







Security arrangements for devotees at Kashi Vishwanath Corridor reviewed

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ VARANASI

District Magistrate (DM) S Rajalingam and Additional Commissioner of Police (ACP) Dr S Channappa inspected various ghats on Wednesday...



District Magistrate S Rajalingam and ACP Dr S Channappa inspecting the Godowlia-Dashaswamedh area in Varanasi on Wednesday.

Corridor and reviewed the tight security arrangements for the devotees there. The district magistrate instructed the officers posted at the ghats to ensure that no boat operator allows people to board the boat without life jackets...

Cleanliness drive launched in Maha Kumbh area

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ PRAYAGRAJ

Following Paush Purnima Amrit Snan and Makar Sankranti Amrit Snan, a cleanliness drive was started on Wednesday to clean the Maha Kumbh area.



Saraswati said special teams have been formed to remove garbage left in the mela area. More than 10,000 workers have been deployed and work is going on rapidly on the plan to dispose of the collected garbage.

Additional teams of sanitation workers have been deployed for this work. Special attention is being paid to the cleanliness of the toilets set up from the parking to the ghats.

administration has given instructions for appropriate action. The administration has appealed to the devotees not to spread dirt in the Mela area. and throw garbage at appropriate places and cooperate in maintaining cleanliness.

Power employees protest proposed privatisation

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ VARANASI

On the call of Vidyut Karamchari Sanyukt Sangharsh Samiti, UP, the employees at the electricity sub-stations in the district tied black armbands on Wednesday and held a protest meeting at Hanuman Temple in Bhikaripur.



Power employees holding a protest meeting at Bhikharipur in Varanasi on Wednesday evening.

ity sub-stations worth lakhs of crores. Also, about ₹40,000 crore are due from the consumers which these private companies will collect like and fill their pockets.

NER providing 24x7 medical facilities in observation rooms

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ VARANASI

The North Eastern Railway (NER) has made arrangements to provide special medical facilities 24x7 in observation rooms at Prayagraj Rambagh and Jhusi railway stations for pilgrims during Maha Kumbh-2025.

and medical assistance under the leadership of Additional Chief Medical Superintendent (ACMS), Varanasi Division (NER) Dr Niraj Kumar till Tuesday, while serious patients have been sent to local hospitals.

cists deployed in observation rooms are distributing medicines to the patients and maintaining the medicine distribution rooms. They are also maintaining the equipment present there as well as providing medicines, dressing materials and medical consumables to the passengers as per the need.

referred immediately if needed, ACMS said. Public Relations Officer (PRO) of Varanasi Division (NER) Ashok Kumar said that the aim of Indian Railways is to make the Maha Kumbh 2025 event safe, healthy and memorable.

NQAS team inspects health centre

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ VARANASI

Chief Medical Officer (CMO) Dr Sandeep Chaudhary said under the National Quality Assurance Standards (NQAS) certification run by the Government of India, the NQAS team inspected the 10th health centre (Ayushman Arogya Mandir Maniyaripur) under the Primary Health Centre (PHC) Sewapuri here on Wednesday.



NQAS team at Ayushman Arogya Mandir Maniyaripur in Varanasi on Wednesday.

Health facilities are being continuously expanded and strengthened at the community level in the prime minister's parliamentary constituency Varanasi.

Yoga teacher chased by stray dogs; falls from scooty, dies

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ KANPUR

A yoga teacher died after she lost control over her scooty on being chased by stray dogs in Kakadeo police station area on Tuesday night.

House Officer (SHO) Manoj Bhaduria reached the hospital and on the basis of documents found from her purse identified the deceased and informed her kin.

area. In the first incident which took place in the wee hours of Wednesday on Bhognipur-Chaudagra road near Navedi village, a speeding unidentified vehicle fatally knocked down a brick kiln worker and escaped.

was coming towards Ghatampur on bike on Tuesday night. After he reached near Benda village, he was hit by the speeding DCM. Police sent him to Ghatampur community health centre (CHC) from where after the first aid, doctors referred him to Kanpur where he succumbed to his injury during treatment.

Prof Singh invited to attend reception at Rashtrapati Bhavan

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ VARANASI

President of extending this invitation to him. Vice-Chancellors, scholars and educationists of some selected universities of the country have been invited to this programme.

Five-day student-centric programme commences

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ VARANASI

The five-day student-centric programme in connection of National Youth Day began at Banaras Hindu University (BHU) here on Wednesday by the Wellbeing Services Cell (WBSC), under the guidance of Dean of Students and Associate Dean of Students (Student Development).

ma recovery through psychological, social and physical techniques fostering overall healing and resilience in individuals affected by trauma.

BLW conducts mock drill to test security system

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ VARANASI

The Banaras Locomotive Works (BLW) tested its emergency security system through mock drill here on Wednesday.

Department and workshop employees demonstrated skill and patience through mock drills to prevent losses due to fire by comprehensive quick response to emergencies.

It was a moment of pride for SHUATS when Prof C John Wesley, Additional Registrar and Chairman, Athletics Committee SHUATS, representing the Prayagraj district lifted the Mens Doubles Masters Badminton Championship in 40+ category in the recently concluded Yonex Sunrise Uttar Pradesh State Masters Championship 2025 held at Agra from January 10 to January 12.

A moment of pride for SHUATS

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ PRAYAGRAJ

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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.

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 Anand 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 Sathasiva 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



SANJAY CHANDRA

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)



## FIRST COLUMN

### THE POWER OF POSITIVE SELF-TALK

It comes in 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 MISUNDERSTANDING

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 "30s"—overhyped, overstretched, and overimagined—poses a significant threat to effective communication in 2025.

Overhyped narratives inflate minor issues into crises, over-stretched 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.



SATENDRA

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

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. Alarmingly, 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)*









# Juventus the draw specialists, AC Milan the comeback kings

PTI ■ MILAN

Juventus is earning a reputation as draw specialists, AC Milan as the comeback kings. Juventus was held 1-1 at Atalanta on Tuesday for its seventh draw in its past eight league matches and its 13th out of 20 Serie A games this season. It remains unbeaten in Serie A, however. Milan fought back to win 2-1 at nearby Como. Atalanta moved level on points with second-placed Inter Milan, which has played two matches less, and four points behind Serie A leader Napoli. Milan was three points below fifth-placed Juventus. They face each other in Turin on Saturday and Milan is likely to be without key player Christian Pulisic after the United States

international limped off on the stroke of halftime at Como. Juventus took the lead in Bergamo in the 54th minute following great play by Weston McKennie. The United States midfielder ran onto a long ball and then played a perfectly-weighted pass for Pierre Kalulu to fire past Marco Carnesecchi at the near post. Kalulu had come incredibly close to scoring moments earlier when his header bounced off the inside of the far post and rolled across the line before Carnesecchi managed to claw it away. Television replays showed that only a few millimeters were still on the line, with about 98% of the ball having gone over. Mateo Retegui made his comeback in the 65th minute after several weeks out with



injury and the league's top scorer headed Atalanta level 13 minutes later with his 13th league goal of the season. Historic Hernández goal saw Milan earn a comeback victory for the third time in four matches under Sérgio Conceição, who got his first Serie A win as coach. Conceição, who replaced the fired Paulo Fonseca at the end of last year, had got his reign off to the perfect start as he steered Milan to the Italian Super Cup trophy with two comeback wins after just over a week at the helm. That was followed by a disappointing 1-1 draw against relegation-threatened Cagliari on Saturday, however. Milan again went behind on Tuesday, when Como's new

signing Assane Diao — on the teenager's first start — ran down the right flank and cut inside before firing into the near bottom corner. Hernández had perhaps been at fault for backing off Diao too much but he atoned for that error with a fine equalizer in the 71st minute. It was his 30th goal in Serie A, overtaking Paolo Maldini as the most goals in the Italian league. Milan turned the match around completely five minutes later when Rafael Leão ran onto Tammy Abraham's through ball and dinked it over Como goalkeeper Jean Butez. Leão and Hernández are two of Milan's key players but they have both had a difficult first half of the season as they often clashed with Fonseca.

## Djokovic breaks a tie with Roger Federer for the most Grand Slam matches in tennis history

PTI ■ MELBOURNE

Novak Djokovic added yet another record to his lengthy list, breaking a tie with Roger Federer for the most Grand Slam matches played in tennis history by reaching 430 on Wednesday at the Australian Open in what was a tougher-than-expected second-round victory. Djokovic improved to 379-51 for his career at major tournaments, a .881 winning percentage, by defeating 21-year-old Portuguese qualifier Jaime Faria 6-1, 6-7 (4), 6-3, 6-2 in a match briefly interrupted by light rain before Rod Laver Arena's retractable roof was shut. "Grand Slams, of course, they are the pillars of our sport. They mean everything for the history of the sport. ... Definitely the most important tournaments," Djokovic said. "I'm just blessed to be making another record, I guess, today." Oh, yes, Djokovic already holds so many marks, many



of which used to belong to Federer — who went 369-60 during his 429 Slam matches, a .860 winning percentage — and there are more on the horizon. As it is, Djokovic has won the most Grand Slam singles titles of any man, 24, ahead of Rafael Nadal's 22 and Federer's 20 (those other two members of the Big Three are now retired). The 37-year-old Serb has spent more weeks at No. 1 in the rankings than any other player. He's played in 37 Slam finals, six more than Federer's old record. And so

on and so on. Consider, too, what could possibly await for Djokovic. A title at the end of the 15 days at Melbourne Park would be his 25th at a major, a number never reached by any man or woman. It would also be his 11th at the Australian Open, equalling Margaret Court for the most. It would make him the oldest man in the Open era — which began in 1968 — to collect a Grand Slam singles trophy (Ken Rosewall was about six months younger when he won the 1972 Australian

Open). And it would be Djokovic's 100th tour-level tournament title, a nice round number behind only Jimmy Connors' 109 and Federer's 103 in the Open era among men. Not everything has gone perfectly this week in Australia for Djokovic in his first tournament working with former on-court rival Andy Murray as his coach. Both of Djokovic's matches so far came against a young player making his Grand Slam debut. And both times, he was pushed to four sets. In the first round, it was against Nishesh Basavareddy, a 19-year-old American who turned pro only last month and is ranked 107th. In the second, it was Faria, who is ranked 125th, giving him a bit of a hard time, especially during a four-game run in the second set. "He was playing lights-out tennis. ... I had to weather the storm," Djokovic said. "I think I responded very well in the third and, particularly fourth, (sets).

## Sindhu can reach an even higher level with more speed and power: New coach Irwansyah

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

Indonesian coach Irwansyah Adi Pratama aims to not just tweak PV Sindhu's technique and fine-tune her skills but also reignite the fire within her, believing that, with added speed and power, she can regain her lost glory and surpass her previous achievements. Irwansyah, who has been recently roped in by Badminton Association of India (BAI) to train women's singles players, was court-side when Sindhu overcame rustiness to reach the second round of the India Open Super 750 tournament, defeating world No. 24 Sung Shuo Yun of Chinese Taipei 21-14, 22-20 on Tuesday. "Every player has been through something like this. What I've learned, I want to pass on to her. I'll try my best. I believe she can still do it. She can come back and reach an even higher level than before. I do believe in it. That's the reason I'm here," Irwansyah, a former long-term head coach



of the Indonesian men's singles team, told PTI. "My plan is to make her more of an attacking player. She has all the right qualities, so I just want to build on that and push her further. I want to change her game to be more aggressive — more speed and power." It has been a challenging two years for Sindhu, who broke a title drought by winning the Syed Modi Super 300 crown last December. After clinching the 2022 Singapore Open and Commonwealth Games titles, she faced a setback with a stress

fracture. Although she recovered and reached the final at the 2023 Spain Masters, a knee injury in October hampered her progress. She returned to action in February, reaching the final of the Malaysia Masters Super 500, but was unable to secure a title. "I want to help her enjoy herself more on the court. It's important that she enjoys it because when she enjoys it, she'll become more confident. That's the main focus right now — working hard to get her

## Koneru Humpy to compete in Norway Chess Women 2025

PTI ■ STAVANGER

Reigning World Rapid chess champion and Indian Grandmaster Koneru Humpy will return to compete in the Norway Chess Women in May. Currently ranked world number six in women's classical chess, Humpy aims to make her mark in the prestigious chess tournament. Humpy's return to Norway Chess Women highlights her remarkable career, filled with significant milestones. In 2002, she became the first Indian woman to achieve the GM title, securing her place in chess history. Today, she remains India's top ranked women's player in the country. Her achievements include winning the World Rapid Championship title twice — in 2019 and 2024. She was also named BBC Indian Sportswoman of the



Year in 2020, recognising her contributions to Indian sports. Her victories in the Olympiad, Asian Games, and Asian Championships have further confirmed her status as one of the top female players in chess. "It's an honour to play in the prestigious Norway Chess Women tournament," Humpy was quoted as saying in a media release. Asked to describe herself, she

chose the word "self-disciplined," a quality that defines her approach to chess and her rise to the top. This discipline has helped her remain focused, consistent, and resilient, even against tough opponents. "Humpy's achievements speak volumes, and we are delighted to welcome her back to Norway Chess Women 2025," said Kjell Madland, Founder and Tournament Director of Norway Chess.

## Christian Pulisic limps out of AC Milan match sparking new injury fears

PTI ■ MILAN

There are renewed injury concerns for Christian Pulisic after the United States international limped out of AC Milan's match at Como on Tuesday. Pulisic was forced off the pitch on the stroke of halftime, leaving Milan with 10 men for the final moments of the first period. He was replaced by Alejandro Jiménez for the second half. The 26-year-old Pulisic went down after being caught on the ankle by Como defender Marc-Oliver Kempf. He immediately waved the medical staff over and appeared to be pointing to his left thigh. His availability is unknown for Milan's match at Juventus on Saturday. Pulisic had only just returned



from injury — making his comeback in the Italian Super Cup, which Milan won. He had been out for nearly a month after tearing a muscle in his right calf and then sustaining a minor ankle issue. Pulisic scored in both the semifinal and the final of the Italian Super Cup. He has been one of Milan's top players this season with five goals and four assists in Serie A. He has also scored three goals in the Champions League.

## Italian football club Lazio fires falconer for posting photos of his own prosthetic penis

PTI ■ ROME

Lazio has fired the man who handled the Italian soccer club's eagle mascot after he posted photos and videos online of his own prosthetic penis. Falconer Juan Bernabé shared the images on his private social media accounts after undergoing surgery for a penile implant, which he said was for non-medical reasons. Bernabé also gave an interview to controversial Italian radio show La Zanzara on Monday and elaborated on his reasons for undergoing the procedure. Bernabé added that he felt "very proud" and "more masculine" being part of Lazio. The Serie A club clearly did not feel the same as it fired the Spaniard shortly afterward. "Shocked to see the photographic images and video of Mr. Juan Bernabé and



to read the statements that accompanied them, Lazio announces that it has stopped, with immediate effect, all relationship with this person, given the seriousness of his behavior," the capital club said in a statement. "The club realizes — and shares — the pain that the fans will feel at the loss of the eagle in the next home games, but believes that it is not possible to be associated ... with a person who, by his own initiative, has made the

continuation of the relationship unacceptable." The eagle — a bird that symbolizes ancient Rome — traditionally flies over Stadio Olimpico before home games. Bernabé said he had no regrets about sharing the images. Lazio suspended Bernabé in 2021 when he was filmed performing a fascist salute at the end of a match and chanting "Duce, Duce," which was the name used to praise former fascist Italian leader Benito Mussolini.

## Zheng loses to No. 97 Laura Siegemund, Osaka rallies to advance at the Australian Open

PTI ■ MELBOURNE

Distracted by a time penalty and unable to counteract No. 97-ranked Laura Siegemund's aggressive approach, Zheng Qinwen's loss in the second round Wednesday fell a long way short of last year's run to the Australian Open final. Zheng lost the 2024 decider at Melbourne Park to Aryna Sabalenka and went on to win the Olympic gold medal in Paris and finish runner-up at the WTA Finals in a breakout season. But her first tournament of the year ended in a 7-6 (3), 6-3 loss on John Cain Arena against 36-year-old Siegemund, who attacked from the first point and put Zheng off her game. Zheng needed a change of shoes early in the second set, got a time warning on her

serve from the chair umpire — she said she couldn't clearly see the clock — and was worried about some minor issues which sidelined her before the Australian Open. "I feel maybe today is not my day. There's a lot of details in the important points. I didn't do the right choice," Zheng said. Of a weak serve that bounced before the net, Zheng said the time warning from the umpire "obviously that one really distracted me from the match." "This is my fourth year in the tour, and never happen that to me." Both of last year's women's finalists were playing at the same time on nearby courts. Sabalenka, the two-time defending champion, extended her run to 16 wins at Melbourne Park by



winning the last five games to beat No. 54-ranked Jessica Bouzas Maneiro 6-3, 7-5. Naomi Osaka, another two-

time Australian Open champion, reached the third round of a major for the first time since 2022 when she

weathered an early barrage from U.S. Open semifinalist Karolina Muchova before rallying to win 1-6, 6-1, 6-3.

Osaka lost in the first round here last year to Caroline Garcia in her comeback from maternity leave but avenged that with a first-round victory over Garcia this week. Osaka said she used a loss to Muchova at the U.S. Open as motivation. "She crushed me in the U.S. Open when I had my best outfit ever," Osaka joked in a post-match interview. "I was so disappointed. I was so mad. This was my little revenge." Osaka will next meet Belinda Bencic, the Tokyo Olympic gold medalist who is playing in her first major since the birth of her daughter, Bella, last year. Also advancing were No. 7 Jessica Pegula, had a 6-4, 6-2 win over Elise Mertens, and 17-year-old Mirra Andreeva, the No. 14 seed who beat Moyuka Uchijima 6-4, 3-6, 7-6 (8).

recovered to dominate the tiebreaker, while Zheng remained too conservative in her tactics until right near the end. "I knew I just had to play more than my best tennis. I had nothing to lose. I just told myself to swing free," Siegemund said. Zheng is "an amazing player. One of the best players right now, but I know I can play well and I wanted to show that to myself." Third-seeded Carlos Alcaraz, aiming to add the Australian Open title to complete a set of all four major crowns, advanced 6-0, 6-1, 6-4 victory over Yoshihito Nishioka. "The less time you spend on the court in the Grand Slams, especially at the beginning of the tournament, it's gonna be better, especially physically," Alcaraz said.

