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Bhagwat sparks Cong, BJP row

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

A fresh round of war of words began between the BJP and Congress as the Opposition leader Rahul Gandhi hit out at RSS chief Mohan Bhagwat saying that his remark that India got "true independence" after the Ram temple consecration amounts to treason and is an insult to every Indian.

Rahul said his party was fighting the "BJP, RSS and the Indian state itself", triggering a row with the ruling BJP alleging that everything the Leader of Opposition in Lok Sabha does or says is in the direction of breaking India and dividing the society.

Rahul's criticism of RSS as well as BJP drew a sharp response from the BJP president JP Nadda and his cabinet colleagues including Nirmala Sitharaman who asked what for the Congress and Rahul Gandhi carry a copy of the Constitution when the Leader of Opposition in Lok Sabha is using such a language. Nadda alleged that it is not a secret that Rahul Gandhi and his ecosystem have close links with urban Naxals and the deep state who want to "defame, demean and discredit" India.

"Mohan Bhagwat has the audacity to say this publicly. In any other country, he would be arrested and tried. That is a fact," Rahul Gandhi said at the inauguration of the Indira Gandhi Bhawan. "To say that India did not get independence in 1947 is an insult to every Indian. And it is time to stop listening to this nonsense that these people think they can keep parroting out and shouting," he said.

Rahul said every party worker is fighting this battle of ideologies under difficult circumstances where institutions have been captured by the BJP and the RSS and investigative agencies are being used against opposition leaders.

Congress president Mallikarjun Kharge also condemned Bhagwat's remarks and warned that "it would become difficult for him to move around in the country if he continues to make such statements". The leader of



Congress President Mallikarjun Kharge with Congress Parliamentary Party chairperson Sonia Gandhi during the inauguration of the new All India Congress Committee (AICC) headquarters 'Indira Bhawan', in New Delhi

opposition in the Lok Sabha also hit out at the Election Commission and alleged that there is a "serious problem" with the country's election system.

"It is the duty of the EC to ensure transparency in elections. If there is an increase of one crore in (the number of) voters in Lok Sabha and Vidhan Sabha in Maharashtra, it is the duty and sacred responsibility of the EC to show us exactly why this has happened. There is a serious problem with our election system," Rahul said.

Nadda who is also Union Health Minister in Narendra Modi cabinet said Congress' ugly truth now stands exposed by their own leader. Everything he has done or said has been in the direction of breaking India and dividing our society, Nadda alleged.

Sitharaman said the LoP, who was sworn in by taking oath on the Constitution, is now saying

that grand old party is fighting the BJP, the RSS and the Indian State itself. Sharing a video clip of Rahul's remarks, BJP IT department head Amit Malviya said, "Rahul Gandhi has now declared an open war against the Indian State itself. This is straight out of George Soros's playbook."

The BJP president charged that the Congress has a history of encouraging all those forces who want a weak India. "Their greed for power meant compromising the nation's integrity and betraying the trust of the people," Nadda said, adding, people of India are wise, and they have decided they will always reject Rahul Gandhi and his rotten ideology.

At a press conference, BJP spokesperson Gaurav Bhatia said Rahul Gandhi had taken oath to preserve the country's sovereignty and integrity but is now speaking fighting the Indian state.

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Meta apologises over Zuckerberg comment

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

Amidst the raging controversy over comments by Meta CEO Mark Zuckerberg on the 2024 Lok Sabha elections, the social media giant on Wednesday tendered apology. Meta India vice president Shivnath Thukral apologised for Zuckerberg's remarks and said it was an "inadvertent error".

BJP leader Nishikant Dubey said he treated the matter of Facebook founder Mark Zuckerberg's remarks on Indian elections as "closed" after the official of the social networking platform tendered the apology. Zuckerberg, in a podcast, had claimed that the incumbent government in India lost power in the 2024 elections due to its handling of the Covid-19 pandemic.

Union Minister Ashwini Vaishnaw had debunked Zuckerberg's remarks as misinformation, and made it clear that Meta must uphold facts and credibility. "A Meta India official has finally apologised for the mistake. This is a victory of the common citizens of India," Dubey, who chairs the Parliamentary Committee on Information

Technology, said in a social media post. Dubey had on Tuesday said that the panel will summon the firm following its chairman's comments that India's ruling dispensation lost the Lok Sabha election last year.

On Wednesday, Dubey said people elected Narendra Modi as prime minister for the third consecutive term which was a testimony to his strong leadership. "Now the responsibility of our committee ends on this issue. We treat this issue closed. However, we will continue to hold these social platforms to account in the future on other issues," Dubey added.

Earlier, Union Minister Ashwini Vaishnaw had called out the remarks made by Zuckerberg on the Joe Rogan podcast. "Zuckerberg's claim that most incumbent governments, including India in 2024 elections, lost post-COVID is factually incorrect," Vaishnaw had said in a social media post.

"As the world's largest democracy, India conducted the 2024 elections with over 640 million voters. People of India reaffirmed their trust in NDA led by PM Narendra Modi's leadership," said Vaishnaw, who is Minister for Information and Broadcasting as well as IT.



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Noida parking dispute ends in gun violence

STAFF REPORTER ■ NEW DELHI/NOIDA

On late Monday night at Radha Sky Gardens, a residential complex in Greater Noida, a parking dispute took a violent turn, resulting in a resident opening fire. The altercation, which had been building for days, finally escalated when Gaurav Sisodia, a resident of the society, fired six shots from his licensed firearm.

Fortunately, none of the security guards, who were the targets of the gunfire, were injured, managing to escape the scene unharmed. The confrontation began when Sisodia, reportedly intoxicated, engaged in a heated verbal and physical altercation with the security personnel.

Tensions between Sisodia and the guards had been rising, with multiple reports indicating that minor disagreements had flared up into serious conflicts. The dispute finally reached its peak on Monday night when Sisodia, feeling provoked, brandished his gun and fired it.

GRAP IV implemented

STAFF REPORTER ■ NEW DELHI

The Centre on Wednesday re-imposed Stage-IV of the Graded Response Action Plan (GRAP) in the Delhi-National Capital Region (NCR) after air quality deteriorated. GRAP Stage IV curbs include a ban on all construction activities, the entry of non-essential polluting trucks into Delhi, and mandatory shifting of school classes, except for classes 10 and 12, to hybrid mode. Non-essential diesel trucks are prohibited from entering Delhi, while Delhi-



registered BS-IV and older diesel-run heavy goods vehicles are banned, except for essential services, with exceptions for essential services and adapted vehicles for persons with disabilities under Stage IV.

WEATHER

AQI 386
MAX 18.1°C(-1.8)
MIN 6°C(-1.4)

MARKETS

SENSEX 76,724.08 ↑ +0.29%
12:00 pm 3:00 pm
Prev close 76,499.63
1 US\$ = 86.40 INR



Prime Minister Narendra Modi with Chief of the Naval Staff Admiral Dinesh K. Tripathi during the commissioning ceremony of three Indian Navy warships INS Surat, INS Nilgiri and INS Vaghsheer, at the Naval Dockyard in Mumbai

Modi commissions three naval warships

TN RAGHUNATHA ■ MUMBAI

Stressing the importance of enhancing and modernising India's military capabilities in the 21st century, Prime Minister Narendra Modi said here on Wednesday that "be it land, water, air, the deep sea or infinite space, India was safeguarding its interests well. Speaking at a ceremony after commissioning three frontline naval combatants INS Surat, INS Nilgiri, and INS Vaghsheer on the occasion of Army Day, the Prime Minister said that as part of its continuous reforms in the defence sector, India had

established the Chief of Defence Staff and was progressing towards the implementation of theatre commands to make the armed forces more efficient. Averring that "India is today recognized as a reliable and responsible partner globally, especially in the Global South," the Prime Minister said that "India operates with a spirit of development, not expansionism," and the country had always supported an open, secure, inclusive, and prosperous Indo-Pacific Region. He said that India considered the entire region as its

responsibility. Modi said that when it came to the development of coastal nations, India introduced the mantra of SAGAR (Security And Growth for All in the Region) and advanced with this vision. "During India's leadership during its G20 presidency, we promoted the mantra of 'One Earth, One Family, One Future'. We also implemented India's vision of 'One Earth, One Health' during the global fight against COVID-19, underscoring India's belief in treating the world as one family and its commitment to inclusive development."

Kejriwal files nomination, has ₹4.2 Crore in assets



AAP National Convener Arvind Kejriwal file his nomination for Delhi Assembly polls. Photo: Ranjan Dimri/The Pioneer

RAJESH KUMAR ■ NEW DELHI

The Aam Aadmi Party (AAP) national convener, Arvind Kejriwal on Wednesday filed his nomination from the New Delhi constituency, declaring a family net worth of Rs 4.2 Crore. In 2020, Kejriwal had declared assets worth Rs 3.4 Crore, a marginal increase of Rs 1.3 Crore from 2015. Kejriwal's total assets were worth Rs 2.1 Crore in 2015. On the other hand, BJP candidate from the New Delhi seat and former MP Parvath Sahib Singh Verma has a total of Rs 77,89,34,554 in movable assets, including Rs 2.2 Crore in cash, while his wife, Swati Singh, has Rs 17,53,60,937 in movable assets, including jewelry worth more than Rs 45 Lakhs.

According to Kejriwal's affidavit submitted to the Election Commission (EC), Kejriwal has a total of Rs 3,46,849 in movable assets, including Rs 50,000 in cash-in-hand. His wife, Sunita Kejriwal, has movable assets worth Rs 1,00,89,655, including Rs 42,000 in cash-in-hand. His immovable assets are worth Rs 1.7 Crore. The affidavit also revealed that Kejriwal owns no house or car. According to the affidavit, Kejriwal's income for the financial year 2023-24 was Rs 7.21 Lakhs. Sunita Kejriwal's total assets are worth Rs 2.5 Crore, with over Rs 1 Crore in movable assets, including 320 grams of gold worth Rs 25 Lakh and one kilogram of silver worth Rs 92,000, and Rs 1.5 Crore in immovable assets.

India to take legal action against Ex-RAW Officer over Pannum plot

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

A high-powered enquiry committee set up by the Government has recommended legal action against former RAW officer Vikash Yadav, who was named by FBI for engaging persons, caught for attempt to murder Khalistani separatist and designated terrorist Gurpatwant Singh Pannun in New York in 2023. However the official statement did not name him. The statement issued by Ministry of Home Affairs (MHA) said after a long enquiry, the committee has recommended legal action against "an individual, whose earlier criminal links and antecedents also came to notice during the enquiry".

The probe was ordered after the US alleged there was an attempt to kill Khalistani separatist Pannun by Indian agents in New York in 2023. US already arrested Nikhil Gupta and facing charges for attempts to murder Pannun, who has dual citizenship of America and Canada. Pannun's outfit Sikhs for Justice (SFJ) is banned by MHA.

The MHA said on receipt of information provided by US authorities regarding activities of some organised criminal groups, terrorist organisations, drug peddlers, etc., who undermined the security interests of both India and the US, a high-powered enquiry committee was set up by the government of India in November 2023. The committee conducted its own investigations, and also pursued leads provided by the US side and it received full cooperation from US authorities and the two sides also exchanged visits.

It further examined a number of officials from different agencies and also scrutinised relevant documents in this connection. "After a long enquiry, the Committee has submitted its



report to the Government and recommended legal action against an individual, whose earlier criminal links and antecedents also came to notice during the enquiry," the statement said. The committee has recommended that the legal action must be completed expeditiously. "The Committee has further recommended functional improvements in systems and procedures as also initiation of steps that could strengthen India's response capability, ensure systematic controls and coordinated action in dealing with matters like this," the statement said. While announcing the constitution of the high-powered committee in November 2023, the External Affairs Ministry had said it will look into all relevant aspects of the matter (security concerns raised by the US). Earlier, the US said it had spotted a plot to kill a Sikh separatist and warned India about concerns about New Delhi's involvement. The US said it was treating the plot with utmost seriousness and raised the issue with the Indian government "at the senior-most levels". In December 2023, Yadav was arrested by Delhi Police in a case of kidnapping and extortion lodged against him. He is currently on bail in this case.

Helmet fuels power cut in UP pump

BISWAJEET BANERJEE ■ HAPUR

A petrol pump in Hapur's Partapur Road faced an unusual disruption when a lineman, angered by the denial of fuel for not wearing a helmet, cut off the pump's power supply. The incident led to a 20-minute shutdown, causing chaos and heated exchanges. The situation intensified after a video of the altercation went viral on social media.

In compliance with government directives, two-wheeler riders without helmets are not allowed to purchase fuel at petrol pumps. This rule was being enforced at the petrol pump on Partapur Road.

According to Golu, a pump employee, the lineman from the local power station arrived at the pump to refuel his vehicle without a helmet.

Upon being informed about the rule, the lineman became irate and demanded fuel, which was denied. In retaliation, he reportedly cut off the pump's power



supply, halting operations and creating disarray among staff and customers. Pump employees rushed to the nearby transformer to confront the lineman about the disconnection. They emphasized that the pump had no outstanding electricity dues, questioning the rationale behind the disruption. After heated discussions, the power supply was restored.

The incident gained traction after a video of the event went viral, sparking widespread criticism. Authorities are now facing scrutiny over the lineman's actions and the lack of accountability in such cases.

Arvind Kushwaha, Sub-Divisional Officer (SDO), stated, "We have not

received any formal complaint about the disruption of supply at the petrol pump. If a complaint is filed, necessary action will be taken. The matter is currently not under official scrutiny." Superintending Engineer S.K. Agrawal added, "Such actions are unacceptable. No establishment's power supply can be cut arbitrarily. We will investigate the matter thoroughly and take appropriate action."

This is not the first time power supply disruptions have occurred without due process. In a previous instance, several officials, including a superintending engineer, were suspended for cutting off power to an industrial unit.

The incident underscores the challenges in enforcing government directives and the potential abuse of authority by officials. With the viral video drawing attention, public pressure on authorities to act decisively has increased. Residents and pump operators now await swift and transparent action to prevent such incidents in the future.

India Women Break ODI Record with 435 Runs, Sweep

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI/RAJKOT

Indian women's cricket team on Wednesday scripted history by scoring highest ever total of 435 runs in the third and last one day international (ODI) match against Ireland in Rajkot. It was defeated by a whopping 304 runs and Indian team notched up its biggest ever ODI win and completed a three-nil clean sweep. Indian skipper Smriti Mandhana scored a century in just 70 balls thereby setting the stage for the massive total.

Incidentally, it was highest total by an Indian team - men's or women's - in ODIs. India men's highest ODI total is 418/5 made against the West Indies in Indore in 2011. The result of the match was a mere formality once India set



Ireland a massive target of 436, and Ireland could only garner 131 before getting bundled out in 31.4 overs. India put the first step forward towards a crushing victory through record-breaking Mandhana (135, 80b, 12x4, 7x6) and her opening partner Pratika Rawal (154, 129b, 20x4, 1x6), reaching 435/5. Mandhana and Rawal added a whopping 233 runs for the first wicket in just 26.4 overs and there was no looking

back. Then spinners Tanuja Kanwar (2/31) and Deepti Sharma (3/27) took over, sharing five wickets among them to decimate the Irish line-up, which was well short on experience.

Orla Prendergast (36) and Sarah Forbes (41) added 64 runs for a fluent third wicket stand that helped Ireland to recover from a shaky 24 for two to reach 88 without further damage. But once Prendergast was cleaned up by Kanwar, India were all over the tourists like a bad rash, claiming the remaining seven wickets for just 33 runs. It also helped India eclipse their previous largest margin of victory (by runs) - 249 registered against the same opposition in 2017 at Potchefstroom, South Africa.

CM Mann dedicates first boutique and heritage hotel of Punjab to people

PNS ■ PATIALA

Punjab Chief Minister Bhagwant Mann on Wednesday dedicated the first of its kind boutique and heritage hotel Ran Baas- Palace constructed at Quilla Mubarak here in the royal city to the people.

Mann said that this aesthetically designed hotel has been built on PPP mode and will set a new benchmark in comfort, hospitality and elegance. He envisioned that magnificent hotel will be a favourite place for destination weddings and others.

He said that this Hotel will give a big boost to the tourism sector in the state in general and the royal city of Patiala in particular.

The Chief Minister said that geographically Punjab is blessed land adding that the state government intends to take the tourism sector to a new zenith. He said that areas around Chohal Dam, Ranjit Sagar Dam, Shahpur Kandi Dam and Kandi areas of the state are being developed as ideal tourist destinations for attracting the tourists from across the globe and there is a huge potential for developing these areas as a tourist destination for which all out efforts are being made.

Mann said that the state government has land even in other states like Goa, Jaipur (Rajasthan), Mcleodganj (Himachal Pradesh) and others



which will be developed in coming days. He said that earlier the previous state governments used to sell the prime properties of the state to their close friends but now a reverse trend is being witnessed as the state government is developing these sites.

He said that this is the first heritage hotel of the state adding that more such projects will be developed in the state by optimally utilizing the historic buildings of the state. He said that Punjab has a lot of scenic beauty in the state which can be duly utilized by the film industry and others adding that the state government is working tirelessly on this mission.

Mann said that the state government will construct a heritage street at the native village of Shaheed-e-Azam Bhagat Singh to showcase the glorious contribution of Punjab and Punjabis in the national freedom struggle. He said that this 850 metre long heritage street will be constructed from the existing Museum to the ancestral house at Shaheed Bhagat Singh at Khatar Kalan. He said that this street will showcase the glorious contribution of the state in the

University would be named after Pandit Shriram Sharma: Hry CM

PNS ■ CHANDIGARH

Haryana Chief Minister Nayab Singh Saini on Wednesday announced the establishment of a research chair in the name of the freedom fighter and member of Constituent Assembly Pandit Shriram Sharma at Maharishi Dayanand University, Rohtak. In addition, the Chief Minister said that a University would be named after him to honour his immense contribution to the nation.

The Chief Minister made this announcement while unveiling the statue of Pandit Shriram Sharma at a function organised in Rohtak. He announced that the state government will also observe his birth anniversary, on October 1 every year. On this occasion, essay, poem writing, and speech competitions will be held in schools and colleges across the state, encouraging students to learn about and reflect on his life and legacy.

Saini also announced the installation of a 30-foot tall national flag at the site of Pandit Shriram Sharma's statue, along with a beautification project for the location. Regarding the two other demands made by the Pandit Shriram Sharma Vichar Manch—writing his saga of valor at the Pandit Shriram Sharma Metro Station in Bahadurgarh and including his biography in



the school curriculum—the Chief Minister said that these requests would be forwarded to the relevant departments for fulfillment. He also announced a discretionary grant of Rs 21 lakh for the Pandit Shriram Sharma Vichar Manch Samiti, further supporting the continued promotion of his ideals and values.

He paid rich tributes to the great freedom fighter, highlighting his significant role in India's freedom struggle, making of constitution and his contributions to nation-building post-independence.

Deeply influenced by the ideology of Mahatma Gandhi, the Father of the Nation, Pandit Shriram Sharma participated in all five Satyagraha movements during India's struggle for independence and was imprisoned multiple times for his efforts, he

added. In January 1922, during the Non-Cooperation Movement, Pandit Sharma boldly uprooted the British flag in Jhajjar and hoisted the tricolor, leading to his arrest and brutal torture by the British police. Undeterred by the mistreatment, he remained resolute in his cause. In 1923, he also launched a weekly Urdu newspaper, Haryana Tilak, to inspire and ignite the spirit of the freedom struggle among the people.

The government has honoured Pandit Shriram Sharma by naming the Bahadurgarh Metro Station after him. In addition, the monthly Samman Pension provided to freedom fighters and their dependents has been increased from Rs 25,000 to Rs 40,000. This pension is currently being given to 289 beneficiaries across the state, he added.

Punjab PR department organises third religious congregation and Langar

PNS ■ CHANDIGARH

Punjab Information and Public Relations Department

on Wednesday organized a third religious congregation and Guru Ka Langar dedicated to the birth anniversary of the Tenth Guru, Sri Guru Gobind Singh Ji and for the universal welfare, on the advent of the new year.

During the event, which was held at Gurdwara Sahib, Punjab Civil Secretariat-1 here, Gurdwara Sahib Sector-11's Granthi Bhai Kashmir Singh recited path of Sri Sukhmani Sahib. Subsequently, Bhai Gurmeet Singh Shant performed soul-stirring Gurbani Kirtan in the Basant ragas.

The event was attended by Cabinet Minister and AAP State President Aman Arora, Lok Sabha Member Gurmeet Singh Meet Hayer, Chief Minister's OSD (Media) Adil Azmi, Financial Commissioner (Revenue) Anurag Verma, Secretary General Administration Gurpreet Kaur

Sapra, PUNSUP MD Sonali Giri, Director IPR Vimal Kumar Setia, ADGP (Traffic) Amardeep Singh Rai, JG (Hqrs) Sukhchain Singh Gill, Additional Director PR Sandeep Singh Garha, Chief Minister's Deputy Principal Secretary Jagnoor Singh Grewal along with staff from the Information and Public Relations Department and Punjab Civil Secretariat.

Following the spiritual activities, the sangat partook langar. The event saw extensive participation from the journalist community, staff from various departments of Punjab Civil Secretariat-1, Punjab Civil Secretariat-2 and Punjab Legislative Assembly as well as retired DIPR officers. Gurdwara Sahib Sector-38, Kamal Sound Dhuri and CISF also paid their contribution in the successful conduct of the event.

Heroin seized in Tarn Taran

PNS ■ CHANDIGARH

The Tarn Taran Police has busted a Pak-backed drug trafficking cartel with the arrest of a kingpin and seized 5 kg heroin from his possession, Punjab Director General of Police (DGP) Gaurav Yadav said on Wednesday.

The arrested accused has been identified as Rashpal Singh, a resident of Village Bhai Ladhu, Tarn Taran. Apart from recovering heroin, police teams have also impounded his motorcycle.

Yadav said that the accused person was in direct contact with multiple Pakistan-based smugglers and had been receiving consignments of drugs from across the border. Probe revealed that the Pak-based

smugglers were exploiting drones to ferry drugs across the border, he added. The DGP said that further investigations are going on to establish backward and forward linkages in this case. More arrests and recoveries are likely in coming days, he added.

Senior Superintendent of Police (SSP) Tarn Taran Abhimanyu Rana said that acting on reliable information, a police team conducted a targeted operation and apprehended Rashpal Singh in the area of Village Bhai Ladhu and recovered 5 kg heroin from his possession. He said that efforts are being made to uncover the entire network of suppliers, dealers, and buyers, as well as to ascertain the total quantity of drugs purchased by the arrested individual so far.

Chandigarh Traffic Police Hosts Road Safety Dialogue Cum Workshop



PNS ■ CHANDIGARH

To reduce fatalities, reduce traffic congestion, enhance road safety and address traffic-related challenges, the Chandigarh Traffic Police on Wednesday conducted a comprehensive Road Safety Dialogue Cum Workshop on Wednesday, bringing together experts and key stakeholders from various departments of the administration.

The workshop commenced with a welcome address by SSP/Traffic Sumer Pratap Singh and setting up of the agenda by Surendra Singh Yadav, DGP UT Chandigarh, followed by a field visit to five identified black spots and five major traffic congestion points across the city by different teams. The visit provided a first-hand understanding of the critical issues affecting road safety and traffic flow. During the event, participants presented detailed analyses of the identified areas, highlighting the key reasons behind frequent accidents, congestion, and safety hazards.

The teams emphasized the importance of improving road infrastructure, better traffic management, and enhancing public awareness to tackle these challenges effectively. The dialogue focused on both short-term and long-term solutions, including the installation of advanced traffic control systems, redesigning hazardous road intersections, better street lighting, and educating the public on safe driving practices. Short-term measures such as traffic rerouting during peak hours and increased patrolling were also discussed to alleviate congestion and improve safety in the immediate future. The workshop is a step toward ensuring and addressing immediate traffic concerns and laying the groundwork for long-term solutions," a statement said.

Director General of C-PYTE Major General Rambir Singh Mann informed that the staff of C-PYTE camps have been working assiduously to instil values including national integration, discipline, social concern in the youth to make them better citizens, besides training and guiding them to find job in the armed forces, police, para-military forces and other industries.

girls trained for Army and Police via C-PYTE camps in Punjab

PNS ■ CHANDIGARH

Punjab Government has trained as many as 265 girls for Army, CAPF and Punjab Police for the first time through Centre for Training and Employment of Punjab Youth (C-PYTE) camps across the state, Employment Generation, Skill Development and Training Minister Aman Arora said on Wednesday. He was chairing the 5th Governing Council meeting of the C-PYTE.

He said that the state would soon open a C-PYTE camp exclusively for girls aspiring to join the armed forces at village Theh Kanjla in Kapurthala district and the camp will be run entirely by

the women staff. An additional C-PYTE camp will also be established in Pathankot district to enable the state's youth for employment into the Police, Armed Forces and CAPE. Currently, Punjab has 14 C-PYTE camps across the state.

Arora directed the officials concerned to complete the work of under-construction three new camps situated at village Asal Uttar (Tarn Taran), village Kheri (Sangrur) and Borewal (Mansa) within stipulated time.

Principal Secretary Employment Generation, Skill Development and Training Jaspreet Talwar apprised the Cabinet Minister that as many as 2,58,760 youth have been trained totally free of cost through these C-PYTE camps,

of which 115,649 have been employed. Apart from training for uniformed forces, the youth are also being trained for alternative employment to enhance their employability. She informed that at least 150 youth will be trained as Drone Pilot, 300 youth as Security Guard and 150 as JCB/Crane Operators this year.

Director General of C-PYTE Major General Rambir Singh Mann informed that the staff of C-PYTE camps have been working assiduously to instil values including national integration, discipline, social concern in the youth to make them better citizens, besides training and guiding them to find job in the armed forces, police, para-military forces and other industries.

with local police and special units at the range, district, or subdivision level. It will also monitor the activities of de-addiction centers to prevent their misuse.

To strengthen its operations, the STF will operate across three zones headed by Superintendents of Police in Dharanishala, Parwanoo and Mandi, with its headquarters in Shimla. The task force will submit fortnightly progress reports to the Government, which will review its actions and strategies as needed. This comprehensive approach underscores the Government's commitment to eradicating drug abuse and creating a safer and healthier Himachal Pradesh, said the Chief Minister.

Himachal to set up Special Task Force to combat drug abuse and organized crime

PNS ■ SHIMLA

To combat drug abuse and dismantle organized crime networks, the Himachal Pradesh government has decided to set up a Special Task Force (STF) under the leadership of Additional Director General of Police or Inspector General of Police.

In a statement, Chief Minister Sukhvinder Singh Sukhu on Wednesday said that drug abuse has become a global challenge requiring stringent measures. He said "The state government has enacted laws to curb this menace including provisions for confiscating the properties of offenders involved in drug trafficking."

The STF will be equipped with a dedicated commando

force, with personnel undergoing specialized training on anti-narcotics and organized crime in collaboration with the Narcotics Control Bureau. Half of the STF personnel will be recruited specially for this purpose, while the remaining staff will be drawn from the existing Police Department.

"The primary objectives of the STF include disrupting and dismantling drug trafficking networks, taking action against drug kingpins and organized gangs, and strengthening intelligence gathering through faster forensic protocols. The task force will conduct coordinated raids, seize illicit assets linked to the drug trade, and implement preventive detention of habitual offenders," the statement said.

Additionally, the Government aims to promote rehabilitation over punitive measures by expanding access to addiction treatment and compassionate rehabilitation programmes. "Community engagement will be enhanced through initiatives like the 'Him Veer' program and 'Him Dost,' along with statewide awareness campaigns in schools and colleges. To ensure swift justice, the Government plans to establish special courts for NDPS (Narcotic Drugs and Psychotropic Substances) cases and focus on fast-track investigations and prosecutions," Sukhu said.

The STF will independently register and investigate cases through STF Police Stations or in collaboration

Punjab Cong leaders attend inauguration of Indra Bhawan in Delhi

PNS ■ NEW DELHI/ CHANDIGARH

Amarinder Singh Raja Warring, the President of the Punjab Pradesh Congress Committee and MP from Ludhiana, attended the inauguration ceremony of Indra Bhawan, the newly constructed headquarters of the Indian National Congress, in New Delhi on Wednesday.

Speaking at the occasion, Warring said, "Indra Bhawan is more than a building; it is a symbol of our party's unwavering dedication to democracy, equality, and justice. It represents the sacrifices and vision of our leaders who steered India through its Freedom Struggle and laid the foundation of a progressive and inclusive nation. Today, as we inaugurate this iconic structure, we recommit ourselves to these ideals." He further added, "The Congress Party has stood with Punjab through thick and thin, whether it has been during the ongoing farmers protests, the waiver of loans of Punjab's farmers, Congress has and will always work for the benefit of the state of Punjab."

Warring was joined by prominent Punjab Congress leaders, including Leader of Opposition, Partap Singh Bajwa, Sukhjinder Singh Randhawa, Dr. Amar Singh, and Sukhpal Singh Danny Bandala, who together represented the spirit and aspirations of Punjab.

Following the inauguration, Warring, along with other senior Punjab Congress leaders, participated in a session in Delhi. Joining him were LOP Vidhan Sabha Partap Singh Bajwa, MP Sukhjinder Singh Randhawa, and MP Dr. Amar Singh. During the meeting, the leaders deliberated on pressing issues, including farmers' demand for MSP, the deteriorating law and order situation in Punjab, and the hardships faced by common people under the current government. Warring said, "This moment is a proud one for every

Congress worker. The spirit of Indra Bhawan inspires us to continue our fight against divisive forces and build an India that stands united in its diversity. Together, Punjabis and the Indian National Congress remain steadfast in working for the betterment of Punjab and India.

Exhibition showcasing models of buildings designed by Le Corbusier begins

PNS ■ CHANDIGARH

A month-long exhibition showcasing models of buildings designed by Le Corbusier and the works of Architect SD Sharma began at the Government Museum and Art Gallery on Wednesday. Architect SD Sharma, 94, a close collaborator of both Le Corbusier and Pierre Jeanneret, is the highlight of this exhibition, which will run until February 12.

This initiative is collaboration between the Museum and the A3 Foundation, an organization dedicated to promoting art, architecture, and aesthetics, founded by Architect Sangeet Sharma. The event also celebrates three key milestones: Architect SD Sharma's 94th birthday, the A3 Foundation's 75th event, and the Museum's 50th anniversary, further enhancing the significance of this partnership. The exhibition was inaugurated by Brigitte Bouvier, Director of the Foundation Le Corbusier in Paris, along with other dignitaries who travelled to Chandigarh specifically for this occasion. The display chronicles Architect SD Sharma's six-decade career across nearly 70 panels. Many dignitaries like chief architect of UT, ex chief architects of UT, Punjab and Haryana, chairman of IIA and IID, Manmohan Khanna, along with architectural students from the region were present

BRIEFS

PREAMBLE READING PROGRAMME TO BE HELD ACROSS HARYANA ON JAN 17

Chandigarh: The Haryana Government will organize a Constitution Preamble Reading Programme across the state on January 17 at 11.00 am on the theme 'Hamara Samvidhan, Hamara Swabhimani'. The programme will be organized in all mini secretariats and other offices of all the districts as well as all government and private schools, colleges, universities and local bodies (gram panchayats, municipal councils and municipal corporations). A letter to this effect was written by the Chief Secretary's Office to all the Administrative Secretaries, Heads of Departments, Divisional Commissioners, Deputy Commissioners, Managing Directors and Chief Administrators of Boards and Corporations, Vice Chancellors of all the universities of the state, Municipal Commissioners, Sub-Divisional Officers (Civil) and Chief Executive Officers of District Councils. The letter states that the Central Government has started a year-long historic celebration from November 26, 2024 to commemorate the completion of 75 years of adoption of the Constitution of the country. The purpose of these celebrations is to honour the Constitution makers by reiterating the basic values enshrined in the Constitution. The Constitution Preamble Reading Programme is also being organized in this series. It has also been asked to ensure public participation in these programmes.

TO PROMOTE EASE OF DOING BUSINESS, HARYANA TO REDUCE 1,500 BURDENSOME COMPLIANCES

Chandigarh: The Haryana Government has set a target of reducing 1,500 burdensome compliances and decriminalise 50 provisions (Business & Citizens) under Acts/Rules/Checklists by December 2025 in order to promote ease of doing business in the state. This was disclosed at a review meeting for implementation and submission of the Business Reform Action Plan (BRAP) and Reducing Compliance Burden (RCB) held under the chairmanship of Chief Secretary Vivek Joshi. The Chief Secretary directed departments to involve their stakeholders for seeking inputs for the reform action plan. Joshi said stakeholder feedback was crucial in the successful implementation of Business Reform Action Points. He also directed that the departments must adhere to the stipulated timelines set by the government for completion of tasks. The Chief Secretary directed the Industries and Commerce Department to also involve all Deputy Commissioners for suggestions on business reforms.

OFFICERS ASKED TO PREPARE REPORT ON GOVERNMENT'S 100-DAY AGENDA: MINISTER

Chandigarh: Haryana Agriculture and Farmers' Welfare Minister Shyam Singh Rana on Wednesday directed officials to revive the defunct Pack House cum Cold Stores' built by the Haryana State Agricultural Marketing Board with the cooperation of the Horticulture Department. This initiative aims to assist farmers in preserving their fruits and vegetables more efficiently. Additionally, he discussed the establishment of a kinnow fruit and vegetable market at the procurement center in Abubshahar under the Market Committee, Dabwali, which will significantly benefit farmers in the surrounding areas. Chairing a meeting, Rana instructed officials to prepare a report on the state government's 100-day agenda. Speaking to the media afterward, the Agriculture Minister said that he has been holding meetings with various departmental officials to gather feedback on the 100-day roadmap prepared in October after the government was formed. He said that meetings with officials from agriculture, horticulture, animal husbandry, dairy, and fisheries departments are ongoing.

JATINDER MALHOTRA ELECTED UNOPPOSED AS CHANDIGARH BJP PRESIDENT

Chandigarh: Jatinder Malhotra was elected unopposed to continue as Chandigarh BJP president for the next three years by the party's 70 state council members on Wednesday. BJP office-bearers said an official announcement would be made on Thursday. The BJP first appointed Malhotra, 58, as its Chandigarh unit president, replacing Arun Sood, in October 2023. Malhotra ran for a seat in the municipal corporation elections in Chandigarh in 2011 but was defeated by Congress candidate Mukesh Bassi. Malhotra is close to former BJP chief Sanjay Tandon, who previously held the position for nearly six years, and was initially the district president of the party for a zone that included sectors 15 to 30.

PB VIGILANCE BUREAU ARRESTS PATWARI TAKING RS 20,000 BRIBE

Chandigarh: The Punjab Vigilance Bureau (VB) on Wednesday apprehended Harsimratjit Singh, posted as Patwari in revenue Circle Chogawan, Amritsar district while he was accepting a bribe of Rs 20,000. An official spokesperson of the state VB said the accused has been arrested based on a complaint lodged by Sarmel Singh, a resident of village Kohala, in tehsil Lopoke, Amritsar. The complainant approached the VB and alleged in his complaint that the accused had demanded a bribe of Rs 20,000 for correction in the revenue records which were intentionally distorted in Jambandi of 2019-2020 with an intention to demand a bribe from him. After a preliminary enquiry into this complaint the VB team laid a trap during which the accused was caught red handed while he was accepting a bribe of Rs 20,000 in the presence of two official witnesses.

HIMACHAL CM ATTENDS INAUGURATION CEREMONY OF CONGRESS HQ AT NEW DELHI



Shimla: Himachal Chief Minister Sukhvinder Singh Sukhu attended the inauguration ceremony of new Congress headquarters 'Indra Bhawan' at New Delhi on Wednesday. Congress President Mallikarjun Kharge and CPP Chairperson Sonia Gandhi inaugurated the new AICC headquarters located at 9A Kotla road.

CGA TO KICK-START CELEBRATIONS OF 25 YEARS OF ITS INCEPTION WITH GOLF TOURNAMENT



Chandigarh: The Chandigarh Golf Association (CGA) will kick-start its 25 years of inception by holding the Silver Jubilee Golf Cup. S K Sharma, President CGA addressed a media conference to share details of the Silver Jubilee celebrations. "This prestigious event will feature some of India's finest golfers and amateurs who have been nurtured at CGA, including Gaganjit Bhullar, Yuvraj Sandhu, Raghu Bhandari, Karandeep Kochhar, Uttam Singh Mundy, Gurbazz Mann, Aadil Bedi, and other notable names." The celebrations will culminate in a prize distribution for the tournament winners. 25 professionals and amateurs who have brought laurels to the city will be felicitated. Additionally, a Lifetime Achievement Award will be conferred upon Jeev Milkha Singh, honouring his outstanding contributions to Indian golf. Brijinder Singh, President, Indian Golf Union (IGU) will grace the occasion.

President Murmu, PM Modi extend wishes on 77th Army Day

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

President Droupadi Murmu and Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Wednesday greeted the Indian Army personnel, veterans and their families on the Army Day. "The nation remembers with gratitude, the countless sacrifices you have made in service of the motherland," President Murmu said in a social media post. The Army Day is observed on January 15 to commemorate the occasion when General K M Cariappa, who later became Field Marshal, took charge as the Commander-in-Chief of the Indian Army, replacing his British predecessor in 1949. "On Army Day, I extend my

greetings to the Indian Army personnel, veterans and their families. Your unwavering commitment to safeguarding sovereignty of the nation and ensuring national security is an inspiration for all," President Murmu said. She said the humanitarian work done by the Army during crises and disasters is a testament to their kindness and compassion. "May your extraordinary valour and courage continue to inspire generations to come!" she added. Prime Minister Narendra Modi in his message lauded the Indian Army for its determination, professionalism and dedication, and underlined his government's commitment to the welfare of armed forces and

their families. In social media posts, he said, "Today, on Army Day, we salute the unwavering courage of the Indian Army, which stands as the sentinel of our nation's security. We also remember the sacrifices made by the brave hearts who ensure the safety of crores of Indians every day." The Indian Army, he said, epitomises determination, professionalism and dedication. In addition to safeguarding our borders, it has made a mark in providing humanitarian help during natural disasters, he added. He said, "Our government is committed to the welfare of the armed forces and their families. Over the years, we have introduced several reforms and focused on modernisation.



This will continue in the times to come."

Chief of Defence Staff (CDS) General Anil Chauhan extended his greetings and best wishes to all ranks of the Indian Army on the occasion of the 77th Army Day. In his message, the CDS

said, the day is a celebration of the unwavering dedication, courage, indomitable spirit and professionalism that define the Indian Army, an institution that continues to stand as the bedrock of India's security and unity. General Chauhan stated that the

Indian Army's legacy is built on its credible ability to adapt to challenges, uphold sovereignty and serve the nation selflessly. "The relentless efforts of the personnel of Indian Army in maintaining a high state of readiness, excelling in operational domains and ensuring safety and well-being of our citizens, under all circumstances are commendable," he underscored. Highlighting the changing dynamics of warfare and the growing use of technology, CDS said modern warfare is evolving rapidly, driven by advancements in technology, and shifting geo-political dynamics. Conflicts are increasingly expanding into new domains, including Cyber, Space and

Cognitive arenas. He further said, "New age technologies and concepts such as Automation powered by Artificial Intelligence and Data Centric Architecture, Celerity Centric Warfare bolstered by Stealth and Hypersonic technologies, and Robotics driven by Autonomous Vehicles are transforming how future wars will be fought." Stressing that no wars in the future would be fought like the last one, and the very raison-d'être for any Army is to win wars, General Chauhan said Indian Army will need to adapt and equip technologically and continually upgrade its Tactics, Techniques and Procedures to remain ahead of the adversaries.

Empowering men with higher technical acumen with infusion of improved Information and Communications Technology is the need of the hour, he added. The CDS concluded his message by paying homage and expressing his gratitude to the brave hearts, who made the supreme sacrifice and laid down their lives in the Line of Duty. "As we mark this special day, every soldier must resolve to uphold the glorious traditions of the Army, while embracing the challenges of the future with determination and pride. May the Army continue to bring greater success and glory to our motherland and contribute indefatigably towards Nation Building," he said.

DG level border talks between India and Bangladesh expected to be held February 16 onwards

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

The twice postponed Director General (DG) level border talks between India and Bangladesh are now expected to be held here from February 16 with the issue of fencing and rise in infiltration attempts post the regime change in that country being a major subject of discussion, official sources said Wednesday. A delegation of the Border Guard Bangladesh is scheduled to hold discussions with their counterparts Border Security Force (BSF) between February 16 and 19 as part of the 55th edition of these bi-annual talks. This will be the first top-level discussion between the two forces post the fall of the Sheikh Hasina government on August 5, 2024. The engagements of the two sides are being worked upon, sources said. The dates for these talks were twice postponed last year, they said. The issues related to objections raised by Bangladesh over the construction of "agreed upon" single-row fence at about 92



identified patches covering about 95.8 km of the overall 4,096 km international border between the two neighbours is expected to be taken up during this meeting with "prominence", the sources said. Obstruction to the work of fence construction on this border was underlined last week after India followed by Bangladesh summoned the High Commissioners of the either country in their national capitals. Bangladesh expressed "deep concern" over the "activities" of

the BSF vis-a-vis fence erection and border killings when they called Indian High Commissioner Pranay Verma in Dhaka over the weekend. The next day, India made it clear to the acting Bangladeshi High Commissioner Nural Islam in Delhi that all laid down protocols were being followed while constructing the fence as it conveyed its expectation that "all earlier understandings will be implemented by Bangladesh and that there will be a cooperative approach to combating cross-border

crimes." The Indian side, during the border talks, is expected to put across the instances of spiked up infiltration attempts by Bangladeshi nationals across this front post August last year as these instances are linked to human trafficking and cross-border smuggling. According to the data, as many as 1,956 Bangladeshi nationals were apprehended by BSF troops between August and December last year. This five-month period accounted for more than 50 per cent of the interdictions of Bangladeshi nationals on this front as the entire year saw 3,474 such apprehensions. During 2023, 4,342 Bangladeshi nationals were caught by the BSF along this front. The DG-level border talks were held annually between 1975 and 1992 but made bi-annual in 1993 with either side alternatively travelling to the national capitals of New Delhi and Dhaka. The last edition was held in Dhaka in March when the Indian delegation travelled to that country.

BJP slams Sharad Pawar for his remarks on Shah

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

The BJP on Wednesday slammed NCP (SP) supremo Sharad Pawar for his "tadipaar" remark on Amit Shah and asked the veteran leader to stop spreading "wrong information" about the Union home minister. This came a day after Pawar attacked Shah for his comments that the BJP's victory in the Maharashtra assembly polls ended "the politics of betrayal and treachery started by him (Pawar) in 1978". Bemoaning the lack of communication among current political leaders, Pawar also asked the Union home minister to maintain the decorum of the post he holds. In an apparent reference to Shah being externed in 2010 from Gujarat for two years in connection with the Sohrabuddin Sheikh fake encounter case, the NCP (SP) chief had told a press conference in Marathi in Mumbai, "This country has seen many excellent home ministers, but none of them was a 'tadipaar' from his own state (externed)." Shah was acquitted of all the



charges in 2014. Hitting back at Pawar, BJP national general secretary Vinod Tawde said in a statement, "NCP (SP) leader Sharad Pawar has called Amit Shah a 'tadipaar' home minister. Do you know why he was externed from the state?" Shah was externed from Gujarat by a court in the state not because he committed "any robbery or theft", but in connection with a case of alleged

fake encounter of Sohrabuddin Sheikh, who was a "Lashkar-e-Taiba-linked smuggler". "The Gujarat court had said the state home minister (Amit Shah) should not live in the state if an impartial inquiry has to happen in the case. Later, he (Shah) was proved innocent in the case in the Supreme Court," Tawde added. He said Shah has called Pawar a "betrayer because he betrayed in 1978".

"So, if someone makes a political comment, it should be accepted with sportsman's spirit instead of spreading wrong information," the BJP leader said. Both Tawde and Shah described Pawar as a "betrayer" in an apparent reference to his walking out of the Vasantdada Patil-led government in 1978 with 40 MLAs and becoming the chief minister of Maharashtra. "During your (Sharad Pawar) term, there were talks that people associated with (gangster) Dawood (Ibrahim) travelled in your helicopter. Dawood was running Mumbai when you were the chief minister," Tawde charged. The BJP leader asked Pawar if he would have made "such remarks" against V D Savarkar if he had been appointed a minister in the Union government. "Atal Bihari Vajpayee and L K Advani were in jail (during the Emergency) and later they became prime minister and the home minister of the country, respectively. Will you say such things about them also?" he added.

Sonia Gandhi inaugurates Cong's new Kotla Road headquarters

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

Congress Parliamentary Party chief Sonia Gandhi inaugurated the party's new headquarters located at 9A, Kotla Road here on Wednesday, marking a key moment in the history of the grand old party which has operated from the 24, Akbar Road premises for the last 47 years. Congress president Mallikarjun Kharge, former party chief Rahul Gandhi, Congress general secretaries Priyanka Gandhi Vadra and K C Venugopal, among other senior party leaders, were present on the occasion. The event saw party leaders hoist the party flag at the new headquarters and the singing of Vande Matram and the

national anthem. Sonia Gandhi then inaugurated the building, asking Kharge to join her in cutting the ribbon at the entry of the building. The new state-of-the-art AICC headquarters -- Indira Gandhi Bhawan -- symbolises the Congress party's continuing mission to uphold the vision of its stalwarts, the party had earlier said. "It is time for us to move ahead with the times and embrace the new," AICC general secretary, organisation, Venugopal had said. The construction of Indira Gandhi Bhawan was started during Sonia Gandhi's tenure as Congress chief. "Situated at 9A, Kotla Road, New Delhi, the Indira Gandhi



Bhawan is designed to meet the evolving needs of the party and its leaders, featuring modern facilities to support administrative, organi-

sational, and strategic activities. "This iconic building reflects the Congress party's forward-looking vision while paying

homage to its extraordinary past, which has shaped the political and social fabric of India," he had said. Sources have said the party will not vacate its present 24, Akbar Road office, which has been its headquarters since 1978 after the Congress (I) was formed, and it will continue to house some of its cells. The construction of the new AICC headquarters was delayed by several years owing to "paucity of funds" ever since the Congress lost its government at the Centre. The BJP has also not vacated its old party headquarters at 11, Ashoka Road, even after shifting to its new headquarters at Deendayal Upadhyay Marg. Congress old-timers and

romantics agree that modern amenities and a larger area are the need of the hour but the emotional connect and unfolding of history associated with the 24, Akbar Road address will always stay strong. The Akbar Road bungalow once housed Sir Reginald Maxwell, who was a member of Viceroy Lord Linlithgow's executive council. It was also home to a teen Aung San Suu Kyi in 1961 when her mother was appointed ambassador to India. The Congress has been its mainstay though. More than just an office for the party, the premises set in expansive lawns was witness to the tenure of seven Congress presidents.

Pradhan announces third edition of KTS to be held from February 15



PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

Education Minister Dharmendra Pradhan on Wednesday announced the third edition of cultural-exchange programme Kashi Tamil Sangamam will be held from February 15 to February 24. "The programme aims to celebrate, reaffirm and rediscover the age-old links between Tamil Nadu and Kashi -- two of the country's most important and ancient seats of learning. The 10-day initiative will begin from February 15," Pradhan said at a Press conference in the national Capital. The first month-long Kashi Tamil Sangamam was held in 2022 to revive the living bonds between Varanasi and Tamil Nadu. The second edition was organised from December 17 to December 30 in 2023. "A total of 1,000 participants from Tamil Nadu, split in five groups of equal numbers, will be taking part in the event. They will be from different walks of life, including students, teachers, farmers, artisans, professionals and small entrepreneurs, besides women and researchers. Further, a batch of 200 Tamil students from all the central universities will also be part of this event and get to undertake local visits to Varanasi, Prayagraj and Ayodhya," said IIT-Madras Director V Kamakoti. A highlight of the third edition is that the event will coincide with the Maha Kumbh Mela, which is being held from January 13 to February 26. The delegates will have the opportunity for "Shahi Snan" or a holy dip during the Maha Kumbh Mela and a visit to the Ram temple in Ayodhya. The main theme of this edition of Kashi Tamil Sangamam will

highlight the significant contributions of Sage Agasthyar to the Siddha System of Medicine (Bharatiya Chikitsa), classical Tamil literature and the cultural unity of the country. Pradhan encouraged people of Tamil Nadu to participate in Kashi Tamil Sangamam 3.0 wholeheartedly. An exhibition on the different facets of Sage Agasthyar and his contributions to world of Health, Philosophy, Science, Linguistics, Literature, Polity, Culture, Art, particularly to Tamil and Tamil Nadu, etc. and Seminars, workshops, book release, etc. will be organised at Kashi during KTS 3. Kashi Tamil Sangamam is being organized by the Union Ministry of Education in collaboration with other ministries including Culture, Textiles, Railways, Tourism, Food Processing, I&B etc. and the Uttar Pradesh Government. The programme aims to provide an opportunity for scholars, students, philosophers, traders, artisans, artists and people from other walks of life from the two regions to come together, share their knowledge, culture and best practices and learn from each other's experience. It also aims to make the youth aware and experience cultural oneness. The endeavour is in sync with NEP 2020's emphasis on integrating the wealth of Indian Knowledge Systems with modern systems of knowledge. IIT Madras and BHU are the two implementing agencies for the programme. KTS 2.0 was inaugurated by Prime Minister Narendra Modi at Varanasi in December 2023, with the first-ever real-time, app-based translation of a part of the Prime Minister's speech in Tamil for the benefit of visiting Tamil delegates.

Election rules row: SC seeks Centre, EC reply on Ramesh's plea

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

The Supreme Court on Wednesday sought responses from the Centre and the Election Commission on Congress general secretary Jairam Ramesh's plea against the recent amendments, including no public access to CCTV, to the 1961 election rules. A bench comprising Chief Justice Sanjiv Khanna and Justice Sanjay Kumar took note of the submissions of senior advocates Kapil Sibal and Abhishek Manu Singhvi, appearing for Ramesh, and issued notices on the plea. The bench said it would hear the plea in the week commencing March 17. Singhvi said amendments to the 1961 Conduct of Election Rules were made "very cleverly" and barred any access to CCTV footage claiming it would reveal the identity of the voter. He said voting choices were never revealed and the CCTV footage could not reveal votes. Senior lawyers urged the bench to ask the Election Commission of India (ECI) and the Centre to file their responses before the next date of hearing else they would come and say "reply is needed



to be filed" on that day. "They will file the responses," the CJI said. The Congress leader filed the writ petition in December challenging the recent amendments to the 1961 rules and expressed "hope" that the apex court would help "restore the fast eroding" integrity of the electoral process. The Government has tweaked an election rule to prevent public inspection of certain electronic documents such as CCTV camera and webcasting footage besides video recordings of candidates to prevent their misuse. Ramesh said the ECI, a con-

stitutional body charged with the conduct of free and fair elections, couldn't be allowed to unilaterally, and without public consultation, amend such a vital law in such a brazen manner. "This is especially true when that amendment does away with public access to essential information that makes the electoral process more transparent and accountable," he said. Based on ECI's recommendation, the Union Law Ministry in December amended Rule 93(2)(a) of the 1961 rules, to restrict the type of "papers" or documents open to public inspection.

NSUI holds protest march against Bhagwat's 'true independence' remark

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

The Congress's student wing on Wednesday staged a protest march, demanding a ban on the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS) and action against its chief, Mohan Bhagwat. Protesters of the National Students' Union of India (NSUI), who plan to march to Union Home Minister Amit Shah's residence, said Bhagwat's recent remarks that India got true independence after the consecration of Ram mandir in 2024 was "anti-national". The march, led by NSUI national president Varun Choudhary, began from the organisation's headquarters in New Delhi. On Wednesday, Bhagwat said the date Ram temple was inaugurated in Ayodhya should be celebrated as "Pratishta Dvadashi" -- the "true independence" day of the country that faced "enemy attacks for several centuries". He was speaking at an event in Indore where he presented the 'National Devi Ahilya Award' to Champat Rai, general secretary of Shri Ram Janmabhoomi Teerth Kshetra Trust -- which was tasked



with the construction and management of the temple in Ayodhya. The Congress reacted sharply to Bhagwat's remarks, with party leader Rahul Gandhi saying it amounts to treason and is an insult to every Indian. Speaking at the inauguration of the new Congress headquarters in Delhi, Gandhi also said that the fight against the RSS and the BJP was a "civilisational war". "Do not think that we are fighting a fair fight. There is no fairness in this. If you believe that we are fighting like BJP or RSS, you have not understood what is going on. The BJP and RSS have captured every single institution

in this country and we are now fighting the BJP, the RSS and the Indian state itself," he said. Gandhi's remarks triggered another row, with the BJP hitting out at the Congress leader for saying that he is "fighting the BJP, RSS and the Indian state". BJP president JP Nadda alleged on X that it is not a secret that Gandhi and his ecosystem have close links with "urban naxals" and the "deep state" who want to "defame, demean and discredit" India. "I compliment Mr. Rahul Gandhi for saying clearly what the nation knows - that he is fighting the Indian state!" he said.

Kingsbury B&D Tower Resident Welfare Association TDI City, Kundli, Sonapat, Haryana. Table with columns: क्र.सं., प्रक्रिया, दिनांक, समय. Includes items like 'मतदान सूची प्रकाशन', 'पूरेक मतदाता सूची प्रकाशन', etc.

नैरहो स्थान दर्शा, चुनाव अधिकारी आवासीय विभागीय चुनाव कार्यक्रम की घोषणा करता है कि प्रत्येक मतदाता को मतदान करने के लिए मतदान सूची प्रकाशित की जायेगी...

नोट:- 1. मतदान सूची प्रकाशन के लिए 7:00 - 8:00 बजे, उप-प्रधान महासचिव, संयुक्त सचिव कोषाध्यक्ष समीप प्रहरी के लिए 5:00 - 5:30 बजे...

विभाग: 15.01.2025. प्रतियोगिता: 1. निम्ना रजिस्ट्रार, फर्म एण्ड सोसाइटी, सोनीपत को सूचनाएं दें। 2. नोटिस बोर्ड...

CSB Bank PUBLIC NOTICE ON AUCTION OF PLEDGED GOLD ORNAMENTS. Table with columns: S. No., Account Name, Client ID, Bal. Outstanding as on 14-01-2025, Weight (grams). Lists accounts of Layk Singh, Geeta Nand, Samrithi Thakur, etc.

Himachal Pradesh Jal Shakti Vibhag. NOTICE INVITING TENDER. Online bids on item rate basis are invited by the Executive Engineer Jal Shakti Division Mandi, Himachal Pradesh...

Table for Himachal Pradesh Jal Shakti Vibhag tender. Columns: (i) Name of Division, (ii) Name of Sub Division, (iii) Estimated Cost, (iv) Earnest Money, (v) Time of completion, (vi) Cost of Tender Form, (vii) Validity of offer.

ADITYA BIRLA CAPITAL. ADITYA BIRLA FINANCE LIMITED. Registered Office: 11th Floor, Nirlon Compound, Veraval, Gujarat - 362 266.

DEMAND NOTICE. UNDER SEC 13(2) OF THE SECURITISATION AND RECONSTRUCTION OF FINANCIAL ASSETS AND ENFORCEMENT OF SECURITY INTEREST ACT, 2002...

Table for Demand Notice. Columns: Sr. No., Name and Address of the Borrower(s), Demand Notice Date & NPA Date, Description of Immovable Property.

Locker Notice. It is hereby notified that certain Bank lockers who had taken Bank lockers on rent in the Gurdaspur Branch of our Bank have not responded to the Bank's Notices...

UCO BANK. LOCKER NOTICE. Table with columns: Sr. No., Name of Lessee, Locker No., Address, Overdue Amount. Lists Raj Kumar S/o Moti Lal.

The Shivalik Cooperative House Building (First) Society Ltd. PUBLIC NOTICE. It is hereby notified for the information of general public and all concerned that the following person(s) has/have applied for issue of NOC/Permission/Transfer of Share/Flat for enrollment...

NAME CHANGE. I, Istkhrah Ahmad S/O Mahmud Hasan R/o 336 A, Lahot Road, Shastri Nagar, Rohtak. I have changed my name from Istkhrah to Istkhrah Ahmad. In future I will be known as Istkhrah Ahmad.

DEBT'S RECOVERY TRIBUNAL CHANDIGARH (DRT2). Ist Floor, SGO 33-34-35, Sector 17-A, Chandigarh. Ref. to the summons notice regarding case no OA/546/2024, Exh. No. 24297, Punjab National Bank Vs Shri Parvinder Singh published in The Pioneer on 15.01.2025...

PUBLIC NOTICE. Through this notice, it is hereby informed to the general public and concerned parties that the name of M/s VSP Enterprises Private Limited, G.O. Road, Village Barhi, Tehsil Ganaur, Sonapat is availing certain credit facilities from SBI SME Panipat Branch which is collaterally secured by the Equitable Mortgage of Immovable Property...

ELECTION NOTICE. It is for information of all members of The Oriental Employees Cooperative House Building (Ist) Society Ltd, Sector 49, Chandigarh that election for the managing committee of the society will be held with the approval of Joint Registrar, Cooperative Societies, U.T., Chandigarh, as under:-

SAVJANIK SUCCHA. सर्व साधारण को सूचित किया जाता है कि नगर निगम, रोहताक की तरफ से नगर निगम के सार्वजनिक क्षेत्रों में नए प्रोजेक्ट्स शुरू किए जा रहे हैं। 1. 11HB161615 बार्ड नगर, रामकुमार डैस कोलोनी, नगर, रोहताक...

PUBLIC NOTICE. My name is Yatin Garg. Father Name: Ravinder Kumar and Mother Name: Seema Rani. Below is the properties that they both are owner:- 1. 2089-A/15, The Mall Road, Bathinda, Owner: Seema Rani, UID: 23009192...

CORRIGENDUM. It is informed to the general public that as per the RECRUITMENT NOTICE FOR EMPLOYMENT OF CANTEN STAFF FOR EX-SERVICEMEN CANTEENS & DOT URC issued by the Management Committee, URC, 33 Armoured Div C/O 56A, Hisar on 14 Jan 2025 has the following amendments:-

Government of Punjab. Public Notice Reference no. 2025/2927 and 2025/2928 dated: 13.01.2025. The Department of SPO, PAU, Ludhiana invites online e-tender for the following sales:

Cooperative Bank. बैंक की 57 शाखाओं में अंशदाताओं को सूचित किया जाता है कि नगर निगम, रोहताक की तरफ से नगर निगम के सार्वजनिक क्षेत्रों में नए प्रोजेक्ट्स शुरू किए जा रहे हैं...

FORM URC-2. Advertisement giving notice about registration under Part I of Chapter XXI of the Companies Act, 2013, as a company limited by shares.

NOTICE IS HEREBY GIVEN that in pursuance of sub-section (2) of section 366 of the Companies Act, 2013, an application is proposed to be made after fifteen days hereof but before the expiry of thirty days hereinafter to the Registrar at Central Registration Centre (CPC), Indian Institute of Corporate Affairs (ICA), Plot No. 6, 7, 8, Sector 5, IIT Manesar, District Gurgaon (Haryana), Pin Code - 122050, Haryana...

NOTICE TO GENERAL PUBLIC. General Public is hereby informed and cautioned that M/s VSP Enterprises Private Limited, G.O. Road, Village Barhi, Tehsil Ganaur, Sonapat is availing certain credit facilities from SBI SME Panipat Branch which is collaterally secured by the Equitable Mortgage of Immovable Property...

SAVJANIK SUCCHA. सर्व साधारण को सूचित किया जाता है कि नगर निगम, रोहताक की तरफ से नगर निगम के सार्वजनिक क्षेत्रों में नए प्रोजेक्ट्स शुरू किए जा रहे हैं। 1. 11HB161615 बार्ड नगर, रामकुमार डैस कोलोनी, नगर, रोहताक...

PUBLIC NOTICE. Through this notice, it is hereby informed to the general public and concerned parties that the name of M/s VSP Enterprises Private Limited, G.O. Road, Village Barhi, Tehsil Ganaur, Sonapat is availing certain credit facilities from SBI SME Panipat Branch which is collaterally secured by the Equitable Mortgage of Immovable Property...

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Himachal Pradesh State Electricity Board Limited. Shimla: A special campaign was launched today by Mr. Sanjay Gupta, Chairman of Himachal Pradesh State Electricity Board Limited, under the scheme related to home to home power consumers for home power consumers. On this occasion, Mr. Sanjay Gupta started this campaign by handing over the form related to the local City Electricity Board to leave the subsidy. On this occasion, Chairman Himachal Pradesh State Electricity Board Limited Mr. Sanjay Gupta informed that under this special campaign related to this scheme, informing all the domestic power consumers of the state and participating about the economic development of Hon'ble Chief Minister Shri Sukhwinder Singh Sukhu. It will be told about He also urged all the officials of the Electricity Board to be a part of the campaign to leave electricity voluntarily in the appeal of Chief Minister Mahadya. He said that there are about 24 lakh domestic power consumers in the state and they can play a major role in this campaign. He said that while this campaign will further strengthen the economic situation of the state, Himachal Pradesh State Electricity Board Limited will also get an economic attitude. He said that so far six hundred twenty-four domestic electricity consumers have voluntarily left their subsidy.

40 Water Storage Tanks To Be Built, New Pipelines To Be Installed. Shimla: Residents of Shimla will soon enjoy 24x7 access to clean drinking water. Under this ambitious project, French company Suez has successfully completed its first phase. This phase involved a drone and door-to-door survey of the city, providing a solid foundation for improving the water supply system. Accurate Water Management with Drone Survey For the first time, drone technology has been used to plan water distribution in Shimla. The survey covered all major parts of the city to identify the optimal locations for water storage tanks and assess pipeline requirements. This initiative could also benefit other government departments in the future. NGOs to Raise Awareness About Project Benefits In addition to the drone survey, the company has completed a door-to-door survey of households. Next, with the help of NGOs, the company will explain the project's benefits to residents and gather suggestions. Based on the survey results, pipelines and water tanks will be installed.

Trident Group Launches Karamyogi's Recruitment Drive to Hire 3,000 Skilled Individuals Across India. Punjab | Chandigarh: Trident Group, a global conglomerate has announced its Karamyogi Recruitment Drive, aiming to hire 3,000 skilled individuals across India. This initiative reflects Trident Group's commitment to building an inclusive, empowering community and contributing to the socio-economic development of the nation. The drive will focus on Punjab (Dhaura and Sanghera) and Madhya Pradesh (Budhni) with an emphasis on female applicants and candidates from sports backgrounds. By providing employment to 3,000+ individuals, Trident Group will indirectly benefit over 15,000 family members, boosting local economies, improving quality of life, and contributing to the national GDP. This initiative will also promote skill development, empower female members, and generate valuable tax revenue. Speaking of the recruitment drive, Pooja Luthra, CHRO Trident Group said, "The Karamyogi recruitment drive aligns with our vision to create meaningful work opportunities for thousands while positively impacting the communities we serve."

Marriage officer/ Deputy Commissioner, Kurukshetra. (Under Special Marriage Act, 1954) Notice is hereby given that an application has been received from Jagdish Kumar son of Shri Ishwar Chand resident of Kurukshetra Haryana India and Sheela Rani D/o Tara Chand R/o of Village Sana, Tehsil Pehowa Distt. Kurukshetra Haryana India for the registration of their marriage under Section 15, Chapter III of the Special Marriage Act, 1954. Any person having any objection to the marriage may, within thirty days of the publication of this notice, apply in writing to the undersigned specifying the grounds for such objection. Date: December 27, 2024. Deputy Commissioner - cum-Marriage Officer, Kurukshetra

SAVJANIK SUCCHA. सर्व साधारण को सूचित किया जाता है कि नगर निगम, रोहताक की तरफ से नगर निगम के सार्वजनिक क्षेत्रों में नए प्रोजेक्ट्स शुरू किए जा रहे हैं। 1. 11HB161615 बार्ड नगर, रामकुमार डैस कोलोनी, नगर, रोहताक...

COURT NOTICE. Criminal Courts, Ludhiana. In the Court of Dr. Jasveer Singh Judicial Magistrate - 1st Class, Ludhiana. Next Date, Purpose of case, Orders and Judgments as well as other case information is available on http://ecourts.gov.in. RAHUL SHARMA VS. ARUN KUMAR. COMA/47552/2023. CNR No.: PBL/D03/052748-2023. US:- 138 OF N.J. ACT. POLICE STATION:- NEXT DATE:- 23/04/2025. PUBLICATION NOTICE FOR PROCLAMATION UNDER SECTION 82 CR PC. NOTICE TO:- ARUN KUMAR SON OF SURESH KUMAR R/O MITTAL FLAT NEAR NARYANPURA RAILWAY CROSSING, NARYANPURA AHMEDABAD-380013. MOBILE NO:- 62308-91184.

Whereas it has been proposed by the satisfaction of the Court that You, the accused above named cannot be served in the ordinary way of service. Hence, this proclamation under section 82 CRPC is hereby issued against you with a direction that you should appear personally before the court on 23-04-2025 AT 10.00 a.m. or within 30 days from the date of publication of this proclamation. Take notice that, in default of your part to appear as directed above, the above said case will be heard and determined as per law, in your absence. Given under my hand and the seal of the Court, this FOR DETAILS LOGIN TO https://highcourthd.gov.in/?tr=district_notice&district=ludhiana Judicial Magistrate - 1st Class Ludhiana

The Custom & Excise Employees Cooperative House Building (Ist) Society Ltd., Plot No. 2, Sector 51B, Chandigarh. GENERAL BODY MEETING NOTICE. It is for information to all members of The Custom & Excise Employees Cooperative House Building (Ist) Society Ltd., Plot No. 2, Sector 51B, Chandigarh that the General Body Meeting of the society will be held on 01.04.2025 at 11.30 A.M. at central part of the Society, Sector 51B, Chandigarh with the approval of Joint Registrar, Cooperative Societies, U.T., Chandigarh Memo No: Coop/CEE/GBM/2025/4784 Dt. 14.01.2025. The detail agenda items has been pasted on notice board of the Society and also delivered to members by hand / post. All the members are requested to attend the General Body Meeting. (President)

Public Notice. It is informed to the general public that I Aruna wife of Manohar Lal resident of House No. 5955, Rajender nagar, railway colony jind my sister no.3331 dated 31/03/1994 which have been lost somewhere in Jind near Dahwan hotel gohana road jind on date 10.10.2024, regarding which I have lodged DDR number 132300112500112. If anyone finds the above documents, then return them to the above address.

Notice Inviting Tender. Online bids on item rate basis are invited by the Executive Engineer Jal Shakti Division Mandi, Himachal Pradesh on behalf of Government of Himachal Pradesh, in electronic tendering system in two covers for the under mentioned work from contractors/firms of an appropriate class enlisted with HP Jal Shakti Vibhag: NAME OF WORK:- Construction of Office Building for Assistant Engineer Jal Shakti Sub-Division No-I Mandi Tehsil Sadar Dist Mandi HP (S/O: Ch/Su Sub Divisional Officer Building, Providing Water Supply Sanitation and providing Electrical installation therein).

SAVJANIK SUCCHA. सर्व साधारण को सूचित किया जाता है कि नगर निगम, रोहताक की तरफ से नगर निगम के सार्वजनिक क्षेत्रों में नए प्रोजेक्ट्स शुरू किए जा रहे हैं। 1. 11HB161615 बार्ड नगर, रामकुमार डैस कोलोनी, नगर, रोहताक...

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PAPER WITH PASSION

Wildfires: A call for action

Los Angeles fires ravage city as President-elect Trump prepares for second term amid climate change controversy

As President-elect Donald Trump prepares to assume office for his second term, the United States faces devastation from the Los Angeles fires, which have claimed several lives and caused billions of dollars in damages. Trump has maintained that there is no such thing like climate change and has even withdrawn from Paris climate agreement. He has been fighting developing countries and even its own allies over climate change. The Los Angeles fires a direct consequence of climate change must come as an eye-opener to the president-elect. The city has become a focal point for devastating wildfires, which have grown in intensity and frequency over the past few decades. The wildfires of recent years, including the catastrophic ones in 2023, serve as a stark reminder of the urgent need to address the underlying factors fueling these disasters and to build a more resilient future. Wildfires in Los Angeles and the broader Southern California region are driven by a confluence of factors: prolonged droughts, climate change, urban sprawl into fire-prone areas, and an accumulation of dry vegetation. The Los Angeles fires have destroyed several homes, displaced thousands of residents and led to several fatalities. The economic toll have reached billions of dollars, while the ecological damage will take decades to repair.

The increasing frequency and severity of wildfires are directly linked to climate change. Rising temperatures, prolonged droughts, and shifting weather patterns create ideal conditions for fires to ignite and spread rapidly. These fires underscore the necessity of global and local actions to mitigate climate change, including reducing greenhouse gas emissions and transitioning to renewable energy sources. One of the significant contributors to wildfire vulnerability is urban sprawl into wildland-urban interface areas. Accumulated dry vegetation acts as fuel for wildfires. The Los Angeles fires are a wake-up call for governments across the world. Addressing the wildfire crisis requires a multi-faceted approach that includes tackling climate change, revising urban development policies, investing in emergency preparedness and fostering community engagement. Los Angeles, like many other regions around the world, must learn to adapt to a man-made reality where wildfires are a persistent threat. By applying the lessons learned from past disasters, the city can build a safer, more resilient future for its residents and ecosystems. But for that to happen the decisions must be taken at the highest level and the world leaders must bury the hatchet and come to an agreement that something concrete needs to be done to mitigate the climate disaster. It is a universal problem affecting all of us so a unified action alone can curb this menace. The Los Angeles fires might prompt Donald Trump to consider the importance of taking action for the greater good, rather than focusing solely on appeasing his supporters.

PICTALK



A woman makes 'rangoli' during 'Pongal' festival celebrations, in Chikkamagaluru

Women breaking the glass ceiling

Women are all set to break the barriers at the highest level as the Vatican and Canada brace up for the top post for a lady



KALYANI SHANKAR

Two dramatic announcements were made last week that could significantly advance women's empowerment worldwide. The first was a historic decision from the Vatican, which saw Pope Francis appoint Sister Simona Brambilla as the prefect for the first time.

This 59-year-old Consolata Missionary, previously the second-in-command of the order department, has created history. Her position corrects the gender imbalance to a certain extent. Sister Brambilla's appointment is seen as a progressive step forward. This position, long considered a male domain, is now open to women for the first time. She will oversee all religious orders within the Catholic Church, a significant step forward since no woman has held this prestigious position before. Thus, the contribution by women to the Church is at last acknowledged and an essential precedent for further empowerment of women. Incidentally, a significant Vatican summit brought Catholic leaders worldwide not long ago.

It addressed the importance of enhancing women's leadership roles, among other issues—important representatives from over 100 countries, including Cardinals and Bishops. It also considered a proposal concerning women deacons. Again, Pope Francis granted the women in the Church the right to vote for the first time two years ago, in line with his commitment to advancing women within the Church in decision-making roles. It also promoted gender equality within the Church and women's participation at the highest levels. The Pope had also set up two Vatican Commissions on the potential ordination of women as deacons. The second dramatic announcement was the resignation of Canadian Prime Minister Justin Trudeau and, subsequently, the race to become Prime Minister. It has all the potential to elect a woman Prime Minister. After a decade in power marked by both successes and challenges, Trudeau's resignation had been dramatic. Ten years ago Trudeau began with great promise but ended amid mounting difficulties



at home and abroad. He faced challenges such as inflation, housing issues, and immigration, which weakened the Liberal Party. After Trudeau's resignation, senior leaders in the Liberal Party, including Anita Anand, the current transport minister, were preparing to replace him. Anand, a senior party member, was born in rural Nova Scotia and moved to Ontario in 1985. She was first elected as the MP for Oakville in 2019 and has held various significant roles, including Minister of Public Services and Procurement, President of the Treasury Board, and Minister of National Defence. Anand missed the chance of making history as Canada's first female Prime Minister of colour and Indian descent. It would have potentially marked a significant shift in women's empowerment in Canadian politics. However, she withdrew from the race on Sunday to return to her academic career, disappointing her supporters. Deputy Prime Minister Chrystia Freeland and Innovation Minister François-Philippe Champagne are potential contenders to succeed Trudeau. Canada has a



IF CANADA ELECTS A WOMAN, IT WOULD CORRECT THE GENDER IMBALANCE DESPITE WOMEN HOLDING ESSENTIAL PORTFOLIOS LIKE DEFENCE AND FINANCE

record 103 female MPs, including 22 elected in the 2021 federal election. Other frontrunners include former central banker Mark Carney, whose recent resignation prompted Trudeau's exit. Candidates must declare their intent and pay a \$350,000 entry fee by January 23. So far, Finance Minister Dominic LeBlanc and Foreign Minister Mélanie Joly have withdrawn from the race to focus on their duties, with Anita also recently bowing out. The challenges Trudeau's successor will face, including repairing strained international relations and managing domestic policy issues, underscore the urgent need for a leader with a clear vision and strong leadership skills. Indians are interested in Canada because of the large Indian diaspora. Recently, tensions between India and Canada have escalated after Prime Minister Trudeau accused India of involvement in the shooting of a Khalistani terrorist in Surrey in June 2023. In retaliation, India stopped issuing new visas to Canadians and asked Canada to reduce its diplomatic presence. In contrast to Trudeau, India hopes for a pro-

India Prime Minister. If Canada elects a woman, it would correct the gender imbalance despite women holding essential portfolios like Defence and Finance. The election of a woman as the next Prime Minister could mark a significant milestone in Canadian politics, furthering the cause of women's empowerment and challenging traditional gender roles in leadership. Trudeau's successor will inherit a lot of problems. There are tensions between the US and India. One of the critical tasks will be to repair strains in foreign policy issues. There is also a lot of backlog in the immigration. On the domestic side, Canada's Liberal Party faced internal problems, which led to Trudeau's exit. The election results will be available on March 8. In the meantime, the election landscape is becoming more transparent, as leaders like Anita Anand have already withdrawn from the race. It is also interesting to note that Vice President Kamala Harris won in the 2020 polls. The US has yet to elect a woman president.

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

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

BORDER FENCING DISPUTE

Madam — Apropos to the article "India summons Bangladesh Deputy High Commissioner." The escalation of tensions along the India-Bangladesh border is yet another reflection of the low point in bilateral ties between two neighbouring countries. Bangladesh's concern over India's efforts to fence the international boundary to stem smuggling and other transnational crimes is misplaced, especially since there have been several attempts by smugglers and traffickers from the Bangladeshi side to transgress the border.

But India is well within its rights to construct fencing in porous sections of the border to prevent transnational crimes in the wake of stray incidents of violence, including firing reported from along the border, especially in West Bengal. The key aim of fencing the India-Bangladesh border is cracking down on smuggling and streamlining the legitimate movement of goods and people. However, there are mechanisms in place to address these issues, and if necessary, these can be revisited to make them work more effectively. Meanwhile, it would be foolish to undo all the achievements of the past and create another point of dispute in a relationship that is already weighed down because of the new political dynamics in Dhaka. More than addressing the immediate irritants on the border, the two sides need to take further steps to arrest the slide in the overall relationship and prevent new areas of divergence.

N Sadasiva Reddy | Bengaluru

CEASEFIRE IN SIGHT

Madam — An encouraging piece of news has emerged once again from Gaza. Hamas has recently agreed to release some of the Israeli citizens it has been holding hostage. Discussions between Hamas and Israeli officials had been ongoing for several days regarding this matter. On October 7, 2023, Hamas launched a sudden attack

BCCI disallows spouse travel with team



The step taken by the BCCI to improve the performance of the Indian cricket team is both positive and visionary. After facing consecutive defeats, the BCCI has decided to prohibit players from taking their families along on foreign tours to ensure discipline and main-

tain focus. This decision is a significant step toward enhancing the team's mental and physical health. When all team members unite and focus solely on the game, their performance is bound to improve.

Spending time with family is important, but during tournaments, undivided attention on the game is essential. This decision will not only strengthen players' mindsets but also fortify team spirit. It will create a healthy competitive environment, motivating players to deliver their best. Additionally, spending more time with team management and coaching staff will refine their strategies and skills. This decision, taken with players' long-term careers and national pride in mind, will instill professional discipline and inspire them to stay goal-oriented. In the long run, this will prove beneficial for Indian cricket.

R K Jain | Barwani

INDIA ENGAGES WITH AFGHANISTAN

Madam — India's ties with Afghanistan have been strong for a long time. However, over the last four years, the Taliban's takeover of Afghanistan has slightly strained these relations. The recent meeting between India's foreign secretary and Afghanistan's acting foreign minister in Dubai might help strengthen the bond once again. It is essential for India to maintain close relations with Afghanistan, regardless of who is in power. Currently, both Afghanistan and the Taliban are at odds with Pakistan, especially after Pakistan's recent attack on the Afghanistan border, which has further strained their relations. Geopolitically, this situation benefits India, as Pakistan's focus on its border with Afghanistan reduces its capacity to infiltrate India with terrorists. Strengthening ties with the Taliban-led Afghanistan and extending support could help India reduce its security concerns.

Priya Thakur | Ujjain

Send your feedback to: letterstopioneer@gmail.com

The timeless value of soft skills in the fast-paced world

In a world that often uses wealth and appearances as markers of success, the true essence of human interaction—soft skills—frequently takes a backseat

We are often judged by factors that may not be relevant in the long run. Wealth, physical features, the name of the school or college we attended, flashy clothes, and many more, are the parameters used to measure our success. We forget that soft skills are equally, if not more, important. I waited patiently for my turn in the check-in queue at the airport during a recent visit to Mumbai.



The young lady behind the counter handed the boarding pass to the passenger and guided her to walk some distance to get a wheelchair. The older lady cryptically remarked that the wheelchair was expected to come to her instead of the other way around. The counter girl looked clueless. Later in the evening, I walked over to the express check-in counter at the hotel. I waited patiently as the gentleman bent down to retrieve something before completing my formalities. Another counter lady walked by looking at me. Since the man did not resurface even after a lapse of time, I looked at the gentleman behind the adjoining table, who offered

to assist me, explaining that the computer system at the other counter was not working. None from the crowd at the reception had bothered to assist me. The private company I worked for won laurels year after year as the best employer. I wondered about the criteria for the evaluation, more so since I saw many of the executives quitting the company and dissatisfied with the working conditions. The HR employees responsible for implementing all the right words in the rulebook failed to decipher the basic principles of Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs. All three companies are reputed names in the private sector.

They recruit people with the best credentials from the best business schools or the best in the hospitality industry. One would expect them to understand soft skills, unlike those working in the government sector. I was witness to and on the receiving end of a raid by an enforcement agency while working in a private company. The officials barged into the office accompanied by uniformed policemen. Orders were rudely barked at me not to touch the telephone. My mobile phone was snatched from my hands. The officials remained in the office for more than 24 hours during which I, and the other team members, were not allowed to contact our families. We were made to feel like criminals for no reason. I was recently stopped by a traffic policeman after I had crossed a legitimate green traffic signal. I was perplexed. Another policeman sauntered over to ask me the reasons for my arguing with the other official. He rudely reprimanded me when I showed my ignorance of the matter. The

policeman had stopped me apparently for crossing the red signal. Fortunately for me, there were cameras at the crossing, which proved my innocence. We face a similar lack of soft skills in our personal lives. Decades earlier, my wife and I were not given a table for lunch at a famous restaurant in Delhi. We were a newly wedded young couple and were probably not dressed the same way as their regular clientele. An attractive personality, a good education and a good job are enough for parents to settle marriages of daughters to strangers, not knowing if the young man will treat the girl well. There are countless examples. I was taught to be a good human being. The children of today are more intelligent and smart. All that we need to do is to teach them to be a better person each succeeding day. Soft skills will follow.

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



SANJAY CHANDRA



FIRST COLUMN THE POWER OF POSITIVE SELF-TALK

It comes handy when the pursuit of happiness is interrupted by challenges



RAJYOGI BRAHMA KUMAR NIKUNJ JI

All of us have a deep desire to be in a state of happiness forever. But it's quite difficult to find someone who is truly blessed, to remain always happy. Isn't it? The fact is that for most of us, the happy times are often broken by periodic sorrow or disappointment. It has been observed that a prerequisite for happiness is success in all our endeavours. Therefore, all of us go to great lengths to ensure that we succeed in everything we do. But unfortunately here too, things don't go the way we want them to.

Throughout our lives, we put in the maximum possible efforts to succeed to prevent failure, but ironically, despite all our desire for success, we undermine our efforts by thinking negatively. It might be hard to believe, but the reality is that we pave the way for our success or failure through our thoughts. Yes! After all, every human action begins with a thought, which is followed by reflection, a decision and then action. So, if our thoughts and actions are completely in harmony, we attain success. However, if our minds are full of doubts or fear about the task we are performing, it undermines our chances of success. So how does one



train a thought to work in our favour? Is it possible? Yeah! It is. The only thing that we need to do is to make our thoughts as pure and positive as those of the Almighty Supreme who transforms this world from one of sorrow and misery to one of peace and happiness with just a seed of powerful thought. A simple way to begin this process of transformation is to use asseveration. An asseveration is a resolute statement that we make to ourselves.

All of us use it intentionally or unintentionally throughout our day. When we wake up with a positive thought like "I feel great", that is a positive asseveration. On the other day if we drag ourselves out of bed in the morning and whimper: "Ohh I feel drowsy", that is a negative asseveration. We must understand that both these statements help us to maintain the emotional state that we are in. Majority of the people across the world do not give much importance to self-talk, i.e. the things that we say to ourselves. It is indeed a very important part of our lives because it deeply affects our conscious and subconscious minds. Remember! We listen to everything we say to ourselves consciously or subconsciously. Because our asseveration works so well to create and maintain our state of mind, we can use it cleverly to change our state of mind to our best advantage.

There is no doubt that it takes a lot of effort and time, but with persistence, asseverations can become a strong tool to make our outlook and life healthier and happier. We can either create or maintain a powerful state of mind with positive asseverations or use them to counter our negative self-talk. Let's say you are running for a half marathon. Despite all the preparations, you tend to lose rhythm and get into some snag.

All of a sudden your confidence sags and you catch yourself thinking "I can't do this. I shouldn't have registered for a half marathon. My capacity is too low. I am too weak as compared to others." All this negative thinking, if allowed to persist, will guarantee that you fail. You can make up some positive asseverations to counter this thinking. Like, you might think, "I feel confident. I can do this, Slow and Steady wins the Race." If you repeat this several times, you will soon start feeling better & achieve your desired goal. While using this self-motivation technique of asseveration, we become more conscious of our thoughts, feelings and behaviour, and start feeling better about ourselves. The only thing that we need to remember is "Never to give up", because however slow the results may seem to be coming, these techniques give us greater control of our thoughts, feelings and behaviour, putting us in charge of our lives.

(The writer is a spiritual educator and popular columnist; views are personal)

The communication crossroads of 2025



CHAITANYA K PRASAD

With disinformation on the rise and the human connection often overshadowed by algorithms, the question looms: Are we fostering understanding, or fueling division?



In 2025, the world is navigating a labyrinth of communication complexities. From geopolitical tensions to the pervasive influence of technology, communication strategies are at the centre of global stability—or instability.

As the tools of interaction evolve, so too do the challenges, responsibilities, and opportunities they present. Are we prepared for what lies ahead, or are we hurtling toward a crisis of our own making? The challenges of communication in 2025 are markedly different from those a decade ago. Geopolitical dynamics have shifted, with nations leveraging digital platforms as both tools of diplomacy and instruments of disinformation. The lines between statecraft and cyber influence are blurred, creating a volatile ecosystem where words carry as much weight as weapons.

The rise of artificial intelligence and algorithm-driven content has exacerbated these challenges. While these tools offer unprecedented efficiency, they also prioritize engagement metrics over truth. The result is an overabundance of sensationalist, clickbait content that often prioritises superficiality over substance. In this cacophony, nuanced perspectives and deeply researched narratives are drowned out, leaving the global audience vulnerable to manipulation and misinformation. The role of media as the "fourth estate" has never been more critical—or more scrutinized. In an era of hyper-connectivity, the media's ability to shape public perception and influence geopolitical outcomes is unparalleled. But with great power comes great responsibility. Shouldn't media foster positive and conscious impact?

Shouldn't it hold itself accountable for the narratives it propagates? Unfortunately, the race for clicks and views often overshadows these ideals. The prevalence of sensationalist headlines, shallow analysis, and polarised reporting erodes trust in media institutions. This calls for a renewed focus on media literacy—not just for consumers but for creators as well.



OVERHYPERED NARRATIVES INFLATE MINOR ISSUES INTO CRISES, OVERSTRETCHED RESOURCES DILUTE THE QUALITY OF CONTENT, AND OVERIMAGINED SOLUTIONS PROMISE MORE THAN THEY CAN DELIVER. TOGETHER, THESE TENDENCIES CREATE A COMMUNICATION ENVIRONMENT RIFE WITH MISTRUST AND MIS-UNDERSTANDING

Journalists, editors, and content creators must be sensitised to the implications of their work, while audiences must be equipped to critically evaluate the information they consume. In dissecting modern communication challenges, one troubling trend emerges: superficial solutions to complex problems. Whether it's a rushed headline, an oversimplified tweet, or a reductive policy announcement, brevity often comes at the cost of depth.

While the demand for digestible content is understandable, it risks trivialising critical issues and fostering a culture of intellectual complacency. To counter this, there is an urgent need for robust communication evaluation strategies. Independent evaluators should assess the quality, accuracy, and impact of information disseminated by platforms, news outlets, and governments. This would not only enhance accountability but also restore faith in the integrity of communication. The phenomenon of the "3Os"—overhyped, overstretched, and overimagined—poses a significant threat to effective communication in 2025.

Overhyped narratives inflate minor issues into crises, overstretched resources dilute the quality of content, and overimagined solutions promise more than they can deliver. Together, these tendencies create a communication environment rife with mistrust and misunderstanding. In geopolitics, this can have disastrous consequences. Overhyped tensions can escalate conflicts, overstretched diplomacy can falter under scrutiny, and overimagined strategies can fail to address the realities on the ground. To mitigate these risks, communication must be grounded in authenticity, clarity, and purpose. Despite these challenges,

there is hope. The rapid evolution of communication technologies offers opportunities for better synergy and collaboration. Tools like multilingual AI models, real-time translation software, and immersive virtual platforms can bridge cultural and linguistic divides, fostering a greater understanding of geopolitics. However, these tools must be wielded with care. Over-reliance on algorithms and automation can lead to a loss of human connection and empathy. The human element in communication—context, emotion, and nuance—remains irreplaceable. To ensure these tools are used effectively, their deployment must be guided by ethical frameworks and human oversight. When it comes to India, the nation stands as a dynamic force in efficient geopolitics and communication, blending tradition with innovation. With its rich heritage of diverse narratives and its growing role as a voice for the Global South, India's communication outreach is uniquely positioned to bridge cultural and ideological divides.

The country's influence has expanded far beyond its borders, particularly through its active participation in multilateral forums like the G20, BRICS, and the United Nations. India's emphasis on South-South cooperation and its role as a leader in digital innovation makes it a fertile ground for reshaping global communication paradigms.

By championing inclusive narratives and fostering dialogue on issues critical to the Global South—such as climate justice, sustainable development, equitable access to technology, and strengthening the education system—India leverages its communication landscape to promote solidarity and shared growth among developing nations. As a

communication powerhouse, India's strategies offer a template for balancing tradition and innovation, providing hope for a more connected and empathetic world. Looking ahead, the most profound paradigm shift in communication lies in its potential to resolve, rather than exacerbate, conflicts. In a world marked by division, the ability to convey messages of reconciliation, empathy, and cooperation is invaluable. Governments, media, and technology companies must prioritise communication strategies that unite rather than divide. For instance, collaborative storytelling initiatives could bring together voices from conflicting regions to share common experiences. Platforms could amplify narratives of peacebuilding and resilience, while governments could invest in cultural diplomacy to foster mutual understanding. The communication landscape of 2025 is a double-edged sword. While challenges like misinformation, and superficiality loom large, the potential for positive transformation is equally significant.

To navigate this precarious moment, we must prioritize media literacy, accountability, and ethical use of technology. We must move away from shallow, divisive narratives and embrace depth, authenticity, and empathy. The question is not whether we have the tools to create meaningful change, it is whether we have the will to use them wisely. In an age of unprecedented connectivity, the power of communication lies not in the tools themselves but in how we choose to wield them. The future depends on our ability to communicate with clarity, conscience, and care.

(The writer is a former civil servant; Views are personal. Inputs provided by Zoya Ahmad)

California's wildfire tragedy: A wake-up call for India's forest fire management

The Los Angeles disaster underscores the growing wildfire risks in India due to climate change and human activity

For the past week, firefighters in Los Angeles have been locked in a desperate battle against devastating wildfires, which have claimed numerous lives and forced the evacuation of over 200,000 residents. Driven by powerful Santa Ana winds and prolonged drought conditions, these fires have scorched hundreds of square kilometers, wreaking havoc in densely populated areas like Pacific Palisades and Altadena.

This disaster has left homes, places of worship, and critical infrastructure in ruins, forcing many into shelters and leaving thousands without electricity. The financial toll of these fires is staggering, estimated between \$135 billion and \$150 billion, making this one of the most economically destructive



SATENDRA

wildfires in US history. Beyond the immediate destruction, the long-term effects are profound: soil degradation, harm to water systems, loss of wildlife, and deteriorating air quality. Moreover, the vast carbon emissions from these fires will intensify global climate change,

further exacerbating the environmental crisis. This catastrophe serves as a stark warning for India. According to the IPCC Sixth Assessment Report, climate change will likely worsen drought conditions and elevate temperatures in forested areas of South Asia, including India, thereby increasing the risk of wildfires. To address these emerging challenges, India must overhaul its forest fire management strategies, drawing on lessons from global experiences like California's recent tragedy.

India's forest cover is already under significant pressure from human activities and changing climatic conditions. The Forest Survey of India (FSI) reveals that 36 per cent of Indian forests are classified as highly, very highly, or

extremely vulnerable to fires. Regions such as the Northeast, Garhwal Himalayas, and Central India are particularly at risk. Alarming, over 90 per cent of forest fires in the country are attributed to human actions, ranging from negligence to deliberate acts. California's wildfire crisis underscores the urgent need to rethink existing forest fire management strategies to address the evolving challenges posed by changing climatic and socio-economic conditions.

With its rich biodiversity and diverse forest ecosystems, India stands to gain valuable insights from such disasters. Developing a comprehensive strategy that prioritises effective early warning systems, robust governance, institu-



tional collaboration, and increased investment in research and development is crucial to safeguarding India's forests. A national action plan aligned with international frameworks like the Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction would significantly enhance India's

ability to manage forest fire risks. Understanding the dynamics of disasters is essential to mitigating these risks. Conducting vulnerability assessments at both meso- and micro-levels can help identify high-risk zones. Investment in research and development, in collaboration with national and international organisations, can advance technologies for fire detection, prediction, and suppression.

Enhancing governance in forest fire management is equally critical. Updated policy frameworks should integrate forest fire management into disaster management plans at both national and state levels. Standard Operating Procedures (SOPs) and field manuals must be revised and

streamlined to support effective detection, reporting, and management of forest fires. Establishing a dedicated National Institute of Forest Fire Management could strengthen training programmes for forest officials, community members, and other stakeholders, while fostering better coordination among forest departments, disaster management agencies, and local communities.

Building resilience is paramount. Leveraging advanced technologies like drones, artificial intelligence, and satellite monitoring systems can significantly improve early detection and suppression efforts. Creating a national Air Operation Wing to handle aerial firefighting operations would enable rapid responses

to fires. Capacity-building initiatives, such as training sessions and mock drills, would equip forest personnel and local communities with essential firefighting skills and SOPs. Collaboration with international research institutions to develop innovative solutions—such as replacing non-native tree species with indigenous, fire-resistant varieties and creating eco-friendly fire suppression methods—can further strengthen forest resilience and sustainability. Establishing a national forest fire knowledge network would facilitate the sharing of best practices, research findings, and innovative approaches.

(The writer is former executive director of the National Institute of Disaster Management; views are personal)

Authorities take impeached Prez Yoon to detention centre

South Korea's impeached President, Yoon Suk Yeol, was sent to a detention centre near Seoul on Wednesday night, after being questioned by anti-corruption officials who took him into custody over his imposition of martial law last month.

tion of martial law December 3 as a legitimate act of governance against an "anti-state" opposition employing its legislative majority to thwart his agenda.



Investigators from the state anti-corruption agency and police officers make their way to the residence of impeached President Yoon Suk Yeol to execute a warrant to detain Yoon in Seoul, South Korea on Wednesday.

After he was questioned for more than 10 hours, a vehicle carrying Yoon arrived at a detention center in Uiwang, near Seoul, escorted by police and presidential security vehicles.

which is leading a joint investigation with the police and the military over whether Yoon's martial law declaration amounted to an attempted rebellion, has 48 hours to request a court order for his formal arrest.

Indictment. If prosecutors indict Yoon on rebellion and abuse of power charges, which are the allegations examined by investigators, he could possibly remain under arrest until the initial court ruling, which is typically made within six months, said Park Sung-bae, an attorney specialising in criminal law.

the death penalty or life imprisonment, if convicted. "If the first court hands down a prison sentence, the detention simply continues," Park said. "If they sentence him to life imprisonment, for example, he continues serving that sentence straight through."

crime", saying his declaration was necessary to raise awareness about an opposition that was exercising "legislative dictatorship by blocking laws and budgets" and "paralysing" state affairs. He denied the rebellion accusations, describing his impeachment as "fraud".

lawyers and his chief of staff, before Yoon was driven out. South Korea's acting leader, Deputy Prime Minister Choi Sang-mok, issued a statement early Wednesday urging law enforcement and the presidential security service to ensure there were no "physical clashes".

Yoon was detained in a major law enforcement operation at the presidential compound earlier in the day. Yoon defiantly insisted that the country's anti-corruption agency, which led the raid with police, didn't have the authority to investigate his actions, but said he complied to prevent violence.

Yoon had been holed up in the Hannam-dong residence in the capital, Seoul, for weeks while vowing to "fight to the end" the efforts to oust him. He has justified his declaration of martial law December 3 as a legitimate act of governance against an "anti-state" opposition employing its legislative majority to thwart his agenda.

WHAT'S NEXT? Yoon could be held in custody for weeks, possibly even months or longer. The anti-corruption agency, which is leading a joint investigation with the police and the military over whether Yoon's martial law declaration amounted to an attempted rebellion, has 48 hours to request a court order for his formal arrest.

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Under South Korean law, the leader of a rebellion can face the death penalty or life imprisonment, if convicted. "If the first court hands down a prison sentence, the detention simply continues," Park said. "If they sentence him to life imprisonment, for example, he continues serving that sentence straight through."

As they began the detention operation in the early morning, the anti-corruption investigators and police officers engaged in an hours-long standoff at the compound's gate with presidential security forces, but otherwise encountered no meaningful resistance.

Police officers were seen using wire cutters to remove the barbed wire placed by the presidential security service on the perimeter of the compound to block their entry. Some police officers used ladders to climb over rows of buses blocking the compound's entrance, and then the investigators began moving up the hilly compound.

Following Yoon's detention, Choi met with diplomats from the Group of Seven nations, including the United States, Japan, the UK and Germany, as well as the representative of the European Union, to reassure them that the government was functioning with stability.

GOVERNMENT OF ODISHA DEPARTMENT OF WATER RESOURCES OFFICE OF THE ADDITIONAL CHIEF ENGINEER, EASTERN CIRCLE-II, CHANDIKHOLE

Dire fire warning for LA area pushed back as winds ease

Easing winds delivered a brief but much-needed reprieve to firefighters Tuesday as they battled two massive blazes burning in the Los Angeles area, and the National Weather Service pushed back its unusually dire warning of critical fire weather until early the following day.



Trucks drive through a neighborhood destroyed by the Eaton Fire, Tuesday, in Altadena, Calif.

afternoon Wednesday. Winds increased Tuesday but not to the near-hurricane-force levels that were predicted to

happen earlier in the day. Still the danger was not over, officials said. "Key message: We are not out of the woods yet," the National Weather Service in Los Angeles said in a post on social media.

Nearly 90,000 households lost electricity as utilities shut off power to prevent their lines from sparking new blazes. Weary and anxious residents were told to be ready to flee at a moment's notice. They remained vigilant, keeping an eye on the skies and on each other: Police announced roughly 50 arrests, for looting, flying drones in fire zones, and other crimes.

most stubborn blaze. CalFire Operations Section Chief Christian Litz said he took a helicopter ride around the perimeter and saw no active flames, though it was far from over.

Table with columns: S. No., Account Name, Client ID, No. of Ac., Bal. Outstanding as on 14/01/2025, Weight (grams). Includes sections for ASHOK VIHAR - DELHI, GREATER KAILASH - II, KAROL BAGH, OKHLA, MAYUR VIHAR - NEW DELHI, BHAIJANPURA - NEW DELHI, KRISHNA NAGAR, NEW DELHI.

Table with columns: S. No., Account Name, Client ID, No. of Ac., Bal. Outstanding as on 14/01/2025, Weight (grams). Includes sections for DILSHAD GARDEN, LAXMI NAGAR, GUJRANWALA TOWN - NEW DELHI, PALAM.

Japan, Philippines to urge Trump on US engagement in Asia

Japan and the Philippines will convey to President-elect Donald Trump the urgent need for the US to remain committed to help uphold the rule of law in an Asian region where security concerns have become "increasingly severe," Japan's top diplomat said Wednesday.

Amid the increasingly severe strategic environment in the region, Japan places importance on our bilateral cooperation as well as on maintaining and strengthening trilateral cooperation between Japan, the Philippines and the United States," Iwaya said.

Manalo told reporters that the Philippines would raise China's latest actions in a meeting on Thursday between Chinese and Philippine diplomats in the Chinese city of Xiamen.

2 pvt lunar landers head toward moon in roundabout journey

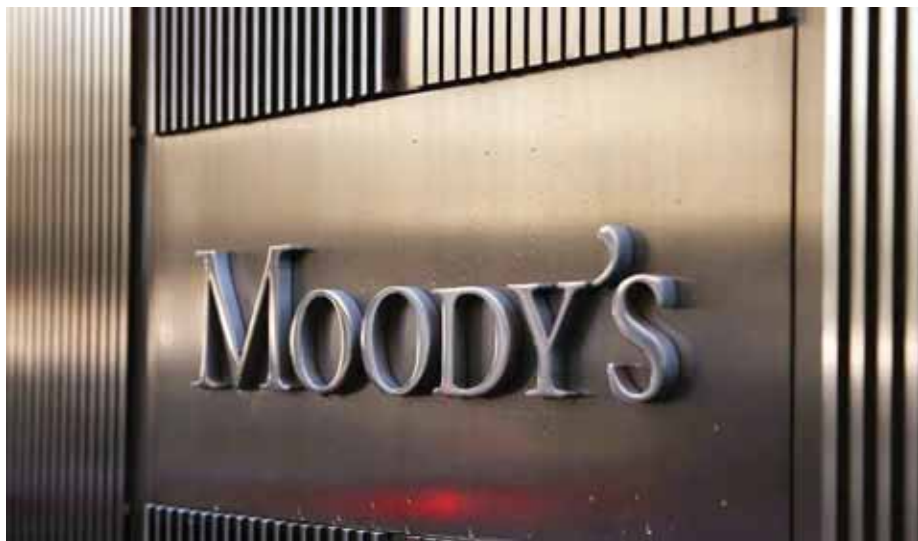
In a two-for-one moonshot, SpaceX launched a pair of lunar landers Wednesday for US and Japanese companies looking to jumpstart business on Earth's dusty sidekick.

The two landers rocketed away in the middle of the night from NASA's Kennedy Space Centre, the latest in a stream of private spacecraft aiming for the moon. They shared the ride to save money but parted company an hour into the flight exactly as planned, taking separate roundabout routes for the month-long journey.

It's take 2 for the Tokyo-based ispace, whose first lander crashed into the moon two years ago. This time, it has a rover on board with a scoop to gather up lunar dirt for study and plans to test potential food and water sources for

India's fiscal conditions to constrain credit strength in 2025: Moody's ratings

PTI ■ NEW DELHI
India's fiscal conditions will continue to constrain its credit strength in 2025, although tension in US-China relations could benefit the Indian economy, Moody's Ratings said on Wednesday.
In its report on Asia Pacific Sovereigns, Moody's Ratings said growth and inflation are levelling out, with strong domestic demand bolstered by modest easing in global and regional financial conditions.
But proposed trade restrictions by the US would weaken economic output across the region.
"India's fiscal conditions will continue to constrain its credit strength in 2025. We expect only gradual fiscal consolidation, and debt to remain significantly higher



than the Baa-rated peer median of around 57 per cent," Moody's said.
"Despite gains in revenue in recent years, we also expect

regional hotspots. Moody's assesses a low likelihood of military conflict in the Taiwan Strait or Korean Peninsula, and tensions will remain elevated, particularly driven by US-China relations.
"These tensions are shaping trade and investment flows, which may be further diverted away from China as the US tightens investment in strategic sectors, further weakening China's economy and dampening regional growth. However, this shift could benefit India and Southeast Asian economies," Moody's said.
A range of geopolitical and domestic political risks persist, it said, adding after elections in key economies, governments may need to make choices whether to fulfill pledges or to focus on fiscal consolidation.

India to achieve 20 per cent ethanol blending target in two months, says Nitin Gadkari

PTI ■ NEW DELHI
India will achieve its target of 20 per cent ethanol blending in the next two months, Union minister Nitin Gadkari said on Wednesday.
The practice of blending ethanol with petrol began in 2001 as a pilot project. "We will achieve this target of 20 per cent ethanol blending in the next two months."
Use of E20 (petrol with 20 per cent ethanol) will help in reducing pollution," Gadkari said while speaking at an event.
The road transport and highways minister said Tata Motors, Mahindra & Mahindra, Maruti Suzuki, and Hyundai Motors have started manufacturing vehicles that run on 100 per cent bio-ethanol.
Gadkari said pollution is a serious problem in the country as 42 Indian cities are among 50 most-



polluted cities in the world. "We import fossil fuels worth Rs 22 lakh crore, which is also causing pollution," he said.
Prime Minister Narendra Modi had launched the higher 20 per cent ethanol-blended petrol in 2023. In the first phase, 15 cities were covered.
Use of ethanol, extracted from sugarcane as well as broken rice and other agri produce, will help India -

Vedanta Resources raises USD 1.1 Billion through dual tranche bond issuance

PTI ■ NEW DELHI
Mining mogul Anil Agarwal's Vedanta Resources has raised USD 1.1 billion through a new bond offering to prepay existing liabilities, the company said in a Singapore exchange filing.
Vedanta Resources Finance II plc, a wholly owned subsidiary of Vedanta Resources, raised USD 1.1 billion through a new dual tranche issuance in international debt capital markets.
Vedanta Resources Ltd (VRL) has raised USD 3.1 billion in USD bonds since September 2024.
As per the exchange filing, the latest bond issuance consists of two tranches - a USD 550 million tranche of 5.5 years tenor at a 9.475 per cent interest rate and a USD 550 million tranche of 8.25 years tenor at a 9.850 per cent interest rate.
Both tranches garnered strong investor demand with the bonds receiving final orders of USD 3.4 billion from over 135 accounts, representing an oversubscription of 3.1x, the company said.
"The net proceeds from the offering of the Bonds will be used to prepay Vedanta's outstanding bonds (including any accrued interest thereto), pay any related transaction costs in connection thereto and to service other debts," it said. Marquee investors from the United States, EMEA (Europe, the Middle East and Africa) and Asia were amongst the major investors. Bonds are expected to be rated 'B' by S&P Global and 'B2' by Moody's Ratings. Moody's recently upgraded VRL corporate family rating (CFR) to B1 from B2 on the back of recent moves.
The final bonds allocation included 61 per cent from Asia, 30 per cent from EMEA, and 9 per cent from the US for the 5.5-Year Tranche and 54 per cent from Asia, 30 per cent from EMEA, and 16 per cent from the US for the 8.25-Year Tranche.

Markets log gain for second day, sensex climbs over 200 points



PTI ■ MUMBAI
Benchmark indices Sensex and Nifty ticked higher for the second straight session on Wednesday, buoyed by buying in bellwether stock Reliance Industries, Zomato and Kotak Bank amid a largely firm trend in global markets.
However, elevated crude oil prices in the international markets and buying by foreign investors weighed on market sentiment, traders said.
The 30-share BSE index climbed 224.45 points or 0.29 per cent to close at 76,724.08. During the day, it jumped 491.42 points or 0.64 per cent to 76,991.05.
As many as 2,150 stocks advanced while 1,806 declined and 108 remained unchanged on the BSE.
The NSE Nifty advanced 37.15 points or 0.16 per cent to 23,213.20.
"The domestic market continues to be volatile on account of elevated US bond yields, strengthening dollar, and increasing FIIs outflows. Global markets are cautious

Exports contract one per cent in December, trade deficit narrows to USD 22 Billion

PTI ■ NEW DELHI
India's exports in December 2024 contracted for the second month in a row by about one per cent year-on-year to USD 38.01 billion due to global uncertainties, while the trade deficit narrowed to USD 21.94 billion.
According to the commerce ministry data, imports rose by about 5 per cent year-on-year to USD 59.95 billion in December. Cumulatively, during April-December this fiscal, exports recorded a growth of 1.6 per cent to USD 321.71 billion and imports by 5.15 per cent to USD 532.48 billion. Trade deficit, the difference between imports and exports, during April-December widened to USD 210.77 billion from USD 189.74



billion during the same period previous fiscal. Briefing the media on the latest data, Commerce Secretary Sunil Barthwal said that India's

commercial wings of Indian Missions in 20 countries to deliberate on issues impacting exports and ways to resolve them. These 20 countries account for about 60 per cent of India's exports. In December last year, Barthwal said sectors which have registered healthy growth in exports included electronics, engineering and pharmaceuticals.
When asked about the revision of gold and silver import data for November 2024, the secretary said a committee has been set up to create a robust mechanism for publishing consistent data.
The government revised gold import data for November 2024, bringing down numbers by USD 5 billion to USD 9.84 billion.

Bank of Maharashtra Q3 profit rises 36 per cent to ₹1,406 Crore

PTI ■ NEW DELHI
State-owned Bank of Maharashtra (BoM) on Wednesday posted a 36 per cent rise in net profit to Rs 1,406 crore in the third quarter ended December 2024 with rising interest income.
The Pune-based lender had posted a net profit of Rs 1,036 crore in the October-December period a year ago. Total income increased to Rs 7,112 crore during the quarter under review against Rs 5,851 crore in the same period previous year, BoM said in a regulatory filing.
The bank earned an interest income of Rs 6,325 crore during the quarter compared to Rs 5,171 crore a year ago.



The bank was able to reduce gross Non-Performing Assets (NPAs) to 1.80 per cent of the gross loans by the end of December 2024 from 2.04 per cent in the year-ago period. Similarly, net NPAs or bad loans came down to 0.2 per cent from 0.22 per cent at the end of the third quarter of the previous fiscal.
The Provision Coverage Ratio (PCR) as of December 31, 2024, is 98.28 per cent.

The bank has raised Rs 3,500 crore through Qualified Institutional Placements on October 5, 2024.
The bank has issued and allotted 61,01,81,311 equity shares of Rs 10 each at a premium of 47.36 per share. Accordingly, the shareholding of the Government of India in the bank has been reduced to 79.60 per cent as of December 31, 2024.
During three quarters, the bank reported a net profit of Rs 4,027 crore compared to Rs 2,837 crore in the nine-month period of the previous year.
Total income also increased to Rs 7,112 crore from Rs 5,851 crore in the nine-month period of the last financial year.

Rupee extends gains, settles 13 paise higher at 86.40 against US Dollar



PTI ■ MUMBAI
The rupee extended its recovery for the second straight session and settled with a gain of 13 paise at 86.53 against the dollar.
Anuj Choudhary, Research Analyst at Mirae Asset Sharekhan, said the rupee gained for the second consecutive session on weak US dollar and soft US 10-year treasury yields. A pullback in the domestic equities and overnight decline in crude oil prices also favoured the rupee. However, FII outflows capped sharp gains.
Analysts attributed the weakening dollar to lower-than-expected producer price index, as per the latest data released in the US.
Going ahead, Choudhary said the US inflation is expected to remain elevated and it may lead to a recovery in the US dollar, which is likely to put pressure on the rupee.

ITA submits white paper on Darjeeling tea industry to West Bengal government

PTI ■ KOLKATA
Leading producers body Indian Tea Association (ITA) on Tuesday said it has submitted a white paper on the Darjeeling tea industry to the West Bengal government highlighting the challenges and opportunities.
A team of ITA officials met Labour Minister Moloy Ghatak on Tuesday evening and submitted the white



paper, the association said in a statement.
The paper attempts to provide an in-depth analysis of the current state of the Darjeeling tea industry. It also highlighted key issues like production challenges and market dynamics.
According to ITA, the paper also suggested recommendations aimed at reviving the industry and ensuring long-term viability.

ITA said that the Darjeeling tea industry is not just an economic asset, but a cultural heritage which needs immediate attention and strategic intervention by the central and state governments by way of financial assistance.
The Darjeeling tea industry faces problems of climate change, low productivity due to very old bushes and less profitability making operations enviable.

Government should target ₹11 lakh crore in FY26, give relief to taxpayers in lower bracket in Budget: ICRA

PTI ■ NEW DELHI
The government should target a capital spending of Rs 11 lakh crore in the Budget for the next fiscal while giving inflation-adjusted relief on personal income tax to boost consumer spending, rating agency ICRA said on Wednesday.
ICRA Chief Economist Aditi Nayar said last year's record budgeted capital expenditure of Rs 11,11 lakh crore is likely to fall short by about Rs 1.4 lakh crore and the next year's target should be fixed at the last year's level with a focus on keeping borrowing within reasonable limits.
Further, Nayar said capex numbers are trailing the run rate required to get to the



Budget target in the current fiscal.
Between April and November 2024, capex spending stood at Rs 5.13 lakh crore, 46 per cent of the Budget estimates of Rs 11.11 lakh crore.
"We are looking at a large shortfall in the current fiscal. For next year, we are hoping that we will get fiscal space to prioritise capex..." For FY26,

based on the revenue numbers...A fiscal deficit of 4.5 per cent of GDP will be quite reasonably achieved. That would allow us Rs 11 trillion of capex, a growth of

21, which increased to Rs 5.54 lakh crore in 2021-22. In 2022-23, capex spending was hiked to Rs 7.5 lakh crore and in 2023-24, it reached Rs 10 lakh crore.
On being asked if the government would continue with the investment push in FY26 as well, Nayar said the capex push creates positivity in the economy and a virtuous cycle that trickles down to other parts of the economy as well.
"I would think that capex would be low in FY25 and the fiscal space available should be prioritised for capex. Our forecast suggests that every 10 basis points of additional fiscal deficit would get us another Rs 35,000 crore of capital expenditure. Probably better to start with a realistic

capex number, a fiscal deficit that would come down in line with medium-term forecast that will give a reasonable borrowing figure for markets to absorb," Nayar said.
ICRA forecasts a fiscal deficit, which is the difference between government expenditure and revenues, at 4.8 per cent of GDP in the current fiscal and 4.5 per cent in FY26.
Nayar also said that GDP growth has bottomed out in the September quarter and going forward, it is expected to recover. The ratings agency projects GDP growth of 6.5 per cent for both the current and next fiscal years.
She said rural consumption is expected to be steady, while urban consumption would be uneven. Once food inflation

starts to recede, urban consumption may begin to see a bit of an uptick, she said. On her expectations from the Budget, Nayar said some tinkering with income tax slabs and rates would give a "mood upliftment" for urban taxpayers. That is what the budget can bring in without too much revenue loss. "Inflation does eat away disposable income. It is not an unfair ask (tax relief). While some modest concessions could be given in terms of tax relief, we need to make sure that we are not losing out too many people from the I-T net," she said, adding that two things will be important - one, not to have too much revenue loss, and second, not to lose too many taxpayers from the tax net.

Naomi Osaka is back in third round of Grand Slam for the first time in three years

PTI ■ MELBOURNE
Naomi Osaka's second-round match at the Australian Open could not possibly have started in a worse way. All of 21 minutes in, she sailed a forehand service return well long and, just like that, trailed 5-0.
Osaka strode to the sideline for the changeover, plopped herself down and draped a white towel over her head, blocking out all sights and leaving her with just her thoughts. She stayed like that throughout the break between games, even maneuvering a water bottle under that towel to take a drink.
This was not a match against some unknown opponent, someone Osaka knew for sure she could beat. It was against 20th-seeded Karolina Muchova, the runner-up at the 2023 French Open and a three-time semifinalist at other majors, including at Melbourne Park in 2021. Muchova also had defeated Osaka in their two most recent matchups. None of that mattered on this afternoon, though: Osaka

forgot about that disappointing start and came all the way back to win 1-6, 6-1, 6-3 on Wednesday. What was her mindset? "Just be aware and try not to get so negative on yourself. I think, for me, the score in the first set was very dramatic, but there was key points that I could have maybe won a game here or there," Osaka explained afterward. "So I kept trying to tell myself that."
This was, in some ways, a significant moment for Osaka, who once reigned atop women's tennis, winning four Grand Slam titles — two at the Australian Open, two at the U.S. Open — and ascending to No. 1 in the WTA rankings. The victory allowed her to reach the third round at a major tournament for the first time since the 2022 season.
Getting to that stage was not considered a big deal at one point for her. But time off because of mental health breaks and then a pregnancy — Osaka's daughter, Shai, was born in July 2023 — changed things.
Since returning to action a year ago, Osaka has shown signs of



getting her game back together, including a memorable and narrow loss to then-No. 1 Iga Swiatek at the French Open. This, though, followed a win against 2022 U.S. Open semifinalist Caroline Garcia in Melbourne and meant the progress is real. "It definitely was something that is a goal of mine, especially after last year; I wasn't able to beat a seed in a Grand Slam," Osaka

said. "I'm obviously very thankful that that happened so early this year."
She also joked about gaining a measure of "revenge" by defeating Garcia — who eliminated Osaka in Melbourne a year ago — and Muchova in consecutive matches. Next for Osaka is a matchup against Tokyo Olympics gold medalist Belinda Bencic, who is also a mother; her daughter, Bella, was born last year. Both Osaka and Bencic are big hitters.
"It's going to be a fun match," Bencic said.
Muchova wasn't the highest-seeded player to exit Wednesday. That was No. 5 Zheng Qinwen, the runner-up to Aryna Sabalenka at the 2024 Australian Open and the gold medalist at the Paris Games last August. Zheng lost a bit of focus after being called for a time violation and never managed to counter 97th-ranked Laura Siegemund's strokes, bowing out 7-6 (3), 6-3 at John Cain Arena.
After the chair umpire cited her for taking too long to serve, Zheng hit her next offering so poorly it bounced way before reaching the net.
"I knew," the 36-year-old Siegemund said, "I just had to play more than my best tennis."
The player who beat Zheng in the final 12 months ago, No. 1-ranked Aryna Sabalenka, stretched her Melbourne Park winning streak to 16 matches as she eyes a third consecutive title, beating No. 54 Jessica Bouzas Maneiro 6-3, 7-5 at Rod Laver Arena.
Other women's winners included No. 7 Jessica Pegula, No. 14 Mirra Andreeva and No. 30 Leylah Fernandez, with 2023 U.S. Open champion Coco Gauff in action during the night session.
Novak Djokovic added to his record collection by playing in his 430th career Grand Slam match — one more than Roger Federer — and, though he dropped a set for the second outing in a row, moved into the third round with a 6-1, 6-7 (4), 6-3, 6-2 win over Jaime Faria.
Other men who advanced included No. 3 Carlos Alcaraz, who joked that he is now a "serve bot" after hitting 14 aces while dismissing Yoshihito Nishikita 6-0, 6-1, 6-4.



England batter James Vince quits First-Class cricket to play in PSL

PTI ■ LONDON
England batter James Vince on Wednesday quit First-Class cricket to play for Karachi Kings in the upcoming Pakistan Super League, defying ECB's decision not to grant NOCs for its cricketers to appear in the T20 competition.
The England board had decided in November, 2024, to refrain from issuing NOCs to all-format players to play in the PSL, scheduled for April-May this season, because the league clashes with the early rounds of the County Championship.
Vince, who has played 13 Tests, was expected to lead Hampshire this season as well, but he was retained by the Kings ahead of the PSL draft.
"I love Hampshire. It's been



my club and home for 16 years, so I want to be able to maintain my best to keep delivering for Hampshire in T20 cricket, and hopefully even further our success in the competition [the Blast]," Vince said in a statement. "I also need to understand what is best for my family,

and combine that with the stage of my career I am at," he added. The 33-year-old, who has been leading Hampshire since 2015, is currently playing for Gulf Giants in the ILT20 tournament in the UAE.
Giles White, Hampshire's director of cricket, said they respected Vince's decision.
"James has been at the heart of the club for the best part of 20 years, showing absolute commitment on and off the field as the team's leading batter and captain," said White.
"We recognise that this announcement will be tinged with disappointment for many fans but hope everyone will join us in celebrating what he has given to our club over many years."
From 216 First-Class matches, Vince has scored 13340 runs at an average of 40 with 30 hundreds.
The ESPNcricinfo has, meanwhile, reported that England batter Tom Kohler-Cadmore too quit County cricket to play in the PSL for Peshawar Zalmi, and he is in talks with Somerset in this regard.

Yashasvi Jaiswal joins Mumbai Ranji camp

PTI ■ MUMBAI
India opener Yashasvi Jaiswal on Wednesday joined the Mumbai camp after confirming his availability for the next round of Ranji Trophy but skipper Rohit Sharma was not to be seen after turning up for a couple of practice on the opening day of training.
Rohit, who batted alongside Mumbai captain Ajinkya Rahane on Tuesday here at the Wankhede Stadium, is expected to resume training in a day or two.
However, it remains to be seen if the incumbent Indian skipper would play in the domestic giant's next Ranji Trophy fixture. Rohit is yet to confirm his availability for the Elite Group A contest against Jammu and Kashmir starting on January 23 but so far, no formal discussions have been taken place.



"The selectors are expected to announce the squad on January 20, during which they will follow the due process of checking for the availability of every player. Rohit will also be approached around the time for selection," a Mumbai Cricket Association (MCA) official told PTI.
The 37-year-old is looking to put an end to his poor run with the bat after he managed a mere 31 runs in three Tests that he played against Australia in the Border-Gavaskar Trophy.

SA20: Joburg Super Kings, Pretoria Capitals register convincing wins

PTI ■ DURBAN
Joburg Super Kings and Pretoria Capitals claimed crucial victories over Durban's Super Giants and Sunrisers Eastern Cape respectively in the Betway SA20.
The JSK spin trio of Tabraiz Shamsi, Donovan Ferreira and Imran Tahir combined in perfect tandem to propel the visitors to a 28-run victory at Kingsmead, while the Capitals seamers were influential in their six-wicket bonus point win over the defending champions.
Super Giants' middle-order batter Quinton de Kock played a lone hand of 55 (45 balls, 5x4, 2x6) to keep his team afloat in pursuit of JSK's 169/4.
But Shamsi, Ferreira and Tahir snared five wickets between them to bowl out the Super Giants for 141. Tahir also produced a moment of brilliance in the field which proved to be hugely inspirational for the visitors.
The 45-year-old displayed the athleticism of a teenager to snare a brilliant two-handed diving catch at point off a Wiaan Mulder reverse-sweep. JSK were certainly galvanised by the veteran to squeeze the Super Giants middle-order after the home team seemed well set at 99/4 with the dangerous pair of De Kock and Heinrich Klaasen at the crease.
Klaasen (29 of 17 balls) was

building up momentum by striking Matheesha Pathirana for a couple of boundaries and a six, but the Sri Lankan exacted revenge by having him caught down the leg side with the final ball of the 12th over to set in the collapse.
Earlier, the Super Kings rallied to a competitive total through contributions from Leus du Plooy (38), Jonny Bairstow (26) and Ferreira (26) before Gerald Coetzee smashed the final two balls of the innings for six for the visitors to seize the momentum.
At Centurion, the Capitals benefited from winning the toss with captain Rilee Rossouw having no hesitation in electing to bowl. It immediately proved to be the correct decision on a surface that had been under the covers for a lengthy period of time with the home team's fast bowlers gaining significant seam movement early on.
Eathan Bosch (2/18) landed the first blow when he removed opener Zak Crawley. Bosch was well supported by Daryn Dupavillion (3/32), who struck with successive deliveries to send both David Bedingham and Sunrisers captain Aiden Markram back to the pavilion to leave the defending champions in tatters at 3 for 4.
The visitors slipped deeper into trouble when Tom Abell and Tristan Stubbs also departed within two runs of each other.

Champions Trophy opening in Febuary third week; PCB hopeful Rohit Sharma will be there

PTI ■ LAHORE
The opening ceremony of the Champions Trophy will be held either on February 16 or 17 and the Pakistan Cricket Board (PCB) is confident that India captain Rohit Sharma will be in attendance at the event.
The PCB source also said that it is awaiting communication from the ICC on the schedule of the customary captains' photo-shoot and the pre-event press conference.
The eight-team tournament will get underway on February 19 in Karachi. However, India will play all their matches in Dubai, starting with the clash against Bangladesh on February 20, after refusing to travel to Pakistan owing to security concerns.
The source said PCB has procured all relevant clearances from its government to promptly



issue visas to all captains, players and team officials who will come here for pre-tournament events.
"This obviously includes Rohit or any other Indian team player or official or board official," he added.
Another source confirmed to PTI that the PCB has made it clear to the ICC that the opening ceremony, featuring all teams and their captains, will take place in Pakistan.
"This is in line with the usual protocols and since the

East Bengal seek government intervention over ISL 'step-motherly treatment'

PTI ■ KOLKATA
Alleging "step-motherly treatment" by the Indian Super League organizers, century-old East Bengal club has sought Union Sports Minister Mansukh Mandaviya's intervention, claiming that systemic bias, the outdated "refugees club" tag, and refereeing controversies have stalled their progress in the top-tier football competition.
The incident occurred during the "Kolkata Derby" in Guwahati on Saturday where East Bengal lost to arch-rivals Mohun Bagan by a solitary goal.
The club claimed the match was marred by biased officiating, including the denial of a clear penalty and a controversial yellow card issued to midfielder Souvik Chakrabarti, which led to his red card and team being



reduced 10 players.
In an emotional plea to the sports minister, East Bengal highlighted how the "refugees club" tag has led to their ongoing marginalisation in Indian football.
"Fight, Fight and Fight -- this has been the perennial motto of East Bengal club for the last 150 years. This club and its supporters have endured the tumultuous period pre and post-partition only through its fighting spirit.
"While the displaced people fought tooth and nail for their substance, the club had to

fight the stigma and the tag of a 'Refugees Club' to establish itself as the leading football club of the country," East Bengal general secretary Rupak Saha wrote in a statement.
"We are surprised that even 75 years after independence, we are in a situation where East Bengal Club has been victimised in almost every match of the ISL.
"We are forced to think why all this is happening to us is it because we are still considered the 'Refugees Club'. Throughout the last 10-12 years, we had to bear the brunt of biased refereeing, be it in the I-League and more so in the ISL.
"During this period, we must have sent close to 50 complaint letters to all the concerned authorities but to no avail and the standard of refereeing has only gone from bad to worse to the worst.

Can't wait to meet Ricky Ponting and ask him about the pull shot: Priyansh Arya

PTI ■ NEW DELHI
When Priyansh Arya hit six sixes in an over last year, he mainly targeted the straight boundary. But when he joins the Punjab Kings IPL camp, it's the pull shot that he wants to perfect with some help from head coach Ricky Ponting, who patented the stroke in his playing days.
Those half a dozen sixes off left-arm spinner Manan Bhardwaj's one over in the inaugural Delhi Premier League put Arya under the spotlight and eventually led to the left-hander drawing a potentially life-changing Rs 3.8 crore winning bid from Punjab Kings, more than 12 times his base price of Rs 30 lakh.
It was as if the stars aligned for the 23-year-old at the mega auction as he made a belligerent hundred against UP in the Syed Mushtaq Ali Trophy days before the high-profile event in Saudi Arabia.
Having been part of Punjab Kings' first pre-season camp in Mumbai last week, Arya has already got the taste of the higher level and says he is bound to become a better

player after his maiden season in the IPL, which begins on March 21.
Has life changed for the Delhi lad since the auction day?
"Life has not changed much since the auction. Yes, there is more interest from people and my expectations from myself have increased. The pre-season camp gave me a fair idea where I need to be come the IPL as I got to do things I have never done in training before."
Arya got to chat with his IPL skipper Shreyas Iyer briefly during the Mumbai camp and apart from him, he is equally excited about spending time with Ponting.
"I have not had the chance to speak to Ricky sir. But when I get to meet him, the first thing I want to ask him is about the pull shot," he said referring to one of the best exponents of the pull shot.
"I am also really excited about spending time with Iyer. I love the attitude of Iyer and Ricky sir, both on and off the field. I would also like to ask them about their mindset in highs and lows.



"Just by interacting with the best you can learn a lot, I have already experienced it (in the camp)," said Arya, whose parents teach in a government school in the national capital. The IPL is still some time away and if he does get to open alongside Prabhsimran Singh, there will be immense pressure and scrutiny. Will his price tag also play on his mind?
"I am not thinking on those lines. For me it is just about learning from the best minds in the game."

And what does he plan to do with the money?
"That (is something) my parents will decide," pat came the response from Arya.
Growing up, he closely tracked the career of now India head coach Gautam Gambhir as they both came to the same academy in Delhi.
Arya loves Gambhir's play against spin and he too has gone on to become a decent batter against the turning ball. No wonder those six sixes came off a spinner.
Besides Gambhir, Arya also draws inspiration from Sri Lankan great Kumar Sangakkara.
"Right from the beginning, I like to play down the ground. That is what I was thinking at that time (when he hit six sixes). I have followed Gautam bhaiya a lot. I loved how he used to pick spin and that is what I tried to pick from him.
"Among overseas players, I like Kumar Sangakkara. I love his cover drive a lot though personally I like pull shot the most."
The moment when his name

came under the hammer will remain fresh in Arya's memory forever.
"We were playing the domestic T20 (SMAT) and I was sitting in the hotel with my teammates. I could not express myself after Punjab made that winning bid. "I did not know what do. My phone stopped working. I would have been happy at just being picked but to get this bid made me feel really good," Arya recollected. Arya made his T20 debut for Delhi in 2023 and List A in 2021, long before he achieved the memorable feat in the DPL last year. The southpaw looked back at his journey thus far.
"There were challenges. The year I made my debut I got to play only two games and was on the bench the rest of time. The year after I was dropped from the senior team. When I got the DPL stage, I told myself I have to be the best batter in the competition and that happened."
He is yet to play first-class cricket and that his next target. However, the ultimate aim is to play Test cricket.