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MAHSA AMINI IS A
SALUTE TO WOMEN

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SEOUL'S REPRISAL BLOWS UP AFTER
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WTO SAYS TRADE GROWTH
TO SLOW NEXT YEAR

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PROTEAS IN
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Won't resume talks with Pak, says Shah

Home Minister
addresses first rally
after Article 370
abrogation in
Jammu & Kashmir

MOHIT KANDHARI ■ JAMMU

Home Minister Amit Shah on Wednesday firmly ruled out holding any dialogue with Pakistan and declared that the Modi Government would not tolerate any form of terrorism.

Shah was speaking at a well-attended rally at Baramulla, the first by any Union Minister after the Abrogation of Article 370 in August 2019.

Reaching out to the local audience Shah announced that Assembly elections in Jammu and Kashmir (J&K) will be conducted with "full transparency" once the Election Commission (EC) completed the exercise of publishing the revised electoral rolls.

Making a passionate appeal to the youth to shun the path of violence, Shah said terrorism has already claimed 42,000 lives in J&K since the 1990s and asked whether it has ever benefited anyone.

Launching a scathing attack on former J&K Chief Ministers Farooq Abdullah and



Union Home Minister Amit Shah, with J&K Lt-Governor Manoj Sinha and MoS Jitendra Singh, during a public rally at the Shaukat Ali Stadium in Baramulla district of north Kashmir on Wednesday

PTI

Mehbooba Mufti, the Union Home Minister also accused the 'Gupkar alliance' of "laying a red carpet" for Pakistani terrorists coming into the country. He blamed the families of the Abdullahs (National Conference), Muftis (People's Democratic Party), and Nehru-Gandhi (Congress) for the lack of development in J&K saying they ruled the State for most of the period since the country's Independence.

"Mufti and company,

Abdullah and sons and the Congress have done nothing for the welfare of the people of Jammu and Kashmir," he said, adding that their rule was marked by misgovernance, corruption and lack of development. The Home Minister also lashed out at those advocating dialogue with Pakistan.

"Some people say we should talk to Pakistan. Why should we talk to Pakistan? We will not talk. We will talk to the people of Baramulla, we will

talk to the people of Kashmir," he said.

Asserting that the Modi Government would go all out to wipe out terrorism, he said, "We want to make Jammu and Kashmir the most peaceful place in the country."

Shah said some people often talk about Pakistan but he wanted to know how many villages in Pakistan-occupied Kashmir have electricity connections.

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RSS for population policy applicable to all Indians

Temple, water
must be
common, says
Bhagwat at
Dussehra meet

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■
NEW DELHI

Population control through the introduction of a population policy applicable to all communities was the focus of RSS chief Mohan Bhagwat's much-awaited Dussehra speech. Bhagwat also sought countrymen to counter "forces hindering our Sanatana Dharma" and "inimical to Bharat's unity and progress."

He also spoke about the inequalities in society and said, "Temple, water and cremation ground should be common for all. We should not fight over petty things. Issues like someone can ride a horse and others can't, should have no place in society and we've to work towards it."

Speaking on the importance of the mother tongue, the RSS chief lauded the New Education Policy and said, "It's a myth that English is important for a career. The New Education Policy should lead to students becoming highly cultured, good human beings who are also inspired by patriotism. This is everyone's desire. Society needs to support this activity."



Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS) chief Mohan Bhagwat with mountaineer Santosh Yadav and others during a Vijayadashami function, in Nagpur on Wednesday

PTI

Bhagwat also dismissed "scare-mongering" vis-a-vis minorities in respect of the Sangh saying the RSS stands for "brotherhood, amity and peace."

Addressing the annual RSS event on the occasion of 'Vijaya Dashmi', Bhagwat said population growth across the world has created new geographical boundaries and countries and stressed that population policy prepared after comprehensive thought should be applicable to all communities equally.

"Seventy-five years ago, we experienced this in our country. In the 21st century, the three new countries that have come into existence, East Timor, South Sudan and Kosovo — they have been the results of population imbalance in certain territories of Indonesia, Sudan, and Serbia", he said in his key address at

Nagpur. "Population imbalances lead to changes in geographical boundaries. Alongside the differences in birth rate, conversions by force, lure or greed, and infiltration are also big reasons."

"All these factors have to be mulled over. Population control and religion-based population balance is an important subject that can no longer be ignored", Bhagwat said.

"Shakti is the foundation of peace. To unite our society, unity between men and women is essential. This partnership is vital for society's growth," he said. He also lauded the chief guest Mount Everest climber Santosh Yadav who has twice climbed the great heights of Gauri Shankar (mountain) and called for an equal role for women and their empowerment.

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CAPSULE

FOURTEEN RESCUED IN U'KHAND AVALANCHE

Dehradun/Uttarakashi: Fourteen members of a mountaineering team which had gone missing after being hit by an avalanche at Draupadi Ka Danda peak in Uttarakashi district were rescued on Wednesday. Search operations by Indian Air Force are underway to find the several others missing climbers. **P2**

THREAT CALL SENT TO AMBANIS, PROBE ON

Mumbai: An unidentified person called up Sir HN Reliance Foundation Hospital in south Mumbai on Wednesday and threatened to blow it up, a police official said.

NOBEL TO CHEMISTS FOR MEDICINE MOLECULES

Stockholm: Three scientists from the United States and Denmark were jointly awarded this year's Nobel Prize in Chemistry for developing a way of "snapping molecules together" that can be used to design better medicines.

ARMY HELICOPTER CRASHES IN TAWANG

Tawang: A Cheetah helicopter of the Indian Army crashed in Tawang district of Arunachal Pradesh near the boundary with China on Wednesday morning, killing one of the two pilots onboard, a defence spokesperson said. **P4**

'45 INDIANS TRAPPED IN JOB RACKETS RESCUED'

New Delhi: India on Wednesday said that it has so far rescued around 45 Indians trapped in fake job rackets in Myanmar. Giving out details here, MEA spokesperson Arindam Bagchi said that 13 of these Indians have reached Tamil Nadu. **P4**

Modi first PM to attend 400-yr-old Kullu Dussehra

Modi inaugurates
hydro engineering
college, AIIMS in
poll-bound State

PNS ■ SHIMLA / BILASPUR

Narendra Modi on Wednesday became the first Prime Minister to join the famous Kullu Dussehra celebrations in its 400-year history. According to the Prime Minister's Office (PMO), "The Prime Minister was welcomed and facilitated upon his arrival in Kullu. This was followed by the arrival of Bhagwan Raghunath ji and it marked the commencement of the Rath Yatra." The PM also waded through the crowd and reached the Rath to take the blessings of Lord Raghunath.

This time the International Dussehra in Kullu festival will be celebrated from October 5 to 11. The festival is unique in the sense that it is the congregation of more than 300 deities of the Valley.

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Prime Minister Narendra Modi plays a traditional trumpet 'ransings' during the launch of developmental initiatives at Bilaspur, Himachal Pradesh on Wednesday.

PTI

'10-headed Ravana turned into ₹50 crore demon'

Uddhav calls
Shinde traitor
as CM parades
estranged
Thackerays at
Dussehra rally

TN RAGHUNATHA ■ MUMBAI

In a major attack on Maharashtra Chief Minister and rebel Sena leader Eknath Shinde, erstwhile united Shiv Sena president and former Chief Minister Uddhav Thackeray on Wednesday dubbed the rebel Sena MLAs as "gaddars" (traitors) and said that after the recent rebellion within his party "the ten-headed demon king Ravana" had turned into "₹50 crore Ravana", alluding to the money allegedly taken by the rebel MLAs to switch to the Sena camp.

On a day when Shinde paraded three estranged Thackerays — late Bal



Shiv Sena supporters during their Dussehra Rally at Dadar, in Mumbai on Wednesday

PTI

Thackeray's son Jaidev, daughter-in-law Smita and grandson Nihar — at his Dussehra rally venue as his supporters, Uddhav said that Shinde had "betrayed" him after he had handed over the Chief Minister's responsibility to him when he was hospitalised after a surgery.

For the first time in the 56-year-long history of Shiv Sena, Mumbai witnessed two Dussehra rallies in north-central Mumbai — one addressed by Uddhav at Shivaji Park at Dadar and another by Shinde at Bandra-Kurla Complex (BKC) grounds.

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Eye on national role, TRS rechristened Bharat Rashtra Samithi by KCR

PTI ■ HYDERABAD

Seeking to expand its electoral footprint beyond Telangana, the ruling Telangana Rashtra Samithi (TRS) on Wednesday changed its name to Bharat Rashtra Samithi (BRS).

Over two decades after the founding of the party with the objective of carving out a separate Telangana from Andhra Pradesh, the party adopted a unanimous resolution at its general body meeting here, rechristening it as BRS.

Now, the goal is to take on the BJP and emerge as a national force to reckon with, bringing together like-minded parties.

In the presence of JD(S) leader HD Kumaraswamy, Tamil Nadu's VCK leader Thol Thirumavalavan, TRS president and Chief Minister K Chandrababhan Naraiah proposed the name change resolution and it was unanimously passed

at the meeting.

Rao's announcement of the name change was welcomed by party functionaries with a big round of applause and amid chants of "KCR Zindabad and TRS Zindabad."

The change of name is to expand the party's activities nationwide and the party's constitution is also amended accordingly, Rao said.

The TRS rank and file, who gathered outside the Telangana Bhavan, the TRS headquarters here, went ecstatic and burst crackers and distributed sweets soon after the announcement. "Desh ke neta KCR" chants reverberated and similar slogans were seen in posters. "Desh ke neta KCR", "Dear India he is coming", and "KCR is on the way", were among the slogans prominently displayed on banners that could be seen in and around the venue of the meet.

Continued on Page 2

EC move to regulate election-time promises 'unwarranted', says Left

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■
NEW DELHI

The majority of the Opposition parties seemed to oppose the Election Commission's proposal suggesting that they should disclose their plans to finance electoral promises and how this would impact the financial situation of the Governments.

While the AAP, the RJD, the DMK, and Shiv Sena have already criticised such attempts to curb freebies, the CPI(M) Polit Bureau on Wednesday slammed the poll panel's move.

Coming down heavily on the poll panel, the Left major party asked why the Election Commission all of a sudden changed its stand after telling the Supreme Court that it didn't want to say anything in the

case. In a statement, the CPI(M) Polit Bureau said this is not the job of the Election Commission, and this is an area that is solely the prerogative of political parties in a democracy.

CPI(M) general secretary Sitaram Yechury also criticised the Election Commission saying this new move has been made under pressure from the Central Government.

"The Election Commission, in an affidavit to the Supreme Court in April, stated that the commission cannot regulate policy decisions of political parties and that it would be an overreach. It is surprising that the panel has now taken a contrary stand. Is this due to pressure from the executive? The Constitution mandates the EC to conduct

free & fair elections. It is not the Election Commission's job to regulate policy pronouncements and welfare measures that political parties promised to the people. This is solely the prerogative of political parties in a democracy. We strongly oppose any effort to circumscribe or regulate the right of political parties to address people's concerns and offer policy measures to ameliorate their problems.

"EC's proposal is an unwarranted move," said Yechury.

The CPI(M) Polit Bureau said the commission cannot regulate policy decisions of political parties and that it would be an overreach of powers. It is surprising that the Election Commission has now taken a contrary stand.

Continued on Page 2

Alt News founders in race for Nobel Peace Prize

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

India's well-known fact-checkers and founders of alternate media platforms Alt News Mohammad Zubair and Pratik Sinha are reportedly in the race for the Nobel Peace Prize 2022.

The Indian duo find a place in the list of "favourites" compiled by Time magazine based on nominations that were made public via Norwegian lawmakers, predictions from bookmakers, and picks from the Peace Research Institute Oslo.

As per the list, other strong contenders are Ukraine President Volodymyr Zelensky, Russian Opposition leader Alexei Navalny and Swedish climate activist Greta Thunberg. The results of the Nobel Peace Prize 2022 will be



announced at 11 AM local time on Friday in Oslo, Norway.

The Delhi police arrested Zubair on June 27 this year over a meme he tweeted in 2018 against a Hindu deity. He came out of Tihar jail after a month after the Supreme Court granted him bail.

33 killed as bus falls into gorge in U'khand

PTI ■ PAURI

At least 33 people were killed and 20 others injured when a bus carrying 45-50 members of a marriage party fell into a gorge in Uttarakhand's Pauri Garhwal district, police said on Wednesday.

The bus was on its way to Kanda Village in Bironkhal from Laldhang town in Haridwar when it fell into a 500-metre gorge near Simri bend at around 7 PM on Tuesday, they said.

Rescue operations were carried out throughout the night, police said. As many as 18 bodies have been retrieved so far while seven-eight bodies could still be trapped inside the bus, they added. Twenty people injured in the accident were pulled out of the mangled remains of the bus and rushed to hospitals in Bironkhal, Rikhnkhal and Kotdwar, police said.

They said two of the injured died on the way to hospital.

A rescue operation was launched soon after the incident on Tuesday evening. However, efforts of the rescuers were hampered by dark-



NDRF personnel shift the body of a victim during a search and rescue operation after a bus carrying members of a marriage party fell into a gorge, in Pauri Garhwal district on Tuesday evening

PTI

ness. Villagers then used flashlights on their mobile phones to rescue those stuck inside the bus as there was no arrangement of lights at the site of the accident, eyewitnesses said on Tuesday. Later, officials rushed to the site and ambulances, lighting and life-saving equipment were arranged.

Continued on Page 2

14 mountaineers rescued after U'khand avalanche

PTI ■ DEHRADUN/UTTARKASHI

Fourteen members of a mountaineering team which had gone missing after being hit by an avalanche at Draupadi Ka Danda peak in Uttarakashi district were rescued on Wednesday as a multi-agency rescue operation aided by IAF helicopters was underway to find the several others missing.

Principal of the Uttarkashi-based Nehru Institute of Mountaineering (NIM) Col Amit Bisht had said on Tuesday that ten bodies were spotted out of which four had been recovered. However, police confirmed the death of four.

Earlier in the day, the Uttarakhand Police released a list of 28 trainee mountaineers who were missing in the avalanche at the height of 17,000 feet.

Sub Divisional Magistrate,



Bhatwari, Chhattar Singh Chauhan said 14 members of the team out of which six had sustained minor injuries in the avalanche were airlifted to Matli in two sorties,

Eight more rescued in another sortie are alright, he said, adding they are being sent back to the NIM.

Out of the 14 rescued so far 10 are trainees and four instructors, he said, adding NDRF, SDRF, ITBP and NIM are jointly conducting the search and rescue operations.

A search is on to find the rest of the 41-member team of mountaineers who have been missing since the avalanche

occurred at 8.45 am on Tuesday.

The missing are said to be stuck in the crevasse in Dokriani Bamak glacier where the avalanche struck.

The trainees hail from West Bengal, Delhi, Telangana, Tamil Nadu, Karnataka, Assam, Haryana, Gujarat, Himachal Pradesh, Uttarakhand and Uttar Pradesh.

The bodies recovered include that of mountaineer Savita Kanswal who had climbed the Everest in May this year. She was from Lonthru village in Uttarkashi district.

Search and rescue operations resumed on Wednesday morning with four ITBP jawans dispatched in Cheetah and ALH helicopters to Dokrani Glacier.

The rescue operations had to be halted due to darkness and inclement weather on Tuesday.

Ravan effigy topples on spectators at Haryana Dussehra event



PTI ■ CHANDIGARH

Several people had a narrow escape during a Dussehra event in Haryana's Yamunanagar on Wednesday when a burning effigy of Ravana fell while they were trying to go near it.

Police said no one was injured in the incident.

Y a m u n a n a g a r Superintendent of Police Mohit Handa said some people were trying to go near the burning effigy but police personnel present there pushed them back.

Asked whether the effigy

fell on any of the spectators, the SP said it did not.

It may appear that the burning effigy fell on some people but it was not the case, said the SP while referring to a video clip of the incident doing the rounds on social media.

"We have checked in hospitals and police personnel were also present on the spot. There was no injury to anyone," he said. Effigies of demon king Ravana, his son Meghnad and brother Kumbhakaran are set on fire on the occasion of Dussehra to celebrate the victory of good over evil.

Rahul writes to K'taka CM seeking treatment for injured elephant calf

PTI ■ BENGALURU

Congress leader Rahul Gandhi on Wednesday wrote to Karnataka Chief Minister Basavaraj Bommai seeking his intervention for providing timely treatment to a "severely injured" elephant calf at the Nagarhole Tiger Reserve.

He said he came across the injured calf during his visit to the Reserve, along with his mother and Congress president Sonia Gandhi.

"The Congress President and I briefly visited Nagarhole Tiger Reserve where we happened to come across the painful sight of an injured baby elephant, with its mother. The little calf has a severely injured tail and trunk, and is fighting for its life," Rahul Gandhi said in a letter to Bommai.

Noting that he understands and appreciates that



there is a view that nature must be allowed to take its own course, he said, "However, in the case of endangered and iconic species, exceptions are often made depending on the severity of the situation. The aforementioned calf is undoubtedly in need of urgent medical care."

"Therefore, I wanted to cross political boundaries and appeal to your sense of compassion to intervene and save the little elephant. I am confident that it will survive if given proper treatment. I hope you will extend timely assistance to save the iconic

little elephant," he added in the letter.

Rahul Gandhi has even tweeted the picture of the calf with its mother.

"A mother's love. I felt so sad to see this beautiful elephant with her injured little baby fighting for its life," his tweet read.

Nagarahole, spread over Mysuru and Kodagu is covering an area of 847.981 Sq km. Sonia and Rahul Gandhi, who are in the state for the party's ongoing Bharat Jodo Yatra, which is currently on a two-day break for Ayudha Puja and Vijayadashami (Tuesday and Wednesday), are camping at a private resort in Kabini backwaters at H D Kote taluk in the Mysuru district.

They will be participating in the march on Thursday morning when it resumes at Bellale in Pandavapura Taluk in Mandya District.

Not against Tharoor: Kerala leaders on Cong chief poll

PTI ■ THIRUVANANTHAPURAM/KOZHI KODE

Senior Congress leaders in Kerala on Wednesday said they were not against Shashi Tharoor, who has made an aggressive bid to the party's top post, but they were of the view that veteran leader Mallikarjun Kharge was better suited for the position.

Senior party leaders and MPs K Sudhakaran and K Muralreedharan also said they were only expressing their personal views on whom they are supporting and everyone in the party was free to decide whom they want to vote for.

They were responding to statements made by Thiruvananthapuram MP Tharoor in an interview with



a TV channel where he said the party leaders in Kerala appeared to be against him in connection with the Congress presidential polls.

He also said in the interview that he has been asked by many to contest in the polls as they want a change in how the party is functioning presently.

Reacting to his statements, Sudhakaran, also the Kerala Pradesh Congress Committee

(KPCC) president told the media in Kozhikode that he only expressed his personal view regarding whom he supports and he has not issued any directive on which candidate should be supported by KPCC delegates.

Sudhakaran also said he was not aware that party leaders in Kerala were opposed to Tharoor, as claimed by the Thiruvananthapuram MP.

Muralreedharan, speaking to media, said there was no official or rebel candidate and all PCC delegates are free to vote for whomever they choose as it is a secret ballot.

He also said that Sudhakaran only expressed his personal view.

Muralreedharan further said that people like him in the party want someone who

is closely connected to the general public and knows their minds and that Kharge was such an individual "who has risen through the party ranks from the ground level by sheer hard work".

"We are not against Tharoor, but his connection with the common people is a bit less," he added.

"He (Tharoor) cannot be blamed for that. It is probably because of his diplomatic background. But that does not mean we are discounting or rejecting him. We need everyone -- those from ordinary or humble origins and those with diplomatic backgrounds. Party needs everyone," he further said.

Muralreedharan also said that he was in agreement with Tharoor's views that there

should be a contest or election for the various party posts and such a change would be seen in Congress, especially in Kerala, in the future.

Regarding Kharge's age, Muralreedharan said that "if the mind and body can go together, then age is not an issue".

"People like me, in the present situation, believe that Kharge is the best person to lead the party with courage," he said.

The polling for the Congress presidential election is scheduled to be held on October 17. The counting of votes would be taken up on October 19 and the results are expected the same day. More than 9,000 Pradesh Congress Committee (PCC) delegates form the electorate.

IIT-Delhi set for complete curriculum revamp after over a decade: Director

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

The Indian Institute of Technology (IIT)-Delhi is set for a complete curriculum revamp for all courses after over a decade, according to the institute's new Director Rangan Banerjee.

In an interview, Banerjee told PTI knowledge and technology landscape is rapidly changing and the curriculum has to match up the pace, and therefore IIT-Delhi has formed a panel for the curriculum review for all courses.

From being engineering institutions to becoming full-fledged universities, IITs have evolved over the years, he said.

"We are going through a complete review of our curriculum so that we can enhance the student experience. The exercise is being conducted after over a decade. Over the last several years, IITs have moved from being predominantly undergraduate and engineering institutions to full-fledged universities offering a wide range of courses," he said.

"We are trying to provide in our curriculum,



challenges and opportunities for students to engage with the real world and hence a complete revamp was needed. So hopefully next year we should be able to see many changes. Right now we are doing extensive consultation with faculty, students and alumni," he added.

Banerjee, who was earlier a professor at IIT-Bombay, said both knowledge and technology landscape are rapidly changing and the curriculum has to match up the pace. "The curriculum has to constantly evolve for it to be relevant and our classroom teaching and practical modules have to reflect the same," he said.

Won't resume talks with Pak says...

From Page 1
"We have ensured in the last three years that all villages in Kashmir now have electricity connection."

Lauding Prime Minister Modi for bringing investment into J&K, Shah said that the region which was known to be a "terrorist hotspot" has now become a "tourism hotspot."

Shah came down heavily on the three political families for the second consecutive day. He alleged that their rule was full of misgovernance, corruption, and lack of development. "Mufti and company, Abdullah and sons and the Congress have done nothing for the welfare of the people of Jammu and Kashmir," he said.

He said that Rs 56,000 crore investment has come to Jammu and Kashmir in the last three years, which will give employment opportunities to five lakh people, while just Rs 17,000 crore investment had come since independence.

The Home Minister said the Modi government has given one lakh houses to the

poor in Jammu and Kashmir.

He alleged that rampant corruption led to underdevelopment in Jammu and Kashmir and said the Modi government has ensured that every rupee being spent goes to those most deserving. Shah said due to the improved security situation, 22 lakhs tourists have visited Jammu and Kashmir this year so far.

Comparing the two models of governance Shah said, "There are two models. One of PM Modi which gives employment, peace, and brotherhood; and another is the Gupkar model which led to the Pulwama attack.

"PM Modi made a hospital in Pulwama at an expense of Rs 2,000 crore. The Gupkar model is laying the red carpet for the Pakistani terrorists into the country. The Gupkar model placed stones, closed colleges, and machine guns in the hands of the youth. The Modi model has IIM, IIT, AIIMS, NIIT, and NEET for the youth. The youth wants education Farooq Abdullah, not stones in their hands," he said.

Modi first PM to attend 400-yr-old...

From Page 1

Earlier, the PM virtually sounded the poll bugle in Himachal Pradesh where Assembly elections are scheduled later this year saying that the previous Governments only laid foundation stones and forgot about the actual projects once the elections were over.

He asserted that development in the State has been possible because its people voted the BJP to power both at Centre and in the State.

At a rally held at Bilaspur, where Chief Minister Jai Ram Thakur presented Modi with a "Ransingha", a trumpet-like traditional instrument which the PM played and later said, "This marks the beginning of each future victory." He said the BJP Government not only laid the stones but also inaugurated the development projects.

He addressed the meeting at the Luhn ground after inaugurating an All India Institute of Medical Sciences (AIIMS) hospital and a hydro engineering college, the foundations stones for which were

laid by him in 2017.

Modi said Bilaspur has got a "double gift" of development with the inauguration of the AIIMS and the Hydro Engineering College. "I am fortunate to have been a part of Himachal Pradesh's development journey," he said, adding that development in the State has been possible because its people voted the BJP to power both at Centre and in the State.

Modi began his speech with the slogan "Jai Mata Naina Deviji", the temple to which is located in Bilaspur district itself and also extended Dussehra greetings. He said Himachal Pradesh plays a crucial role in 'Rashtra Raksha' (national security) and now with the new AIIMS in Bilaspur, it will also play a pivotal role in 'Jeevan Raksha' (saving lives). Modi said there were only three medical colleges in Himachal Pradesh in 2014. Eight more medical colleges and the AIIMS have been set up in the last eight years, he added. He said the State can benefit much from medical tourism.

EC move to...

From Page 1
Blaming the EC for coming under the pressure of BJP lead Central Government, the CPI(M) said any effort to circumscribe or regulate the right of political parties to address people's concerns and offer policy measures to ameliorate their problem will be opposed.

33 killed as bus...

From Page 1
Chief Minister Pushkar Singh Dhami, who along with former Union Minister Ramesh Pokhriyal Nishank on Tuesday arrived for an on-the-spot assessment of the situation, met the people hospitalised in Kotdwar.

'10-headed Ravana turned into ₹50 crore...

From Page 1
The two rallies were the first major showdown between the rebel Shinde Sena group toppled the MVA Government led by Uddhav and formed its Government in alliance with the BJP on June 30 this year. There were large crowds in both the Dussehra rallies.

In a development that surprised the Uddhav-led Sena camp, late Bal Thackeray's son and Uddhav's estranged elder brother Jaidev Thackeray, his estranged sister-in-law and Jaidev's former wife Smita Thackeray and late Balasaheb's grandson and Uddhav's eldest brother Bindumadhav Thackeray's son Nihar shared stage with Shinde and pledged

their support to the current Maharashtra Chief Minister.

While Jaidev was involved in a bitter legal battle with Uddhav over Bal Thackeray's will till four years ago, Jaidev's divorced wife Smita had moved out of Thackeray's residence some years ago. Nihar, the lesser known Thackeray, is the son of Uddhav's elder brother Bindumadhav who died in a road accident in 1996.

Addressing a Dussehra rally at the Shivaji Park, Uddhav came down heavily on Shinde for stabbing him in the back and dubbed the rebel Shiv Sena MLAs who switched sides after allegedly accepting a pay-off of Rs 50 crore each from the rebel Sena leader.

"We all know the ten-headed Ravana. Now we have 50

Khoka Ravans in our midst. Times have changed. As a result, even Ravan has changed (His one head is worth Rs 50 crore). When I see all this, I feel both bad and sad," Uddhav said, while comparing the Sena MLAs who joined the Shinde camp allegedly for the sake of huge sum of money.

"When I was hospitalised for a spine surgery in November last, I handed over my responsibility to my then trusted colleague Ekanth Shinde. But, he turned out to be Kattappa. He conspired against me. He should realise that he has taken on not Uddhav Thackeray but Uddhav Balasaheb Thackeray. He has joined issue with Goddess Jagadamba. Let the Goddess take care of him," Uddhav said.

RSS for population policy applicable to all...

From Page 1
"In 2017, women activists working in various organisations conducted a comprehensive survey of the women of India. The survey findings also underscore the need for empowerment and equal participation. There is a necessity to engage women in decision making," Bhagwat said.

He said, "What men can do, the women can also do. But what the women can do, men cannot" without women, we cannot gather the whole power of the society. But when we gather the whole power of the society, the work of uplifting the country will become successful."

Bhagwat said that change is the rule of this world but one should be firm on Sanatan

Dharma. "Time changes and with time, a person becomes wiser. But extremist mindset acts as a hindrance. Change is the rule of this world but one should be firm on Sanatan Dharma," he said.

In his address, the RSS chief referred to "hindrances" created on the path of 'Sanatan Dharma' by "forces inimical to the unity and progress".

"The second type of obstacles (first being conservatism) are created by forces who are inimical to Bharat's unity and progress. Broadcasting wrong and fake narratives for spreading misperceptions, engaging and encouraging criminal acts, and fomenting terror, conflict and social unrest are their tactics. We are experiencing these. These forces pit differ-

ent sections of society against each other on the basis of sectional self-interest and hatred, and increase chasms and enmities, this has been their conduct in independent Bharat," he said.

Bhagwat went on to say that without getting trapped in their machinations, irrespective of their language, religion, region, or policy, they have to be dealt with fearlessly, relentlessly, and be either protested or repelled.

"We should assist the governments and administration's efforts to control and bring such forces to their heels. Only our society's strong and pro-active cooperation can ensure our comprehensive security and unity," said the RSS head without specifying

the forces inimical to the country's progress and unity.

Bhagwat said that the Sangh has a steady resolve to stand on the side of brotherhood, amity and peace. "Scare-mongering by some is done among so-called minorities that there is a danger to them because of us or organised Hindus. This is neither the nature of Sangh nor of Hindus. Sangh has a steady resolve to stand on the side of brotherhood, amity and peace," he said.

"We must be companions in bliss and sorrow, we must understand and respect Bharat, we must be of Bharat, this is the Sangh vision of National integrity and Harmony. There is no other motivation or vested interest of

Sangh in this," Bhagwat added.

The RSS chief said India has made great strides of which each Indian should be proud of. "The government is pursuing policies which lead towards self-reliance. Bharat's importance and stature has increased in the community of nations. In the sphere of security, we are becoming more and more become self-sufficient. After negotiating through the calamity of corona our economy is inching towards the pre-pandemic levels," he said.

He said the Prime Minister in his address to the nation on the occasion of the inauguration of 'Kartavya Path' gave a description of Modern India's future based on economic, technological and cul-

tural foundations.

"The government is to be commended for its clear enunciations. The process of national regeneration calls for overcoming obstacles. The first obstacle is Conservatism! The knowledge base of humankind increases with time. With time some things change while some are obviated. New facts and situations emerge. Therefore, any new dispensation must create a harmonious balance between tradition and contemporary realities. Outdated mores of the past have to be castaway, he said.

He said the Sangh wants the government to develop a healthcare system that pools varied medical treatment methods from diverse sources

for etching out affordable health services that are widely available and shorn off commercial motivation.

Speaking of 'Hindu Rashtra', Bhagwat said since Sangh is receiving the affection and confidence of people and also has become strong, the concept of Hindu Rashtra is being taken seriously. "Many people agree with the concept but are opposed to the word 'Hindu' and they prefer to use other words. We don't have any issue with that. For the clarity of concept - we will keep emphasizing the word Hindu for ourselves," he said.

The RSS chief dismissed the 'propaganda' against it vis-a-vis the minorities in the country.

"Scare-mongering is done

among so-called minorities that there is a danger to them because of us or organised Hindus. This has not happened in the past, nor will it happen in future.

"This is neither the nature of Sangh nor of the Hindus, history bears this out. Self-defence and defence of our own becomes a duty for everyone against those who spread hatred, commit injustice, atrocity, engage in acts of hooliganism and enmity towards society.

"Neither threatens nor gets threatened," this kind of a Hindu society is a need of the present times. This is not anti-anybody. Sangh has a steady resolve to stand on the side of brotherhood, amity and peace" said Bhagwat.

PICTALK



Women greet each other by applying Sindoor to their faces on the occasion of Dussehra-Vijaya Dashami festival in New Delhi on Wednesday Ranjan Dimri | Pioneer



Delhi Chief Minister Arvind Kejriwal on Wednesday attends Dussehra festivities at the historical Red Fort ground. Speaking at the Lav Kush Ramilla Committee's 'Ravan Dahan' programme, Kejriwal wished India to become the "best and strongest nation in the world". He said Ramilla is very important for the people as it connects them to the culture of the country and spreads the message of Lord Rama's life. The Chief Minister also witnessed the burning of the effigies of demon king Ravana, his brother Kumbhkaran and son, Meghnad. Actor Prabhas of 'Baahubali' fame also attended the event Ranjan Dimri | Pioneer

Bring down response time for rescue calls: LG to Delhi Fire Service

STAFF REPORTER ■ NEW DELHI

Delhi Lieutenant Governor (LG) Vinai Kumar Saxena has directed Delhi Fire Services to bring down the response time for rescue calls to 2-3 minutes from the current 8-16 minutes and simplify procedures for obtaining Non-Objection Certificates (NOC) from the fire department, without compromising on the safety parameters as part of a slew of measures to improve the national Capital's fire-fighting capability.

During a meeting to review fire-safety preparedness ahead of Diwali on Tuesday, Saxena directed officials to identify at least 50 locations prone to



mishaps and deploy fire tenders, integrating them with ambulance services for quick response. Saxena directed the officials to fill 1,112 vacancies in the department on a priority and expedite the construction of a fire services head-quarter building at Connaught

Place. "The Lt Governor also issued specific instructions to Delhi Fire Services to rationalise and simplify the procedures for obtaining fire no-objection certificates without compromising on safety parameters," the LG's office said in a statement. "The LG asked for

the revised procedural guidelines to be put in place before Diwali so that small eateries, restaurants, nursing homes, showrooms and other establishments that run from pillar to post for obtaining fire clearances could get the much needed relief," the statement said.

The move will benefit a large number of restaurants, eateries, nursing homes and several other business units that fail to comply with the existing fire safety parameters only due to "intricate and archaic procedures".

One identifying locations prone to fire mishaps, the statement said, "To begin with, more than a dozen such locations will be identified ahead of

Diwali and gradually a plan for the entire city will be prepared." Saxena instructed the officials to increase the number of fire stations to at least 80 from the current 64 and fire tenders and water bowsters to at least 350 from 220. He also directed them to identify land required to set up new fire stations.

As part of measures to upgrade technology to fight fires, the LG directed officials to increase the number of ultra-modern fire-fighting equipment, including remote-operated fire fighting machines (robots), multi-articulated fire towers, drone sprinklers, aerial ladders, to enhance the safety of firemen and save lives.

Emphasising on the need for regular drills and awareness on fire safety, the LG asked the officials to prepare a calendar of regular drills at major hospitals, colleges, schools, hostels and crowded markets.

During the meeting, the LG asked the officials to conduct an audit of deaths in fire incidents to assess the shortcomings and requirement for additional resources and skills to improve the department's functioning.

He also asked them to bring in experts for proper training of firemen in animal and bird rescue, adding that all fire tenders should be equipped with GPS to track their movement and response in real-time.

LG'S DIRECTIONS

- Identifying the land required for setting up new fire stations
- Roping in NGOs/experts for proper training of firemen in animal and bird rescue
- Audit of the deaths in fire incidents to assess the shortcomings and requirement for additional resources to improve the functioning of the fire department
- Equipping all fire tenders with GPS to track their movement and response on a real-time basis
- Filling of the 1,112 vacant posts in the fire department
- Expediting the construction of the fire service headquarters building at Connaught Place

Sisodia seeks CBI probe into '₹6K cr scam' by MCD Implement GRAP to contain pollution in NCR, officials told

STAFF REPORTER ■ NEW DELHI

Delhi Deputy Chief Minister Manish Sisodia on Wednesday demanded a CBI probe into the alleged Rs 6,000 crore scam in collection of toll tax by the BJP-ruled Municipal Corporation of Delhi (MCD).

Sisodia wrote to Lieutenant Governor Vinai Kumar Saxena saying, "You did not pay any attention to that scam because it's done by the BJP. I had written to you two months ago for a CBI enquiry into the scam of Rs. 6,000 crore by the BJP-run MCD (Municipal Corporation



of Delhi), you did not consider it important to even acknowledge my letter," Sisodia wrote, in Hindi. This came a day after the Lieutenant Governor ordered a probe into Delhi's free electricity scheme,

a selling point of Chief Minister Arvind Kejriwal and AAP.

"Despite having so much proof in front of you, probably, you cannot see corruption in the matter because here the corruption has been done by BJP. You are setting a record of making false allegations and ordering investigation in fake cases against the democratically elected Government of Delhi every day and night intending to stall the work of the government," Sisodia stated in his letter.

"During its 17 years of reign at MCD, BJP has turned

Delhi into a pile of garbage. There are garbage mountains all across Delhi, from small lanes to major big roads. As a result of failure of leadership in MCD, Delhi stands at bottom of list of cities in the country in terms of cleanliness. If you would put in some attention towards it properly, then there is a chance that roads might look clean," said Sisodia.

"You (L-G) can get as many investigations done as you want. Our government is a Kattar Imandar government and is not afraid of any investigation," Sisodia said.

STAFF REPORTER ■ NEW DELHI

With the air quality in Delhi dropping to the 'poor' level on Wednesday, authorities in the National Capital Region have been asked to strictly implement measures under the first stage of the Graded Response Action Plan (GRAP). The action plan includes penal and legal action against polluting industrial units.

The Centre's sub-committee on GRAP in a meeting noted that there has been a "sudden dip" in air quality

parameters in the region in the last 24 hours which pushed Delhi's AQI into the "poor" category. An AQI between 201 and 300 is considered 'poor'.

"While this is likely to be a localised influence and the forecasts do not predict any further deterioration, in an effort to maintain the AQI in the moderate category, as a precautionary measure, the sub-committee decided that all actions as envisaged under Stage I of the GRAP - 'Poor' air quality be implemented in right earnest by all the agencies concerned, with immediate

effect in the NCR," the Commission for Air Quality Management (CAQM) said in an order. Delhi's 24-average air quality index stood at 211 at 4 pm, worsening from 150 at 4 pm on Tuesday. It stood at 248 in Ghaziabad, 196 in Faridabad, 234 in Greater Noida, 238 in Gurugram and 215 in Noida.

Under Stage-I, the Centre's Commission for Air Quality Management (CAQM) recommends stopping construction and demolition (C&D) activities at sites having plot size equal to or more than 500

square metres that are not registered on the "web portal" of the respective states for remote monitoring of air pollution levels. Project proponents are required to ensure proper implementation of guidelines for dust mitigation, management of C&D waste and use of anti-smog guns at construction sites.

Agencies concerned are required to ensure periodic mechanised sweeping of roads and water sprinkling, and impose heavy fines of curbs on open burning of biomass and municipal solid waste.

Two PFI members booked under UAPA

STAFF REPORTER ■ NEW DELHI

An First Information Report (FIR) has been registered by the Delhi Police against two Popular Front of India (PFI) "members" under the stringent Unlawful Activities (Prevention) Act for their alleged suspicious activities.

According to a senior police official, an FIR has been registered against two PFI activists under IPC sections 120 B (criminal conspiracy) and 153 A (promoting enmity between different groups), along with section 10/13 of the Unlawful Activities (Prevention) Act at Khajuri Khas police station, for allegedly planning and conspiring against the government

and the country.

However, no arrests have been made yet in the matter, he said, adding investigation is underway. This is the second case registered under the UAPA against the PFI members in the national capital. Earlier, four persons allegedly linked to the outfit were arrested by Delhi Police under the Act. The Centre had on September 28 banned the PFI.

On September 27, The Delhi Police's Special Cell have detained 30 people allegedly associated with the Popular Front of India (PFI) from multiple locations, including Nizamuddin and Shaheen Bagh, on Tuesday, as part of a crackdown against the outfit.

86-year-old woman stabbed to death by ex-driver

New Delhi: An 86-year-old woman was allegedly stabbed to death by her ex-driver who had entered her house in outer Delhi's Rani Bagh area for robbing it.

According to police, accused Gopal managed to rob ₹3,20,000 after killing senior citizen and fled from spot. The incident took place on Tuesday around 7:16 pm. The man was fired from his duty just a few days ago, police said. The woman was brutally assaulted. Her family rushed her to Maya Muni Ram Hospital in Pitampura where doctors declared her brought dead, a senior police officer said. SR

Transport dept gets 2K complaints in 2 days against parked old vehicles

New Delhi: The Delhi Government's Transport Department has received nearly 2,000 complaints from the Resident Welfare Associations and market associations about old vehicles parked in their premises within two days of issuing a WhatsApp number for the purpose.

The Delhi transport department had issued the number 8376050050 for RWAs and market associations to share details about parked old vehicles. Last week, the Department had cautioned people against driving old vehicles in the national Capital, saying such vehicles would be immediately impounded.

"Within two days of issuing

the number, we received 2,000 complaints from across Delhi. However, the complaints need to be verified. People are sending pictures of vehicles that they feel look old.

"We have to verify the details of the vehicles' registration in our database to ascertain whether they are actually overage and unfit for plying on Delhi's roads," a senior official said. There are around 25 lakh such vehicles in the national capital, he added.

"If we find vehicles unfit to be parked in public places, our teams will be dispatched, and they will impound the vehicles and immediately hand them to authorised scrapper for scrapping," the official said.

BJP raps AAP for burning garbage-filled effigies



STAFF REPORTER ■ NEW DELHI

Lambasting the ruling AAP Government over the burning of the garbage-filled effigies at 3,500 locations across the national Capital, the Leader of Opposition of Delhi Assembly Ramvir Singh Bidhuri decided to file a complaint with the National Green Tribunal (NGT) in this matter. He also appealed the Lieutenant Governor to order registering of cases against AAP leaders for polluting the national Capital.

Meanwhile, Delhi BJP on Wednesday burnt effigies of Chief Minister Arvind Kejriwal and his deputy Manish Sisodia, a symbol of corruption on the occasion of Vijay Dashami at Jantar Mantar. Bidhuri said that after the implementation of the Graded Action Response Plan (GRAP)

to fight air pollution, in the Capital, there is a ban on the burning of garbage, but on October 4, the AAP leaders burnt garbage at 3,500 places.


Bidhuri alleged that due to burning of garbage by AAP workers all day on October 4, the pollution level of Delhi increased to a severe stage on October 5 and there was a blanket of smoke in the morning. "However, at 10 in the morning, the Air Quality Index (AQI) in the capital reached 195, very near the poor category.


Not only this, it has reached 396 points in Anand Vihar and in the rest of Delhi including Alipur, Ashok Vihar, ITO, Jahangirpuri, Dwarka, Nehru Nagar, Patparganj, Vivek Vihar, Pusa, R.K. Puram, Shadipur and Wazirpur the AQI was recorded more than 200 points respectively," he said. Bidhuri further decided to file a complaint with the

NGT in this matter and said that not only AAP should be fined heavily for burning garbage at 3500 places, but a case should also be registered against its leaders. The Kejriwal government has completely failed in the fight against pollution in Delhi and now it itself is openly doing pollution-increasing activities.

Meanwhile, under the leadership of state BJP president Adesh Gupta, thousands of party workers staged a fierce protest against the alleged corruption being done by Kejriwal and Sisodia, by burning their effigies at Jantar Mantar today.

Speaking at the protest, Gupta said that only Kejriwal has the dictionary to discover new ways of corruption and during his tenure so far, his government and his leaders have done nothing except corruption.

MUNICIPAL CORPORATION OF DELHI



Office of Director (P&I)
Attention:

Mandatory Registration on Portal by all Project Proponents, Contractors, Builders, Persons or Authority Undertaking Construction and Demolition Activity in National Capital Territory of Delhi in Compliance of the Direction by Commission for Air Quality Management (CAQM)

Delhi Pollution Control Committee has developed an online mechanism through a Web Portal called "Dust Pollution Control Self Assessment" at <http://dustcontroldpcc.delhi.gov.in> for self assessment by construction agencies with respect to dust pollution in their sites in pursuance of directions dated 11.06.2021 by CAQM.

The above mentioned directions envisage the following compliances by project proponents:-

- All current/upcoming projects (on plot area equal to or greater than 500 square meters) of construction and demolition for civil structures are required to mandatorily register at the web portal.
- To self-monitor/self-audit their activities on the parameters mandated/directed for compliance and to take necessary steps, if required, to improve the status of compliance.
- The project proponents are required to carry out self-audit/self-determination for dust control measures on the parameters provided on the Web Portal and upload a self-declaration on a fortnightly basis.
- The provision of video fencing with remote connectivity of the projects (within the municipal area of NCR and plot area equal to or greater than 500 Sqm) is part of portal.
- Reliable low cost PM2.5 and PM10 sensors are to be installed at the project site and linked to a cloud storage platform with a live Dash Board in the Web portal.
- All Projects to adopt effective dust control measures in Delhi (wind breakers, dust screens, water sprinkling, dust suppressing and soil stabilisation measures etc.)
- All Projects deploy adequate numbers of anti-smog guns by 30.09.2022, in proportion to the area of the construction sites:
 - At least 1 for a total construction area between 5000-10000 sqm:
 - At least 2 for a total construction area between 10001-15000 sqm:
 - At least 3 for a total construction area between 15001-20000 sqm:
 - At least 4 for a total construction Area 20,000 sqm:
- The deadline for registering Construction sites is 15th October, 2022. The actions will be taken against who doesn't register on the portal.
- Special teams are constituted by MCD to check the violation of dust mitigation measures at construction sites and also to check the compliance of self-audit on web portal by project proponents.
- In the event the air quality deteriorate to 'Poor' (AQI 201-300), C&D activities in respect of such projects with plot size equal to or more than 500 sqm which have still not registered on the 'web portal' of the respective state / GNCTD shall be stopped.

RO No. 38/DPI/MCD/2022-23

‘MEA rescued 45 Indians trapped in fake job rackets in Myanmar’

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

India on Wednesday said it has so far rescued around 45 Indians trapped in fake job rackets in Myanmar.

Giving out details here, MEA spokesperson Arindam Bagchi said that 13 of these Indians have reached Tamil Nadu. "Thanks to the efforts of @IndiainMyanmar & @IndiainThailand, around 32 Indians had already been rescued. Another 13 Indian citizens have now been rescued, and reached Tamil Nadu today," tweeted Bagchi.

He said some more Indian citizens were rescued from their fake employers and are in the custody of Myanmar authorities and that legal procedures to ensure their repatriation at the earliest have been initiated.

Details of the agents allegedly involved in this job racket have been shared with relevant authorities in various states in India for appropriate action," he said. Bagchi reiterated that India has been actively pursuing the case of Indians being trapped in fake job rackets in Myanmar. The victims



were allegedly taken across the border illegally to Myanmar in most cases and were forced to work in captivity in harsh conditions. Bagchi also said similar instances have been reported from Laos and Cambodia and the Indian Embassies in Vientiane, Phnom Penh and Bangkok are helping in the repatriation procedures.

Last month, the Ministry of External Affairs (MEA) had issued an advisory against false job rackets offering jobs to entice Indian youth for the posts of digital sales executives and marketing executives in Thailand by dubious IT firms. These IT firms, according to MEA, are engaged in call-centre



shams and cryptocurrency related fraud and have been noticed by the Indian Missions in Bangkok and Myanmar.

It also suggested that many of the aggrieved people received these job offers via social media platforms or other sources. The MEA advisory further noted, "The target groups are IT skilled youth who are duped in the name of lucrative data entry jobs in Thailand through social media

advertisements as well as by Dubai and India based agents."

The MEA also urged job applicants to verify the antecedents and present credentials of the foreign employers and companies through concerned Indian Missions abroad before travelling on tourist/visitor visa for employment purposes and/or taking up a job offer. It also advised people to verify the past record of recruiting agents.

Army court martial recommends sacking, jail term for NCO found guilty of sexual harassment of female Captain

PNS/Agencies: An Army Court Martial has recommended dismissal from service and a one-year jail term for a non-commissioned officer (NCO) found guilty of sexually harassing a female Captain. The incident had taken place last year when the lady officer had come to Sikkim for a river rafting course in the 17 mountain division area where she was staying in an official accommodation.

In the court martial convened by the 17 Mountain Division in Sikkim, the Havildar has been accused of using criminal force while attempting to outrage the modesty of the female officer belonging to the Military Nursing Service, Army officials said here. The second charge against the NCO was that after forcefully entering the room of the officer, he made 'sexually coloured' remarks, they said.

Once the incident happened, the lady officer managed to escape from the room and complained to the authorities there about the incident.

The Army authorities acted swiftly and the NCO was put through a trial process where he was found guilty. The court martial took place in 617 EME battalion in Sikkim and

Indian Army pilot dies as Cheetah helicopter crashes in Arunachal

Cause of crash not known at this stage, says spokesperson

Agencies: An Army Aviation pilot was killed after a Cheetah helicopter on a routine sortie in the forward area near Tawang in Arunachal Pradesh crashed on Wednesday morning. "Both the pilots were evacuated to nearest Military Hospital. With regret we inform that one of the pilots who was critically injured succumbed to the injuries during treatment," the Defence Spokesperson in Tezpur said.

The second pilot is under medical treatment, he added. The cause of the crash at this stage is not known and the



details are being ascertained, the spokesperson added. The ageing fleet of Cheetah and Chetak helicopters are in urgent need of replacement. The Army Aviation currently operates

around 190 Cheetah, Chetak and Chetak helicopters, with five of them, the oldest, being over 50 years old. A bulk of the fleet, close to 130 of the 190, are between 30 to 50 years old, as reported by The Hindu earlier. This fleet is the lifeline in transporting supplies and for evacuations in the high-altitude areas including the Siachen glacier.

In addition to the Army, the Navy and IAF too operate these helicopters. For instance, the IAF has around 120 Cheetah and Chetak and around 18 of the more recent Cheetahs. As reported by The Hindu earlier, the total technical life of these helicopters will start finishing from 2023 onwards which will only further exacerbate the existing deficiencies.



Defence Minister Rajnath Singh performs 'Shastra Pujan' on the occasion Vijayadashmi on Wednesday

PTI Photo

ED seizes ₹5.85 crore in part-time jobs fraud case

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

The Enforcement Directorate (ED) has conducted search actions on the 12 entities involved in part time job fraud case located in Bengaluru and seized Rs 5.85 crore under Prevention of Money Laundering Act.

The ED initiated money laundering investigation on the basis of one FIR registered in South CEN Police Station, Bengaluru City in the matter related to part time job fraud.

Investigation under PMLA revealed that gullible public mostly youth were cheated by some Chinese persons through a mobile App "Keepsharer" which promised them a part time job and collected money from them.

"These Chinese persons formed companies in India and recruited many Indians as directors, translators (for translating Mandarin to English and vice versa), Human Resource Manager and Tele callers. They obtained the doc-



uments of Indian persons and opened bank accounts by using their documents," the ED said in a statement. The accused Chinese persons developed a mobile App and started its advertisement through WhatsApp and Telegram by offering part time job opportunities to the youth, it said.

This app was linked with an investment app. For registration on this app, they collected money from youth. Further, they collected money from the public also in the name of investment through this app. The youth were given the task of liking the videos of celebrities and

uploading them on social media. When the task was completed, they used to pay Rs.20 per video and that would be credited in the "Keepsharer" wallet. For some time, money got credited in their wallet, later on, the app was removed from the play store, the agency said. "The public was cheated with their investment amount and the remuneration to be paid which run into crores of rupees. The money collected through the scam was routed from the bank accounts of some Bengaluru-based companies and then converted into crypto currency and transferred to China-based Crypto exchanges," it said.

All the transactions were under control of Chinese persons through phone and WhatsApp groups. As per the chargesheet filed by Police, out of 92 accused persons, six persons are citizens of China and Taiwan who were controlling the entire scam. Further investigation in the matter is under progress, it added.

Cough, cold syrups by Indian firm potentially tied to 66 deaths in Gambia, says WHO



AGENCIES: The World Health Organization on Wednesday said four cough and cold syrups made by India's Maiden Pharmaceuticals Ltd could be potentially linked with serious kidney injuries and 66 deaths among children in Gambia. New Delhi-based Maiden Pharmaceuticals declined to comment on the matter. WHO issued a medical product alert for the four syrups and said it was conducting further investigation with the company and regulatory authorities in India.

Gambia's government said last month it has also been investigating the deaths, as a spike in cases of acute kidney injury among children under the age of five was detected in late July.

"While the contaminated products have so far only been detected in the Gambia they may have been distributed to other countries," WHO Director General Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus said at a press conference on Wednesday.

He added that WHO recommends all countries detect and remove these products from circulation to prevent further harm to patients.

Bhagwat's remarks on population 'balanced', he didn't point fingers at particular community: Quraishi

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

Former chief Election Commissioner S Y Quraishi on Wednesday said RSS chief Mohan Bhagwat's remarks on population control policy were "balanced" as he did not point fingers at a particular community. Quraishi, who has busted many myths related to Muslim population numbers in his book "The Population Myth:



Islam, Family Planning and Politics in India", said Bhagwat is rightly of the view that fam-

ily planning must be adopted by all sections of the Indian society. Speaking at the annual RSS Dussehra rally at the Reshimbagh Ground in Nagpur, Bhagwat said India should frame a well thought out, comprehensive population control policy applicable to all social groups equally and flagged the issue of demographic "imbalance". Quraishi said the Rashtriya

Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS) s a s a n g h c h a l a k ' s Vijayadashmi speech is being scrutinised very closely with media's focus on his references to the population

"People are referring to my book Population Myth - Islam, Family Planning and Politics in India" which I had an opportunity to present to Mr. Bhagwaat just recently where I briefly mentioned its focal

points," Quraishi told PTI.

It was significant that the RSS chief heard me out carefully, he said. "I think Mr. Bhagwat's speech was quite comprehensive and balanced. For one, he didn't point fingers at a particular community. He mentioned both the dimensions of population debate - a burden or an asset," the former bureaucrat said. Bhagwat highlighted the factors that influ-

ence population behaviour, Quraishi said and pointed out that the RSS chief, in his remarks, said the number of children is linked with maternal health, education, financial status and individual wish. Bhagwat said the population policy has to be formulated considering all these factors mindfully, Quraishi noted. He also pointed to Bhagwat's remarks that population imbal-

ances lead to changes in geographical boundaries.

The RSS chief mentioned East Timor, South Sudan and Kosovo in this context, Quraishi said. Referring to Bhagwat's remarks that population control and religion based population balance is an important subject that can no longer be ignored, Quraishi said the fact is that it was never ignored.



Vice-Admiral Arti Sarin on Tuesday took over as commandant of the Armed Forces Medical College in Pune. Commissioned in 1985 into Armed Forces Medical Services, she has the distinction of having completed two PG degrees

PNS

First clinic in country dedicated for Fontan patients opens in Kerala

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

Adult patients or kids who have undergone Fontan procedure — a type of heart surgery which reduces the mixing of deoxygenated and oxygenated, can now look forward to holistic management of their complex health condition.

An exclusive first-of-its kind clinic in India's Thiruvananthapuram in Kerala was recently inaugurated by Dr Sanjay Behari, Director, at Sri Chitra Tirunal Institute of Medical Sciences and Technology (SCTIMST) for comprehensive management of the congenital heart diseases.

The Fontan procedure which also reduces the work of the heart and provides a better oxygen supply to the body, is a milestone in the palliation of children born with complex univentricular heart diseases 90 per cent of who would not have survived beyond their first birthday without intervention.

This operation occurs at approximately 1 1/2 to 3 years of age. As a centre for com-

prehensive rehabilitation and follow-up of children and adults who have undergone Fontan surgery, the clinic will help implementation of measures to improve quality of life of these patients by timely consideration for additional investigations as required, including advanced imaging and cardiac catheterization.

It will also involve holistic care for these patients by involving all divisions of Cardiology, the departments of Cardiac Surgery, Cardiac Anesthesiology, Physical Medicine and Rehabilitation specialists, Vascular surgery from SCTIMST, and Respiratory Medicine, Nephrology, Gastroenterology and Endocrinology consultants whenever required.

This is because, while the ideal Fontan circulation does very well for long, it is not unusual for other organ systems like the liver, kidney, lungs and the gut to present with issues with the newly fashioned circulation.

Therefore, it is important for patients to be followed up

regularly by a Cardiologist and other specialists to find any problems early, when treatment is most effective. Dr Neeraj Pandit, Professor & Head, Department of Cardiology, Rajiv Gandhi Super Speciality Hospital, Tahirpur, Delhi Government welcomed the initiative saying, that as survival rate is very less in such cases, regular surveillance in infancy and early childhood is important to minimize risk factors.

The child may need a customized series of diagnostic tests between the planned stages of surgery, and throughout childhood, he explained.

The SCTIMST institute has over 200 patients who have undergone all stages of univentricular palliation, and the number is ever increasing. A registry of patients with univentricular congenital heart diseases who have undergone Fontan completion will also be formed. The clinic shall also serve as a portal for second opinion and consultations to other providers, said the doctors from the SCTIMST.

NGT warns A&N administration over sloppy waste management

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

The National Green Tribunal has warned the Union Territory of Andaman & Nicobar islands of imposing a fine for environment restoration if gaps in the management of solid and liquid waste were not bridged within six months.

The green panel said because of the peculiar situation of the islands, the tribunal was temporarily refraining from levying compensation.

A bench headed by NGT Chairperson Justice A K Goel said more action was required to handle the gaps in waste management.

The bench, also comprising Justice Arun Kumar Tyagi and expert members A Senthil Vel and Afroz Ahmad said remedial action cannot wait for an indefinite period and it was the responsibility of the UT authorities to have a comprehensive plan in place to control pollution.

"We hope in the light of interaction with the Chief Secretary, the UT will take further measures in the matter



by an innovative approach, stringent monitoring at appropriate level...ensuring that the gap in solid and liquid waste generation and treatment is bridged at the earliest..." the bench said. "...But we expect that all necessary measures for bridging the existing gaps be taken within the outer limit of six months," the green panel said.

In case of default, the tribunal would be left with no other option except to assess compensation on the polluter pays principle for the failure of

the administration to fulfil its duties under the law to provide a clean environment, the NGT said. The bench also directed the preparation of Integrated Islands Management Plans and Integrated Coastal Regulation Zone Plan within three months in accordance with a central government notification declaring Andaman & Nicobar as 'Islands Protection Zone.' NGT is monitoring compliance with Municipal Solid Waste Management Rules, 2016 and other environmental issues by states and Union territories.

Mehbooba, J&K cops in Twitter spat over her house arrest claim

PTI ■ SRINAGAR

Former Chief Minister Mehbooba Mufti and Jammu and Kashmir Police engaged in a Twitter spat on Wednesday after she claimed that she was placed under house arrest to prevent her from visiting an area in north Kashmir.

The police rebutted the claims of the PDP chief and said she was free to travel anywhere.

Mehbooba claimed that since Union Home Minister Amit Shah was travelling to Baramulla, 54 kilometres from here, in north Kashmir and addressing a public rally there, she had been stopped from attending a wedding of a party worker in Pattan, 27 kilometres from here.

"While HM is going around Kashmir beating drums of normalcy, I am under house arrest for simply wanting to visit Pattan for a



worker's wedding. If an ex CM's fundamental rights can be suspended so easily, one can't even imagine the plight of a commoner," she said in a tweet and tagged the home minister and Lt Governor Manoj Sinha.

She also put out pictures of the alleged locking of the door of the main gate of her house.

However, almost 40 minutes later, the Srinagar Police tweeted that there were no restrictions on her travel to Pattan. The police even claimed that she herself had locked the gate from inside.

"It is clarified that no restriction of any kind (of) travel to Pattan, travel to Pattan at 1 pm as intimated to

us. The picture tweeted by her is of inside of the gate with own lock of residents who stay in the bungalow. There is no lock or any restrictions. She is free to travel," the police said in the tweet.

They also put out pictures of her gate with no locks from the outside.

This was quickly rebutted by Mehbooba who said the SSP Baramulla had informed her Tuesday night that she would not be allowed to travel. She claimed that the police were "now lying through their teeth".

"I was informed last night by SP (SSP) Baramulla @bhattray that I wouldn't be allowed to travel to Pattan. Today @JmuKmrPolice have themselves locked my gates from inside & are now lying through their teeth. Sad that law enforcement agencies are brazenly trying to cover up their tracks," she said in a tweet.

4 ultras killed ahead of HM's visit

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ SRINAGAR

Ahead of the high-level security review meeting chaired by the Union Home Minister Amit Shah in Srinagar on Wednesday, a joint team of security forces eliminated four more terrorists, including three Jaish-e-Mohammad and one Lashkar-e-Tayyeba terrorist, in twin encounters in the South Kashmir district of Shopian.

In a separate incident a civilian was killed after a policeman's rifle went off accidentally in the Hall area of Pulwama. The civilian has been identified as Mohammad Asif Padroo son of Mohd Ayub Padroo resident of Poterwaal Shopian. The police cop was later arrested by the police.

According to a police spokesman, "all three JeM terrorists neutralised in a joint operation launched late Tuesday evening in village Drach Keegam area of Shopian were categorised terrorists. They were involved in several terror crime cases including attacks on Police/SFs

and civilian atrocities.

The terrorists have been identified as Zubair Maqbool Wani resident of Doompura Keegam, Jamsheed Ahmad Magray resident of Rajpora & Hanaan Bin Yaqoob @ Saqib resident of Kareemabad Pulwama.

As per police records, terrorists Hanan Bin Yaqoob and Jamsheed were involved in recent killing of SPO Javed Dar on 02/10/2022 at Pinglana area of Pulwama. They were also involved in killing of an outside labourer from West Bengal in Gadoora. Besides, terrorist Jamsheed was involved in Ratnipora terror attack where he shot & injured two outside labourers. In another operation launched in the Moolu area of Shopian, a local LeT terrorist identified as Arif Rashid Wani resident of Shirmal was eliminated by the security forces.

Security forces recovered arms & ammunition including 04 AK series rifles, 01 Pistol, 08 AK magazines, 04 Pistol magazines & other incriminating material from both the encounter sites.

Shah visits martyred cop's residence



PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ SRINAGAR

Union Home Minister Amit Shah on Wednesday visited the residence of a martyred cop Mudasir Sheikh in Uri and paid tributes to him by offering prayers at his ancestral graveyard.

Mudasir had laid down his life while fighting three foreign terrorists of Jaish-e-Mohammad terrorist organization in close quarter battle (CQB) in operation Najibhat Crossing on 25th May, 2022.

He was part of the team of valiant undercover operatives of Jammu & Kashmir Police which intercepted the terrorists heading for targeting Shri Amarnathji Yatra in a joint operation with 52RR of Indian Army.

While visiting the family, Shah said that the martyr Mudasir's family is a great source of inspiration for the police force and the youth of Kashmir, with their open denouncement of terrorism and celebrating the martyrdom of their son as a national sacrifice.

Conduct co-ordinated counter terrorism operations, Shah tells security forces

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ SRINAGAR

The Union Home Minister Amit Shah on Wednesday directed the security forces and the police to pro-actively conduct co-ordinated counter-terrorism operations, to fulfill the Prime Minister, Narendra Modi's vision of a prosperous and peaceful Jammu & Kashmir.

While chairing a high level security review meeting along with Lieutenant Governor Manoj Sinha and other senior officials of the Government of India, including the Army, CAPE, J&K Police in Srinagar the Union Home Minister appreciated the efforts of the security agencies and administration of the Union Territory of Jammu & Kashmir for keeping the streets free from violence and significantly restoring Rule of Law.

After gathering feedback from the top brass of the various security agencies the Home Minister directed that the security grid should be further strengthened to ensure zero fear of terrorists and sepa-



ratists. "The Terror eco-system comprising elements that aid, abet and sustain the terrorist-separatist campaign to the detriment of the well-being of the common man requires to be completely dismantled", said the Union Home Minister while reviewing the prevailign security situation.

He also reviewed the working of the security grid and progress made on vari-

ous items of the security agenda in previous meetings to reduce the incidents of terrorism and stranglehold of the separatist networks over the system.

The Union Home Minister exhorted the security forces and the police to continue with the coordinated efforts through

meticulous and well-planned counter-terrorism operations to wipe out terrorism. The cases registered under the UAPA were also reviewed and it was stressed that investigation should be timely and effective. The agencies concerned should work on improving capacities for ensuring quality investigation, the Union Home Minister emphasised.

Dussehra celebration in Leh

MOHIT KANDHARI ■ JAMMU

Krishan Sharma, 47, owner of a fruit and vegetable shop near old bus stand in Leh, on Wednesday stayed away from work.

Far away from the bustling Leh market he along with Sumit Singh, a class 11 student of Kendriya Vidyalay, Leh and Bhupinder Singh of Doda teamed up in a small makeup room of a local temple and emerged as Ram, Lakshman and Sita to participate in the Dussehra celebrations in the Buddhist dominated Leh district.

Dressed in their traditional attire local Buddhist and Muslim girls helped them with their traditional make up and glorified their characters with finesse.

Krishan has been playing Rama for almost 21 years now and is a permanent fixture of the annual Dussehra celebra-

tions in Leh.

He landed in Leh in 1994. He then worked for about three years at one of the local hardware shops and saved enough money to start his own business venture.

For more than two decades now, Krishan Sharma, hailing from Samailpur area of Samba, has settled in Leh and his two sons are also studying in a local school.

Bhupinder Singh has been playing Sita for the last 5 years now. A native of Doda, Bhupinder is earning his livelihood by working at a Kiryana store in Leh. Lakshman, the younger brother of Lord Rama, is a student of class 11. His father is running a tailor shop in Leh.

Before the portraits of Ravana, Kumbkaran and Meghnath were consigned to flames amid loud chants of religious slogans a traditional Rath yatra was also taken out from



the Hare Krishna temple via main market and culminated at Pologround.

Hindu Trust (Hindu Maha Sabha) Leh organizes Dussehra annually in Leh. A miniscule population of around 24,000 Hindus are staying in the region.

Balbir Singh, President of the Trust said, "we started organising the Dussehra festival more than three decades ago". In the absence of adequate infrastructure and

resources Ram Leela is not organised in Leh. However, Hindu Trust is contemplating to organise it from next year. Balbir Singh said, in the past local carpenters used to make the effigies of Ravana and others using plywood sheets. The effigies used to be extremely heavy and would burn with difficulty with the help of kerosene oil. But now we are bringing the effigies from Jammu. Artists from Meerut take orders and supply us these effigies.

Fresh municipal polls in Bihar only after quotas restored: JD(U)

PTI ■ PATNA

Bihar Chief Minister Nitish Kumar's Janata Dal (United) on Wednesday asserted that fresh municipal polls will now be held in the State only after reservations for Other Backward Classes and Extremely Backward Classes, set aside by the Patna High Court, were restored.

JD(U) national president Rajiv Ranjan Singh alias Lalan and parliamentary board chief Upendra Kushwaha made the averment at a joint press conference here, a day after the court declared the quotas "illegal" and directed the State Election Commission to hold the urban local body polls only after all the reserved seats were "re notified" as those of general category. The SEC, on its part, has deferred the polls, scheduled in two phases on October 10 and October 20, saying that fresh dates will be announced in due course.

"There is no illegality in the quotas. These were introduced by the Nitish Kumar government for panchayats in 2006 and for urban local bodies a year later. We suspect the BJP's hand in the goof up. The party and its parent body RSS have always been opposed to quotas," the JD(U) leaders alleged.

"If we check the backgrounds of the petitioners who had challenged reservations in urban local bodies, their links with the BJP will come to the fore. Many BJP leaders had privately celebrated the high court order. It can be verified," they claimed.

The saffron party had been JD(U)'s ally till 2013 when Kumar broke up following differences over the elevation of Narendra Modi as prime ministerial candidate.

The two parties realigned in 2017, fought the Lok Sabha polls in 2019 and assembly elections a year later together, and ran a coalition government till August this year, when Kumar again dumped the BJP following accusations of attempts to break the JD(U).

The BJP, on its part, has been squarely blaming Kumar for the legal wrangle, alleging that his government did not complete formalities like setting up an independent commission for recommending quotas for electoral purposes.

The saffron party has also been raking up the era of Karpoori Thakur, the mentor of Kumar and RJD president Lalu Prasad, claiming that its forerunner Bharatiya Jana Sangh had always supported the late socialist leader's social justice measures while the Congress, which is a part of the ruling 'Mahagathbandhan', was opposed to the same.

However, the JD(U) leaders maintained "there was simply no need for a commission in Bihar. BJP is trying to mix up the issue here with a Supreme Court order passed with regard to Maharashtra. Reservations here were less than 50 per cent. Hence, such a commission was not needed".

The high court order has come a huge embarrassment to



both Kumar and his deputy Tejashwi Yadav, the RJD heir apparent, both of whom were confident of thwarting BJP's attempts to wean away a section of OBC voters by their populist measure of a statewide headcount of castes, ordered after the Centre refused to conduct it nationally.

Meanwhile, state Minister for Education and Parliamentary Affairs Vijay Kumar Chaudhary, a JD(U) leader who enjoys the reputation of a trouble-shooter, told reporters elsewhere that the government would move the Supreme Court against the

Small Mahagathbandhan parties stress on coordination committee

PTI ■ PATNA

Smaller constituents of the Sruling Mahagathbandhan in Bihar on Wednesday sought to step up the demand for the early formation of a coordination committee amid a perceived rift between the JD(U) and the RJD, the two largest parties of the coalition.

The less than two months old coalition, formed after stripping the BJP of power in the state, appeared to be on the rocks recently when RJD state chief Jagadanand Singh said Deputy CM Tejashwi Yadav would replace his boss Nitish Kumar by next year, and his son Sudhakar lost his job as the agriculture minister after repeatedly putting in the dock the very government of which he was a part.

Yadav, on his part, tried to defuse the situation by asserting that he was "not in a hurry" to occupy the top post and getting Jagadanand Singh to issue

a circular forbidding RJD cadres from making any statements that placed the new coalition in jeopardy.

Nonetheless, smaller allies, especially the Left parties, feel that it was high time that a "coordination committee" was put in place, an absence of which is often blamed for the disintegration of the NDA in the state. "We met the Deputy CM soon after the resignation of Sudhakar Singh with the demand for immediate formation of a coordination committee. We felt that the government was running fine and instances like the behavior of Singh were having an adverse impact," Mahboob Alam, the legislature party leader of the CPIML(L), told PTI.

"We had demanded the formation of a coordination committee and devising a common minimum program soon after the formation of the government. Our objective was to avert such misunderstandings.

The need has only grown stronger," said the CPIML(L) leader, whose party is part of the ruling coalition but supports the government from outside.

He claimed that Tejashwi Yadav, whose party has the highest number of MLAs in the assembly, gave a patient hearing and seemed willing to act. "He asked me to come up with names of representatives whom my party would like to be a part of the coordination committee. I believe he is in touch with other alliance partners as well and we will see some headway," said Alam.

Besides JD(U), RJD and CPIML(L), the alliance comprises Congress, CPI, CPI(M) and HAM. However, all alliance partners realise that for the coalition to survive there must not be any rift between JD(U) and RJD, which together account for 124 MLAs, two more than the magic mark in the 243-strong assembly.

5 people killed, 8 injured after car hits multiple vehicles on Bandra-Worli Sea Link in Mumbai

PTI ■ MUMBAI

Five people were killed and eight others injured after a speeding car rammed into three other stationary cars and an ambulance on the Bandra-Worli Sea Link in Mumbai on Wednesday, police said.

The accident took place around 3 am between pole numbers 76 and 78 on the south-bound stretch of the sea link bridge, which connects Bandra in western suburbs to Worli in south Mumbai.

The Prime Minister's Office (PMO) expressed grief over the loss of lives in the accident.

"Pained by the loss of lives due to an accident on the Bandra-Worli Sea Link in Mumbai. Condolences to the bereaved families. I hope that those who have been injured have a speedy recovery: PM

@narendramodi," the PMO tweeted.

A police official said during a probe into the incident they came to know that a car initially hit a divider on the bridge and an ambulance was rushed to the spot for assistance.

The occupants of two other cars also halted their vehicles to provide help, he said.

At that time, another car coming from behind rammed into three stationary cars and the ambulance, the official said.

Thirteen people, including a woman and a Sea Link employee, were injured and five of them were later declared dead during treatment, he said.

Six of the injured were undergoing treatment in different hospitals. Two others were allowed to go after being treated for minor injuries, the police said.

Kerala Police officer suspended over alleged links with banned PFI

PTI ■ KOCHI

A Kerala Police officer has been suspended for allegedly having links with activists of banned outfit Popular Front of India (PFI), police said.

Ernakulam (rural) District Police Chief Vivek Kumar issued an order on October 4 immediately suspending the Civil Police Officer (CPO) who is alleged to have links with PFI activists, according to a report submitted by the SHO of Pothanikkad police station.

The order said he was being suspended immediately, pending an investigation, for dereliction of duty, indiscipline and failure to perform his responsibilities which have not only maligned the prestige of the force, but also led to the public losing its respect for the police.

It also said that an officer of the rank of Deputy



Superintendent of Police would be investigating the allegations against the CPO, who was posted at Kalady police station and would submit a report with his recommendations within 14 days. The order states that according to the report, the CPO -- C A Siyad -- without knowledge or permission of his superiors, tried to meet the PFI activists who were in custody at Perumbavoor police station in connection with the September 23 hartal related violence and attempted to unauthorisedly intervene in the investigation in the case.

Bengal bids adieu to Durga on Vijaya Dashami

SAUGAR SENGUPTA ■ KOLKATA

Bengal bid adieu to Mother Durga with a heavy heart on the Vijaya Dashami day even as the 10-day annual festivities concluded on Wednesday.

Thousands of idols of the Mother Goddess were immersed in the Ganges and other rivers with many thousands of devotees queuing up by the Hooghly River in Kolkata to watch the final moments of the Mother's send-off ceremony.

Durga --- a reincarnation of Parvati the wife of Lord Shiva --- is worshipped and loved as a 'daughter' in Bengal. Legend has it that the Mother comes every year to her parents' place on earth and after 10 days returns to Kailash the abode of Shiva.

"This is one day when the devotees are a tad unhappy with Shiva because he takes away our daughter," says one of

the organisers adding "we will again have to wait for a full one year."

Congratulating the people of Bengal Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee said, "though we feel bad about the mother going back ... If fact she resides within us ... and we must try to feel her presence every moment."

Apparently to ward off the gloom devotees, particularly the saree-clad married women engage in Sindoor Khela.

They smear each other with red vermilion after offering the same sindoor or vermilion at the feet of the Mother praying for the wellbeing of their near and dear ones. This is accompanied by group dance to the beats of Dhak or drum.

Else at Taki in Indo-Bangladesh border the people of two countries assemble in thousands on the opposite banks of Ichamati river that serves as the international border.

On Wednesday too hun-



dreds of idols from both sides of the border at Taki in North 24 Parganas were immersed in presence of thousands of spectators.

Incidentally former Army chief General Shankar Roy Chowdhury and former Union Law Minister Ashok Sen hailed from Taki.

"The immersion process at the international border is a spectacle to watch...and has the potential to become an international tourism event much like the one at Wahaj border but with a different mood ambience... We hope the governments take a note of this," said one of the organisers.

Get real

RSS chief Bhagwat must discard phony issues like that of population and focus on the real ones like inflation

RSS chief Mohan Bhagwat's remarks on population control, "religion-based imbalance," and "forced conversions" were gratuitous. Speaking at the annual Dussehra rally of the RSS, which is the ruling Bharatiya Janata Party's mentor body, he said, "Along with population control, balance on religious basis is also a matter of importance which cannot be ignored." But population has ceased to be a threat; India's population has stabilised. According to data from the National Family Health Survey-5, which was released almost a year ago, the country's total fertility rate (TFR) had come down to 2. TFR means the average number of children a woman gives birth to in her lifetime. As per experts, TFR of 2.1 is the replacement rate, implying neither an increase nor a decrease in population. More importantly, from the RSS perspective, considerable decline has been noticed in the Muslim population growth rate. In the decade 2001-11, the rate declined by 4.7 per cent, as compared to the decline of 3.1 per cent in the Hindu population growth rate. Evidently, the overall decline is the result of growing prosperity and spread of education and awareness among all communities. Against this backdrop, concerns over population rise and "balance on religious basis" appear to be overblown. Similarly, religious "conversions by force, lure or greed" are not such big problems that a major organisation should be worried about. Especially because the BJP is in power at the Centre and in many states; many states also have laws prohibiting forced conversions.

Such remarks are also not in consonance with the Muslim outreach efforts made by the RSS, including Bhagwat, in the last few weeks. Recently, he met a group of eminent Muslims from various walks of life.

In June, he had also tried to rein in the saffron zealots not to "look for a Shivling in every mosque (har masjid me Shivling kyun dekhna)." This statement was made as the controversy over the Gyanvapi mosque raged. In a nutshell, Bhagwat should avoid making statements which may further anger the excitable saffron enthusiasts. As it is, their words and actions have had a chilling effect on Muslims. Government machinery, especially those who are expected to uphold the law, doesn't make things easier. A video doing the rounds on social media is that of cops in full public view thrashing a few men, said to be Muslims, in Gujarat's Kheda district. The men, who allegedly attacked a Garba event, were held against an electric pole in the village square and beaten. Worse, the cops were cheered on by the onlookers. Human dignity, civil rights, innocent until proven guilty, the rule of law—such concepts seem to be vanishing. The RSS website talks about "keeping aflame the spirit of freedom." Accordingly, it should condemn the Kheda incident. Also, it must regularly focus on such real issues as inflation and unemployment, as its leader Dattatreya Hosabale did, instead of raising the bogeyman of growing Muslim population.



Devotees carry idol of Devi Durga for immersion on the last day of Durga Puja festival, in South Dinajpur

PTI

5G must be evaluated

Though 5G would be a game changer its ill effects on the human health must be evaluated and made known to the public

The wait for 5G is over as Airtel 5G services have started rolling out in India. 5G was launched on the first day of the Indian Mobile Congress (IMC) 2022 by Prime Minister Narendra Modi on 1st October. All the major telecom companies- Airtel, Jio, and Vi are in the process of rolling out 5G services. Airtel has taken the lead and giving its 5G services in major metros. The Jio and Vi would be offering these services soon. There is a lot of hype about the rollout of 5G and it is being touted as the next big thing in the telecom sector. It is a successor to 4G, the fifth-generation technology brings a host of improvements and capabilities. But its major advantage over 4G is its speed which makes significantly faster downloads and uploads possible and, allows simultaneous 4K streaming. Besides, 5G can be of great use for businesses and other facilities such as telemedicine, telesurgery, self-driving cars, remote surveillance, cloud computing, and location tracking. Though no denying the fact that this is the march of technology and cannot be stopped and also has distinct advantages over existing 4G networks, it has its downside too which should not be ignored or hidden from the public domain.

Most governments are ignoring the risks to human health and the environment caused by 5G radiation. The International Agency for Research on Cancer (IARC) at the World Health Organization (WHO) has classified RF radiation in the frequency range of 30 kHz to 300 GHz to be a 'possible' human carcinogen, Group 2B (1,2). Since there is a lack of data and research on the subject government's the world over are opting for 5G, ignoring the previous research available on the subject which link high Radio Frequency and Electromagnetic Field (EMF) to tissue heating, cognitive functions, and cancer. As things stand today, indepth research must be commissioned to study the ill effects of 5G on human health. With so much money riding on it, there is a slim chance of that happening. The big players in the telecom would ensure that but as the public, we must be cautious before opting for 5G services. In any case, most of us could well do with 4G.

Mahsa Amini is a salute to women

The death of 22-year-old Amini has sparked global outrage. It raises serious questions on the sorry state of affairs of Iranian women.

Did you know that letting your hair blow in the wind is a crime in Iran?", asked a woman protesting in Tehran. The words are poignant, and hard-hitting and capture the angst of Iranian women, their agony, state of despair, and desire to live freely and independently with dignity.

In an era where women are shaping the world, it is indeed heart-wrenching to know that a 22-year-old woman in Iran died a tragic, misogynistic death for not covering her head properly with a hijab. MahsaAmini, a young girl, was stopped by the morality police of Iran for wearing the hijab loosely over her head and taken to a police station to re-educate her on how she should dress properly. Some reports say her death was caused by a skull fracture from heavy blows to the head, however, Iran's morality police claim Amini collapsed from a heart attack.

Whatever the cause of Amini's death, one thing is clear, she died under mysterious, unfavourable, and unfair circumstances. Streets of Tehran have been lit with pyres of hijab and hair of women since then. The outburst is almost like a revolution that should shake the conscience of the world, for its time humanity decided, cutting across boundaries of religions and regions, and the basic and essential human rights.

Aggrieved and hapless, the plight of AmjadAmini, the father of the victim, can't be imagined. He tells the mullah performing prayers over his daughter's dead body, "Your religion denounced her, now you've come to pray over her? Aren't you ashamed of yourself? You killed her for two strands of hair! ... Take your religion and go." The words "You killed her for two strands of hair" stand out, for they paint a telling picture of the sorry state of affairs for women in Iran.

The episode indeed begs some serious questions: Why in



the 21st century are women being told how to dress? Who are these so-called custodians of religion who have taken on the mantle to police women on how they should dress? Why does a father have to bear the loss of an innocent child for no fault of hers? And how justified is it on the part of the authorities in various parts of the world to keep women in shackles in the name of religion?

Women in Iran are not fighting the hijab, but the imposition of it. Hijab was enforced upon women to promote modest clothing and prevent any unwanted sexual advances from the opposite sex. It is ironic how a diktat issued to seemingly protect women has in reality curtailed their liberty and even threatened their life. A society can never make progress, and be truly free and independent if women in it live subjugated lives like second-class citizens.

Interestingly, this is not the first time that Iranian women are fighting against the compulsion of hijab. Post

THE EPISODE INDEED BEGS SOME SERIOUS QUESTIONS: WHY IN THE 21ST CENTURY ARE WOMEN BEING TOLD HOW TO DRESS? WHO ARE THESE SO-CALLED CUSTODIANS OF RELIGION WHO HAVE TAKEN ON THE MANTLE TO POLICE WOMEN ON HOW THEY SHOULD DRESS?

the Iranian revolution, women were forced to wear hijabs in public. Later in 1983, they needed to wear headscarves. If they failed to do so, they were subjected to beatings which were eventually substituted with fines and jail terms. What is disgusting is that all of it was done in the name of religion.

MasihAlinejad, an Iranian-American journalist, in an interview with a digital news portal, mentioned how women in Iran were fed stories from early on as to how if they don't wear hijab, they would go to hell. For women all over the world, this would seem appalling and shocking, but for Iranian women, among many other Muslim women, this is a reality that they continue to live with. To be sure, one is not arguing here that women must not wear hijabs. At the end of the day, every woman has the autonomy to take a call concerning what she wants to wear. However, the act of instilling fear in women from a young age is condemnable.

This is the time when feminists all over the world, cutting across nationalities and religions, must stand in unison with those protesting in Iran for the sake of humanity. This is the time to appreciate and support protesting women in Iran in their endeavor to live freely and with dignity. Most of them have lived a good share of their lives behind a veil, which is akin to living in a box and not knowing what it is like to be outside of it. To their credit, they have shown exemplary zeal to put up a fight for the life they want to live. What they need now is support. The question is who is going to fight alongside them? They need encouragement, liberation, and the chance to come into their own to experience life. That can only happen if voices from all over the world speak for the cause, consistently and forcefully.

(The writer is a post-graduate in Journalism and Mass Communication and keenly follows and writes on news pertaining to women rights. The views expressed are personal.)

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

NO DELIVERY OF RATION AT DOORSTEP

Sir — It has been reported that the judiciary has set aside schemes of the Delhi and West Bengal governments to deliver rations to beneficiaries at their doorstep. In the case of Delhi, the High Court has interpreted that the state cannot use the centre's grain for the scheme. In the case of Kolkata, the High Court has observed that there is a lack of provision in the law to engage ration shop dealers for doorstep delivery of rations. Ration shops under the control of the government cannot make door deliveries to the buyers of the foodgrains or other commodities unless the law relates to the distribution of ration permits for door deliveries.

Private entrepreneurs and grocers are now locked in competition and they supply groceries at the doorstep of the buyers. No extra charge is levied for door delivery. Private companies are driven by profit motives. Therefore they offer services apparently for free in some cases. In the case of the government, even if the government offers free services, services cannot be obtained without greasing the palm of the employees deployed to render the service to the people. Examples are plenty. Transportation of gas cylinders to the doorstep is free. But an extra amount has to be paid to the deliverer off the record. In government hospitals, no charge is payable for an ambulance. But tips have to be paid to the driver. Paid or free, doorstep delivery of goods is not unworkable.

KV Seetharamaiah | Bengaluru

THE MURDER OF HEMANT K LOHIA

Sir — Shocked to read the murder of Hemant K Lohia, one of the country's senior-most IPS officers, was found in his official residence on Monday night. The guards stationed outside his house saw smoke emanating from one of the rooms after which they broke open the door and found his body on fire. He was later declared dead.

He was strangled before his neck was slit

The decline in exports is worrisome



India's goods exports dropped 3.5% in September to \$32.62 billion, while imports slid below \$60 billion for the first time in seven months to \$59.35 billion, 5.44% higher than a year ago. The trade deficit stood at \$26.73 billion for the month. This is the first contraction in exports since February 2021 and the trade deficit is almost 19% higher than a year ago. While highlighting that the trade deficit

in September was "an improvement over the trade deficit of \$28.68 Billion in August 2022", the Ministry explained that India's "export in certain sectors has seen a decline on account of slowdown in some developed economies and a consequential slowdown in demands" while "certain measures to contain domestic inflation and domestic food security concerns have also impacted exports". Non-petroleum, non-gems and jewelry exports contracted 9.78% in September to \$22.9 billion, from \$25.38 billion a year ago, while imports of such products grew 16.78% to hit \$36.5 billion from \$31.26 billion a year ago.

This is the first decline in exports since February 2021 and the trade deficit is almost 19% higher than a year ago.

C.K. Subramaniam | Navi Mumbai

by a broken ketchup bottle. He was also set on fire. He was Jammu and Kashmir's Director General of Prisons and had a three-decade-long illustrious career. He once stalled a suicide attack at Srinagar's Lal Chowk. He took part in various anti-terror operations before he was appointed as DG of the prison. The police suspect that Jasir, his domestic help, is involved in the murder. The terror group has allegedly taken responsibility for the alleged murder on social media. Terrorists have been attacking civilians in the valley over the last few months. Several civilians including teachers and businessmen have died in terror attacks this year. Police are investigating the link between Jasir with any terror groups.

Bhagwan Thadani | Mumbai

5G IS HERE

Sir — This refers to the 'Dawn of a new era' (Oct 2). The picture of the Prime Minister of India during the inauguration of the 6th India Mobile Congress in New Delhi marks and harbingers the beginning of a new era and presents the sea and an infinite sky of opportunities as a glad tiding and a matter

of great pride. With 5G, India has set a global standard in telecom technology for the first time India earned universally and globally acclaim and accolades to its credit. It is indeed a red letter day for the world's largest economy.

Our Incredible India has ultimately succeeded and surpassed foreign countries for technology by rolling out 5G telecom services and will no longer be dependent upon foreign countries' technology for 2G, 3G, and 4G telecom services. Undoubtedly our Incredible India is growing and progressing by leaps and bounds in the field of science and technology. The 5G telephony services possess distinguishing qualities and device characteristics to provide ultra high-speed internet on mobile phones. It holds the promise of revolutionising sectors from Healthcare and education to agriculture and disaster monitoring. Our Incredible India has certainly achieved stupendous success and reached the pinnacle of excellence.

Zubair Khan | Hyderabad

Send your feedback to: letterstopioneer@gmail.com

SOUND BITE

We are connecting the financial capitals of Madhya Pradesh and Chhattisgarh (via a Bilaspur-Indore flight).

Union Minister —Jyotiraditya Scindia

It was a sad incident. Personally, I am heartbroken by the death of Mahsa Amini in police custody.

Iran's supreme leader —Ayatollah Ali Khamenei

This year has been blessed by Maa Durga. Our baby is going to arrive soon.

Actor —Bipasha Basu Singh Grover

Yes, we've not bowled well at the death in the last five-six games. That's where the game is decided.

Indian skipper —Rohit Sharma

I agree with Mallikarjun Kharge ji that all of us in the Congress wish to take on the BJP rather than each other.

Cong chief's post candidate —Shashi Tharoor

FIRST COLUMN

LIC VALUATION BASED ON EMBEDDED VALUE

Investors must remember market rewards good performance



S KALYANASUNDARAM

Life Insurance Corporation of India came up with its mega initial public offering (IPO) in the month of May to mobilize more than ₹20,000 crore. The government offloaded its stake to the extent of 3.5 per cent (22.13 crore shares). The issue price was ₹949 and the LIC of India was making a tall claim that its valuation is much more based on the embedded value, which is normally applied while valuing insurance business all over the world. But the issue price was steep high when compared with other Insurance companies based on the basis of book value and earnings per share. The market price is hovering around ₹620 of LIC now.

In an interview in June 2022, MR Kumar, Chairman, LIC said, “People should not be worried about immediate performance. The market is down for many other factors - the war, global risk-off in financial assets, monetary tightening. As the market improves, our share price will also improve. Investors should be patient.”

Meanwhile, JP Morgan initiated a coverage on LIC with an overweight rating and a target price of ₹840 for March 2023. JP Morgan said, “It is the cheapest stock in our insurance coverage at 0.75x FY23E EV (embedded value). Private-sector insurers are trading at a premium of 2-3x, but are growing faster and have a long track record of disclosures as compared to just one EV data point for LIC.”

That said, LIC’s discounted valuation and simple product structure makes it too cheap to ignore on valuation, stated the brokerage. Motilal Oswal has put a target of ₹830 for the scrip. Mutual Fund holdings decreased from 0.80 per cent to 0.74 per cent in June 22 quarter and FII/FPI decreased holding from 0.22 per cent to 0.12 per cent in June 22 quarter.



It seems that the IPO valuation of LIC as well as the present valuation by research houses is based on the embedded value. Embedded value, by definition, is the sum of the net asset value and present value of future profits of a life insurance company. We must understand that the embedded value is only a best estimate. In the future, there may be differences between the assumptions used in the calculation and the reality.

With its advantages and disadvantages, the embedded value is a portion of a whole and it must be taken this way. This is another tool for the investment community, which in addition to price to book value, rate of return on equity, earning by source and price to earnings ratio, adds value to a company.

The investors must remember that the market always rewards good performance of companies and punishes the mediocre and poor performers. For the quarter ended June 22 the total income of LIC of India has fallen to ₹68070 crore from its previous quarter figure of ₹211325.61 crore.

When we make a comparison of LIC with other life insurers in terms of PE ratio, book value to price ratio and also dividend yield, we cannot be optimistic about the recovery of this scrip. As on October 3, 2022, Price Earnings Ratio of LIC of India is 83.08, whereas for ICICI Prudential it is 66.65 only. The Price to Book Value ratio for LIC of India is 37.70. For HDFC Life, ICICI Prudential and SBI Life, it was 7.02, 8.00 and 10.65 respectively.

(The author is a retired banker)

Forced scrappage of a fit vehicle is arbitrary



UTTAM GUPTA

For vehicle scrappage, incentive and not force should be the way, as people with limited income may suffer

In an unprecedented order delivered in 2014, the National Green Tribunal (NGT) had prohibited petrol vehicles older than 15 years and diesel vehicles older than 10-year from plying in the National Capital Region (NCR). The order was upheld by the Supreme Court (SC) in its pronouncement on October 29, 2018.

As for compliance, eight years after the NGT order and four years after SC validation, nearly 4,000,000 such vehicles continue to ply on the roads of the national capital. These include 500,000 diesel-run vehicles and 3,500,000 petrol-run.

The transport authorities have reportedly swung into action impounding around 60 such vehicles every day and sending for scrap. At this pace, it will take 23 years to send them all for scrap. Another 161 years will be needed to junk all petrol-run vehicles taking the total to 184 years.

The above numbers will hold only when the pace (impounding 60 vehicles a day) is sustained throughout the year. In reality, the authorities run the drive for just about three months albeit during the winter when normally the scare of pollution intensifies. This will lead to a more bizarre scenario whereby clearing the entire backlog of 4000,000 vehicles would require 736 years.

This apart, the order is bedeviled with several inconsistencies and contradictions. First, the extant law in Delhi provides for renewal of registration of a petrol run vehicle on completion of 15 years from the date of first registration for a further period of 5 years. If the stance of Delhi government is in sync with the NGT/SC order, it ought to have amended the law to disallow extension of registration. But, it hasn’t; instead, it was contemplating filing a revision petition.

Second, the order infringes on the fundamental right (Article 21) of a person resident in Delhi to lead a decent life - by declaring a vehicle as unfit to run on extraneous consideration (read: likely impact on pollution in the city) ignoring the existing law which permits extension of registration by five years.

Even so, pollution exceeding the prescribed threshold is the net result of a combination of a number of factors such as industrial effluents, dust, and construction. The pollution resulting from vehicular movement is only one of them and can’t be used as a potent argument to penalize vehicle owners to a point of even infringing on their fundamental right to have a decent living.

Majority of the over-aged car owners belong to the middle or lower middle class, their resource position being pretty tight. They had financed the purchase of their vehicle from a loan. Many of them may have only recently completed servicing that loan. Indeed, from 16th year onward is the phase when their stress level



POLLUTION EXCEEDING THE PRESCRIBED THRESHOLD IS THE NET RESULT OF A COMBINATION OF A NUMBER OF FACTORS SUCH AS INDUSTRIAL EFFLUENTS, DUST, AND CONSTRUCTION. THE POLLUTION RESULTING FROM VEHICULAR MOVEMENT IS ONLY ONE OF THEM

(The author is a policy analyst)



begins to ease. If, around the same time, they are forced to scrap the vehicle (courtesy, SC order), and buy a new one, they would have plunged into another round of financial nightmare.

Third, the order seeks to penalize vehicle owners retrospectively. For instance, consider a person who bought a petrol-run car, say, on January 1, 2008. She did her financial calculation on the premise that she would be able to run it for 20 years (original registration for 15 years plus five years for extension), i.e. till January 1, 2028. This was in sync with the prevailing law of the land. Now, in view of the SC order, she will have to junk it prematurely on January 1, 2023.

Fourth, the order presumes that all cars ‘automatically’ become unfit for plying after completing 15 years. Whether a vehicle is fit to run or otherwise, a lot depends on how well it is maintained, its timely upkeep and maintenance; this needs to be tested instead of pronouncing it as unfit based on sweeping generalization and merely because it has reached a certain age.

Fifth, it leads to patent discrimination of vehicle owners in the NCR vis-à-vis those in other states. While the former have no option but to dump their cars on completion of 15 years (even when these are fit to run and meet pollution norms), the latter can continue to run their cars up to 20 years and even beyond.

Meanwhile, on March 18, 2021, the Union Minister for road, transport and highways Nitin Gadkari had announced in the Lok Sabha a ‘voluntary’ vehicle scrappage policy. The policy architecture is founded on two major pillars viz. incentivize owners of aged vehicles to scrap and dis-incentivize hanging on to them.

Under the policy, the owner going for scrap will get 4-6 per cent of ex-showroom price of the new vehicle as compensation (call it scrap compensation); five per cent discount on purchase of the new vehicle; rebate on road tax @25 per cent for personal vehicle (generally, states collect this tax @4%, so 25 per cent rebate comes to one per cent). The policy also moots waiver of the registration fee for new vehicles purchased on production of ‘scrap certificate’ issued against scrapped vehicles.

As for the disincentives for hanging on, the policy suggests hike in fee for renewal of registration (Rs 5000/- for a car & 15 years up from Rs 600/- at present) and fitness certificate renewal fees, stiff penalties for delay in renewals and imposition of the so called ‘green tax’ by states on such vehicles.

All personal vehicles will have to undergo mandatory automated fitness tests after 20 years to ply on the roads (for commercial vehicles, the threshold is 15 years). If they don’t pass, those vehicles will be de-registered and impounded by the transport

authorities, pronouncing it as ‘end of life vehicle’. Those more than 15 years but less than 20 years will get registration renewed sans test.

The objective of the policy is to incentivize all aged vehicle owners irrespective of their location, pan India, to dispose of in the interest of protecting the environment. This is the way to go though there is need for some tweaking to make it sufficiently attractive; for instance, exempting new vehicles purchased against scrapped old vehicles from levy of Goods and Services Tax or GST – currently levied at 28 per cent – as suggested by Gadkari sometime back.

But, the order of SC/NGT renders the ‘voluntary’ vehicle scrappage policy infructuous in so far as the NCR is concerned. When there is prohibition on running the car beyond 15 years, the very mention of the word ‘voluntary’ is laughable. The Union Government should take urgent steps to correct the anomalous situation created by the order. It may either approach the top court to relent; alternatively, bring about necessary amendment in the Motor Vehicles Act (MVA) to reflect the policy intent, i.e., use fitness as the sole criterion for deciding ‘whether a vehicle can be allowed to run’. However, the transport authorities must ensure that only those vehicles which pass the test—as per specified norms—are allowed.

POINT COUNTERPOINT

THE SHIVAJI PARK MEETING WILL SEE A HISTORIC RESPONSE. THE SIMMERING ANGER AMONGST PEOPLE WILL COME TO THE FORE. —LOK SABHA MP (THACKERAY CAMP) ARVIND SAWANT



MOST OF THE ELECTED REPRESENTATIVES ARE HERE. SO THIS WILL NATURALLY LEAD TO A HUGE TURNOUT AT THE PUBLIC MEETING. —FORMER MLC KIRAN PAWASKAR

Ukraine is staging spectacular fight against Russia

The US-led allies have helped Ukraine with precision weaponry to push back Russia, but the battle is still on

The US has played a quiet but crucial role as Ukrainian troops have made stunning gains in a counteroffensive that dealt an embarrassing blow to the Russian forces. Kyiv’s military strategy, which has allowed it to take back thousands of kilometers of Russian-occupied territory within days, is attributable to astute planning with the help of the US war modeling and expertise.

In addition, artillery and heavy weapons provided by the US have provided immediate firepower and long-term confidence that Ukraine’s troops will remain equipped for the longer fight. The gains are part of a two-front counteroffensive that began at the start of September and made a major headway — particular-



PK VASUDEVA

(The author is a retired professor of international trade)

ly in Kharkiv, where Ukrainian troops’ lightning-fast advance seemed to catch Russians forces on the back foot and forced them to rapidly retreat.

President Volodymyr Zelenskyy said earlier that the Ukrainian forces had retaken 6,000 square kilometers (2,317 square miles) of Russian-held territory since the beginning of the month — about 3,400 kilometers (2,113 miles) of that in the north just in the last week. The counteroffensive was the result of months of discussions, war strategizing and intelligence sharing between senior US and Ukrainian officials, as well as a steady buildup of Ukrainian firepower with the help of the US weapons shipments, according to defence officials and experts. Zelenskyy in midsummer

relayed to his top military brass that he wanted to make a major push to show that Ukraine could kick back at the Russian incursion, and he had his generals create a plan for a broad offensive across the south and east, reported CNN. The strategy, which was then shared with the US defense officials, was assessed to likely fail, and the Ukrainians went back to the drawing board, according to The New York Times.

The US weapons, including precision armaments such as the High Mobility Artillery Rocket System, which allows the Ukrainians to precisely strike and take out high-value Kremlin targets, and then bolstered the carefully planned operations said Steven Horrell, a senior fellow at the Center for

European Policy Analysis.

The US has committed nearly \$15 billion in lethal aid to Ukraine since the start of the February 24 Russian invasion, and since April, the US government has also led a 50-country effort known as the Ukraine Contact Group to coordinate the flow of military assistance to Kyiv.

Despite Ukraine’s successes — with country officials calling it one of the major turning points of the war — others have warned the fight is still far from over. United Nations Secretary-General António Guterres said he thinks a peace deal to end the conflict isn’t likely anytime soon. The US defence officials point out that the Russians still have large amounts of manpower and weapons in Ukraine and still

hold important territory, including key cities and towns in the easternmost Luhansk region.

Secretary of State Antony Blinken authorized the 21st shipment of military munitions from the US to Ukraine since September 2021, which will include arms and other equipment from the Defence Department. A statement from the Department of Defence said the package included more ammunition for High Mobility Artillery Rocket Systems (HIMARS); 36,000 105mm artillery rounds; 1,000 precision-guided 155mm artillery rounds; and four counter-artillery radars, among other equipment.

Russian President Vladimir V. Putin on September 30 asserted that

Russia would take control of four Ukrainian regions and decried the United States for “Satanism” in a speech that marked an escalation in Moscow’s war against Ukraine.

Speaking to hundreds of Russian lawmakers and Governors in a grand Kremlin hall, Putin said that the residents of the four regions — which are still partially controlled by Ukrainian forces — would become Russia’s citizens “forever”. Putin’s address came against a backdrop of Russian embarrassments on the battlefield, where Ukraine’s forces have scored stunning victories in recent weeks in the east. Even as the Russian leader spoke, officials said the Ukrainian army had moved closer to encircling the Russian-occupied town of

Lyman, a strategically important hub in the Donetsk region that lies inside the territory Putin is claiming.

Putin hinted that the role of nuclear weapons in war is on his mind. Describing the West as “deceitful and hypocritical through and through”, Putin noted that the United States was the only country to have used nuclear weapons in a war. The situation in Ukraine is extremely volcanic and the chances of nuclear war cannot be ruled out if Russia continues to feel embarrassed for reverses in Ukraine. Therefore the UN Security Council must go all out for a ceasefire. Prime Minister Narendra Modi can act as a mediator to avoid nuclear catastrophe because he has good relations both with Russia and the US.

Putin signs annexation of Ukrainian regions as losses mount

AP ■ KYIV

Russian President Vladimir Putin has signed laws formally absorbing four Ukrainian regions into Russia, even as its military struggles to control the territory that was illegally annexed.

The documents finalizing the annexation, carried out in defiance of international laws, were published on a Russian government website on Wednesday morning.

Earlier this week, both houses of the Russian parliament ratified treaties making the Donetsk, Luhansk, Kherson and Zaporizhzhia regions part of Russia. That followed Kremlin-orchestrated “referendums” in the four regions that Ukraine and the West have rejected as a sham.

On the ground, Moscow’s war in Ukraine has entered a new, more dangerous phase. Russia faces mounting setbacks, with Ukrainian forces retaking more and more land in the east and in the south — the very regions Moscow has pushed to annex.

The borders of the territories Russia is claiming still remain unclear, but the Kremlin has vowed to defend Russia’s territory — the newly absorbed regions too — with any means at its disposal, including nuclear weapons.



Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy responded to the annexation by announcing a fast-track application to join NATO and formally ruling out talks with Russia. Zelenskyy’s decree, released Tuesday, declares that holding negotiations with Putin has become impossible after his decision to take over the four regions of Ukraine.

The head of Zelenskyy’s office, Andriy Yermak, wrote on his Telegram channel shortly after Putin signed the annexation that “the worthless deci-

sions of the terrorist country (Russia) are not worth the paper they are signed on. “A collective insane asylum can continue to live in a fictional world,” he added.

Russia and Ukraine gave conflicting assessments Wednesday of a Ukrainian offensive in the strategic southern Kherson region — one of the four areas that Russia is annexing.

A Russian-installed official in the Kherson region insisted that Ukrainian advances in the region have been halted.

Kirill Stremousov, in comments to the state-run news agency RIA Novosti, said that “as of this morning ... There are no movements” by Kyiv’s forces. He vowed that “they won’t enter (the city of) Kherson, it is impossible.”

However, Kyiv’s military said Wednesday they have recaptured more villages in the Kherson region as a part of their massive counteroffensive effort. Operational Command South said that the Ukrainian flag has been raised above seven villages previously occu-

pled by the Russians. Military hospitals are full of wounded Russian soldiers, and Russian military medics lack medications, wrote Deputy Head of Kherson regional administration Yurii Sobolevskiy on Telegram. After the condition of Russian soldiers stabilizes, they are sent for further treatment in Crimea. “Not everyone arrives,” he wrote.

On the battlefield on Wednesday morning, multiple explosions rocked Bila Tserkva, setting off fires at what were described as infrastructure

Kyiv dismisses Russia’s annexation of Ukrainian regions as ‘worthless’

AP ■ KYIV

Kyiv has dismissed as “worthless” the laws that Russian President Vladimir Putin signed on Wednesday formalising the annexation of four Ukrainian regions into Russia.

“The worthless decisions of the terrorist country are not worth the paper they are signed on,” the head of the Ukraine President’s Office, Andriy Yermak, said on Telegram messaging application. “A collective insane asylum can continue to live in

a fictional world.”

President Volodymyr Zelenskyy earlier said in his nightly address that he has signed a decree rendering void any of Putin’s acts designed to annex Ukrainian territories since the annexation of Crimea in 2014.

“Any Russian decisions, any treaties with which they try to seize our land — all this is worthless,” Zelenskyy said at the end of his video address.

Russian energy company Gazprom says it is resuming gas supplies to Italy after

reaching an agreement for transit through Austria.

The Russian government-controlled company had suspended delivery to Italy through Austria last week citing regulatory changes that came into effect in the Alpine nation last month.

In a statement on Wednesday, Gazprom said the operator of an Austrian pipeline has indicated its willingness to handle the transit of gas to Italy “making it possible to resume the supplies of Russian gas across Austria”.

Experts: Russia finding new ways to spread propaganda videos

DAVID KLEPPER, ASSOCIATED PRESS

Russia has devised yet another way to spread disinformation about its invasion of Ukraine, using digital tricks that allow its war propaganda videos to evade restrictions imposed by governments and tech companies.

Accounts linked to Russian state-controlled media have used the new method to spread dozens of videos in 18 different languages, all without leaving telltale signs that would give away the source, researchers at Nisos, a U.S.-based intelligence firm that tracks disinformation and other cyber threats, said in a report released Wednesday.

The videos push Kremlin conspiracy theories blaming Ukraine for civilian casualties as well as claims that residents of areas forcibly annexed by Russia have welcomed their occupiers.

English-language versions of the Russian propaganda videos are now circulating on Twitter and

lesser-known platforms popular with American conservatives, including Gab and Truth Social, created by former President Donald Trump, giving Russia a direct conduit to millions of people.

In an indication of the Kremlin’s ambitions and the sprawling reach of its disinformation operations, versions of the videos were also created in Spanish, Italian, German and more than a dozen other languages. “The genius of this approach is that the videos can be downloaded directly from Telegram and it erases the trail that researchers try to follow,” Nisos’ senior intelligence analyst Patricia Bailey told The Associated Press. “They are creative and adaptable. And they are analyzing their audience.”

The European Union moved to ban RT and Sputnik, two of Russia’s leading state-run media outlets, after Russia’s invasion of Ukraine in late February. Tech companies such as Google’s YouTube and Meta’s Facebook and Instagram also



announced they would ban content from the outlets within the 27-nation EU, undermining Russia’s ability to spread its propaganda.

Russian attempts to get around the new rules began almost imme-

diately. New websites were created to host videos that make debunked claims about the war. Russian diplomats took on some of the work.

The latest effort revealed by analysts at Nisos involved uploading

propaganda videos to Telegram, a loosely moderated platform that is broadly popular in Eastern Europe and used by many conservatives in the United States. In some cases, watermarks identifying the video as

RT’s were removed in a further attempt to disguise their source.

Once on Telegram, the videos were downloaded and reposted on platforms including Twitter without indications that the video was produced by Russian state media. Hundreds of accounts that later posted or reposted the videos were linked by Nisos researchers to the Russian military, embassies or state media.

Some of the accounts appeared to use fake profile photos or posted content in strange ways that suggested they were inauthentic.

One example: a Twitter account supposedly run by a woman living in Japan that had a singular interest in Russian propaganda. Instead of posting about a variety of topics such as entertainment, food, travel or family, the account user only posted Russian propaganda videos — and not just in Japanese, but also in Farsi, Polish, Spanish and Russian.

The account also cited or reposted content from Russian

embassies hundreds of times, researchers found, showing again the close relationship between Russian diplomats and the country’s propaganda work.

When it comes to Russia’s overall disinformation capabilities, Bailey said, the network is “just one piece of a puzzle that is quite large.”

Last week, Russia sought to spread a baseless conspiracy theory blaming the U.S. for sabotage to the Nord Stream natural gas pipelines in the Baltic Sea.

The same week, Meta announced the discovery of a sprawling Russian disinformation network that created websites designed to look like major European news outlets. Instead of news, the websites carried propaganda intended to drive a wedge between Ukraine and its western allies.

That operation was the largest of its kind to originate in Russia since the war began, researchers concluded.

Estonian PM urges not to give in to Putin’s nuclear threats

AP ■ TALLINN

Estonia’s prime minister said Tuesday that the West must not give in to Moscow’s nuclear threats or premature peace proposals but stand firmly in support of Ukraine as the invaded country fights to rid its occupied territories of Russian soldiers.

Kaja Kallas, who has led Estonia’s government since last year, told The Associated Press in an interview that “very dangerous” calls for negotiations and peace in Ukraine have come from “very prominent people” lately. She didn’t specify anyone by name, but her comments came a day after Tesla CEO Elon Musk floated on Twitter a proposal for ending the war that elicited fierce opposition from Kyiv.

Musk, who has been involved in an on and off and reportedly on again deal to buy the social media platform, argued that Russia should be allowed to keep the Crimean Peninsula that it seized in 2014.

The four regions Russia annexed following Kremlin-orchestrated “referendums” last month should hold repeat votes organised by the United Nations, he said.

Musk also said that to



bring about peace, Ukraine should adopt a neutral status, dropping a bid to join NATO.

In her interview with the AP, Kallas recalled the Soviet occupation of Estonia, during which a significant portion of the country’s political and social elite was imprisoned, deported or killed.

“Even if there is peace, it doesn’t mean that the human suffering for those territories will end,” Kallas said.

Russia’s war in Ukraine appears to have entered a new, more dangerous phase in recent weeks. Russian President Vladimir Putin announced a call-up of military mobilisation of reservists, moved to illegally annex Russian-occupied areas of Ukraine and promised

to defend Russian territory “with any means at our disposal,” including nuclear weapons. Such threats must be taken seriously “but not in a sense that, Oh, let’s give in,” Kallas said, adding that attempts to appease Putin when he escalates may send the signal that “when you threaten, they will give in.”

“The nuclear powers of the world have given a very clear signal to Russia: When you use (the nuclear weapons), there is no way back.”

The prime minister expressed hope that Russia’s embarrassing battlefield setbacks in Ukraine, domestic resistance to Moscow’s military mobilisation and mounting criticism from Putin’s allies

mean “we are seeing the beginning of the end of this war.”

The decision to call up reservists is “meant to intimidate, but it also shows signs of panic on the Russian side, that they have to do this, really. And it’s not going in accordance with the plans,” Kallas said.

Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy made a surprise move to apply for fast-tracked NATO membership in response to Putin signing annexation treaties with the Kremlin-installed leaders of the four regions.

Nine NATO members — including Estonia and the Baltic countries where the war in Ukraine stoked fears about their own security — have backed Ukraine’s path to membership in the Western security alliance. All NATO members need to approve the request, which has been complicated by the fact that Ukraine is currently at war. Kallas reiterated Estonia’s support for Ukraine’s NATO ambitions, even though it’s “a long way from the application to membership.”

She said she expected a difficult winter in Europe, which is suffering the side effects of the war in Ukraine in the form of rising energy costs and sky-rocketing inflation.

Belarus Opposition hopeful at Russian setbacks in Ukraine

AP ■ WARSAW

Belarus’ opposition leader said on Wednesday that she believes Russian military setbacks in Ukraine could shake the hold on power of Belarusian President Alexander Lukashenko.

“We have a distracted Russia that is about to lose this war. It won’t be able to prop Lukashenko up with money and military support as in 2020,” said Sviatlana Tsikhanouskaya, speaking at a security conference in Warsaw.

Tsikhanouskaya fled to Lithuania after Russian ally Alexander Lukashenko claimed victory in disputed August 2020 elections that were viewed in the West as fraudulent, and which many thought she won.

She said that hundreds of Belarusian volunteers have supported Ukrainians in their recent liberation of Ukrainian territory.

“As I speak, a Belarusian battalion is part of Ukraine’s counter-offensive chasing the invaders away. We all understand that the speed of changes at the Ukrainian front opens new opportunities for Belarus. And it’s moving so fast,” she said at the Warsaw Security Forum.

“We keep our fingers



crossed for our military volunteers in Ukraine. Fifteen lost their lives already,” she said.

Russia is facing mounting setbacks in Ukraine as Ukrainian forces retake more and more land in the east and in the south — the very regions Russia has said it seeks to annex.

Tsikhanouskaya hailed the Belarusian partisans who carried out acts of sabotage early in the war on the railway sys-

tem in Belarus to hamper the Russians in their assault on Ukraine, and said Belarusians would continue to oppose the war as they can.

“We are preparing our partisans, you know, to act decisively at this very moment. The acts of sabotage that took place in February and March can be repeated again, though people who are making these acts of sabotage can face death penalty,” she said.



Navalny allies see weakened Kremlin, say they’ll regroup

AP ■ MOSCOW

Top allies of jailed Kremlin critic Alexei Navalny announced on Tuesday that they would reestablish a network of groups across Russia, saying the time was right because the government has been weakened by questions about the war in Ukraine.

“The sleeping majority woke up, Putin himself woke him up,” said Ivan Zhdanov, former director of Navalny’s Foundation for Fighting Corruption, in a YouTube video posted by Navalny’s closest ally and top strategist, Leonid Volkov.

“It’s time for us to restore our network to fight mobilisation and war,” Zhdanov said. Russia ordered a partial mobilisation on September 21 to beef up its troops in Ukraine.

Zhdanov and Volkov said the new network would operate as a “partisan underground,” and participants would remain anonymous for their safety.

Navalny has been jailed in Russia since January 2021 on charges widely seen as politically motivated. Many of his close associates have left Russia, and his group’s political infrastructure — the anti-corruption foundation and a network of regional offices — was destroyed in 2021 after being labeled extremist.

Putin facing further isolation from international community: White House

PTI ■ WASHINGTON

Russian President Vladimir Putin is facing isolation from the international community, the White House said as it took note of Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi’s call to Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy.

“We’re asking that countries around the world, and we’ve been

very clear about that, continue to speak out publicly and continue to engage diplomatically on this as well. And so, I think that’s what you’re seeing from the prime minister (of India),” White House Press Secretary Karine Jean-Pierre told reporters at her daily news conference on Tuesday.

Responding to a question, the press secretary said she doesn’t

have anything to read out on any recent conversation between US President Joe Biden and Prime Minister Modi.

“But his public comments directly to Putin are very clear. Now is not the time for war. And it’s not the time, he was even more specific to that, he said his war, Putin’s war, he was alluding to,” she said.

“Look, Putin is facing further

isolation from international communities as countries make clear that Putin’s decisions do have a lot of sympathy,” Jean-Pierre said.

“When it comes to the potential nuclear threat, we have been very, very clear about that. We take any nuclear weapons or nuclear saber rattling very seriously here,” she said.

“I do want to say that we have

not seen any reason to adjust our own strategic nuclear posture, nor do we have indication that Russia is preparing to imminently use nuclear weapons,” she said.

The Ukrainians, she said, are fighting for their sovereignty.

“This is something that we believe, not just the US, our allies and partners around the world,” she said,

The US is going to continue to make sure that they are there for the Ukrainians, the press secretary said.

“When you’re talking about a country’s democracy, when you’re talking about a country’s freedom, it is important for us to be there and stand with the Ukrainian people. And that’s what you’re going to continue to see,” she said.

Seoul’s reprisal blows up after North Korean missile success

AP ■ SEOUL

A malfunctioning South Korean ballistic missile blew up as it plowed into the ground on Wednesday during a live-fire drill with the United States that was a reprisal for North Korea’s successful launch a day earlier of a weapon that flew over Japan and has the range to strike the US territory of Guam.

The explosion and subsequent fire panicked and confused residents of the coastal city of Gangneung, who were already uneasy over the increasingly provocative weapons tests by rival North Korea.

Their concern that it could be a North Korean attack only grew as the military and government officials provided no explanation about the explosion for hours.

South Korea’s Joint Chiefs of Staff said no injuries were reported from the explosion, which involved a short-range Hymoo-2 missile that crashed inside an air force base on the outskirts of the city.

A Joint Chiefs of Staff official, who spoke on condition of



anonymity during a background briefing, said the missile’s warhead didn’t explode during the crash and that the fire was caused by burning rocket propellant. The official said the missile fell soon after liftoff and that no civilian facilities were affected.

Kwon Seong-dong, a governing party lawmaker representing Gangneung, wrote on Facebook that a “weapons system operated by our blood-like taxpayer money ended up threatening our own people” and called for the military to thoroughly investigate the missile failure.

He also criticized the military for not issuing a notice about the failure while maintaining a media embargo on the joint drills.

“It was an irresponsible response,” Kwon wrote. “They don’t even have an official press release yet.”

South Korea’s military acknowledged the malfunction hours after internet users raised alarm about the blast and posted social media videos showing an orange ball of flames emerging from an area they described as near the air force base. It said it was investigating what caused the

“abnormal flight” of the missile.

Officials at Gangneung’s fire department and city hall said emergency workers were dispatched to the air force base and a nearby army base in response to calls about a possible explosion but were sent back by military officials.

The US and South Korean militaries are conducting the joint exercises to show their ability to deter a North Korean attack on the South.

During Tuesday’s drills, they conducted bombing runs by F-15 strike jets using precision munitions and launched two missiles each that are part of the Army Tactical Missile System.

Seoul’s Joint Chiefs of Staff said the US aircraft carrier USS Ronald Reagan was scheduled to return to waters east of South Korea on Wednesday to demonstrate the allies’ “firm will” to counter North’s continued provocations and threats. The carrier was part of drills last week with South Korea and Japan. The homegrown Hymoo-2 is key to South Korea’s preemptive and retaliatory strike strategies against the North.

Taiwan promises to respond to China’s military flight incursions

AP ■ TAIPEI

Taiwan’s Defence Minister on Wednesday said the island will respond to incursions into its airspace by Chinese warplanes and drones, but gave no details on specific actions.

Responding to questions from legislators, Chiu Kuo-cheng said China’s newly aggressive stance had changed what Taiwan would define as a “first strike” that would necessitate a response.

China stepped up its military exercises, fired missiles into waters near Taiwan and sent warplanes across the dividing line in the Taiwan Strait in response to an August visit to the island by US House Speaker Nancy Pelosi, the highest-ranking American official to visit Taiwan in 25 years.

China denies the existence of the median line in the Taiwan Strait and challenged established norms by firing missiles over Taiwan into Japan’s exclusive economic zone. “We initially said we do not make the first strike ... If they haven’t done the first strike, which means firing a projectile or a missile,” Chiu said. “But the situation has obviously changed.”

Asked by legislator Lo Chih-cheng of the governing Democratic Progressive Party if an incursion into Taiwanese airspace by a Chinese warplane would count as a first strike, Chiu responded in the affirmative.

Taiwan has thus far responded to Chinese incursions into its air defense identification zone by issuing warnings,



scrambling jets and activating anti-air missile defenses. The growing frequency of such incursions has spurred a push in Taiwan to optimize its geographical advantages in resisting a much more powerful foe through asymmetrical warfare, such as the use of mobile weapons systems suited to repelling an invasion force. Russia’s invasion of Ukraine has also brought a new focus on China’s vow to bring Taiwan under its control, by force if necessary.

The vast majority of Taiwanese reject the idea of coming under control of China’s authoritarian one-party Communist system. Russia’s failure to achieve its military goals in Ukraine has been a shot in the arm for those advocating for Taiwan’s counteroffensive against China’s attempts at diplomatic, cultural and economic isolation.

A former Japanese colony, Taiwan separated from mainland China in 1949 as Mao Zedong’s Communists forced Chiang Kai-shek’s Nationalists to relocate across the 180-kilometer (110-mile)-wide Taiwan Strait. China has never renounced its threat to invade and cut off all ties with Taiwan’s government following the election of pro-independence President Tsai Ing-wen in 2016.

Also Wednesday, Deputy Economics Minister Chen Chern-chyi said the government was prepared to ensure adequate supplies of food, energy and other critical goods, including those crucial for the high-tech manufacturing industry, in the event of Chinese aggression.

China’s military drills in August were largely seen as a rehearsal for a potential blockade of the island, a move that would spark a global financial crisis and by law trigger a response from the U.S., Taiwan’s chief ally. “We have a system. We do inventory every month,” Chen told lawmakers. “We will insure we have a certain period of stockpile in Taiwan, including food, including critical supply, minerals, chemicals and energy of course.”

Chen also said Taiwan was firm in safeguarding trade secrets and key national technologies and ensuring its top scientific talent is not poached by China. Export controls are in place to ensure Taiwanese products cannot be used in the Chinese military, he said, adding those measures were being constantly updated in consultation with allied nations and any loopholes were swiftly plugged.

Liz Truss’ first speech as UK PM at Tory meet disrupted by protest

PTI ■ LONDON

The first speech by Liz Truss since taking charge as British Prime Minister to the Conservative Party’s annual Tory conference in Birmingham on Wednesday was disrupted by Greenpeace protesters, who had to be taken away by security.

Two female protesters stood up with a banner reading “Who voted for this?” a few minutes into Truss’ speech to the governing party members, who had voted for her as party leader last month.

The Prime Minister brushed off the protest as action from an “anti-growth coalition” and went ahead to reiterate her central message of a tax-cutting growth agenda.

“As the last few weeks have shown, it will be difficult. Whenever there is change, there is disruption,” said Truss.

“Not everyone will be in favour. But everyone will benefit from the result – a growing economy and a better future... I have three priorities for our economy: growth, growth and growth,” she said, to applause from her party members.



The four-day Tory conference in Birmingham, which concludes on Wednesday, has been overshadowed by internal squabbles within the party over the future direction of the economy as the financial markets were jolted by the Truss-led government’s mini-budget last month.

On the platform that won her the leadership over British Indian former Chancellor Rishi Sunak, the UK PM insisted the country’s tax burden will be lowered and the Tory party will “always be the party of low taxes”.

“Cutting taxes is the right thing to do morally and economically. Morally, because the state does not spend its own money. It spends the people’s. Economically, because if people keep more of their own money, they are inspired to do more of what they do best. This is what grows the economy,” she said.

The 47-year-old Tory leader, who succeeded Boris Johnson in the role, asserted that state intervention makes people feel smaller and means they “feel it’s less worthwhile working the extra hour, going for a better job”.

Referencing her recent troubles with her party backbenchers and a humiliating U-turn on cutting the 45-pence top rate of income tax for the wealthiest, she said that it was a sign that “I get it and I have listened”.

“Let me be clear, we have your back,” she promised.

Truss received a standing ovation from the audience for her commitment to supporting Ukraine in its fight against Russia, saying “Ukraine can, must and will win” the fight for “freedom and democracy”.

Biden to focus on hurricane victims in Florida, not politics

PTI ■ WASHINGTON

President Joe Biden is headed to hurricane-ravaged Florida on Wednesday with a pledge that federal, state and local governments will work as one to help rebuild homes, businesses and lives — putting politics on mute for now to focus on those in need.

Hurricane Ian has resulted in at least 84 people confirmed dead, including 75 in Florida, as hundreds of thousands of people wait for power to be restored. Ian’s 150 mph winds and punishing storm surge last week took out power for 2.6 million in Florida. Many people are unable to access food and water.

Biden planned to meet Wednesday with residents and small business owners in Fort Myers, Florida, and to thank government officials providing emergency aid and removing debris.

With the midterm elections just a month away, the crisis had the potential to bring together political rivals in common cause at least for a time.

Joining Biden in Florida



will be two of his most prominent Republican critics: Florida Gov. Ron DeSantis and Sen. Rick Scott, according to the White House and Scott’s spokesman. White House press secretary Karine Jean-Pierre suggested Tuesday that it would be inappropriate for them to focus on political differences.

“There will be plenty of time, plenty of time, to discuss differences between the president and the governor — but now is not the time,” Jean-Pierre told reporters at a White House briefing. “When it comes to delivering and making sure that the people of Florida have what they need, especially after Hurricane Ian, we are one. We are working as one.”

GOP of US optimistic about Senate chances despite Walker turmoil

AP ■ NEW YORK

Leading Republicans are entering the final month of the mid-term campaign increasingly optimistic that a Senate majority is within reach even as a dramatic family fight in Georgia clouds one of the party’s biggest pickup opportunities.

And as some Democrats crow on social media about apparent Republican setbacks, party strategists privately concede that their own shortcomings may not be outweighed by the Grand Old Party’s (Republicans) mounting challenges.

The evolving outlook is tied to a blunt reality: Democrats have virtually no margin for error as they confront the weight of history, widespread economic concerns and President Joe Biden’s weak standing.

There is broad agreement among both parties that the Democrats’ summertime momentum across states like Nevada, Pennsylvania and Wisconsin has eroded just five weeks before Election Day.



“There’s reason to be apprehensive, not reason to be gloomy,” veteran Democratic strategist James Carville said. “It looked like at the end of August we had a little momentum. I don’t know if we’ve regressed any, but we’re not progressing in many places.”

That tepid outlook comes even as Republicans confront a series of self-imposed setbacks in the states that matter most

in the 2022 midterms, which will decide the balance of power in Congress and statehouses across the nation.

None has been more glaring than Herschel Walker’s struggles in Georgia, where the Republican Senate candidate’s own son accused him of lying about his personal challenges — including a report from The Daily Beast alleging that the anti-abortion Walker paid for a girlfriend’s abortion in 2009. Walker called the accusation a “flat-out lie” and said he would sue, an action his campaign hadn’t taken as of late Tuesday.

“Everything has been a lie,” Christian Walker responded on Tuesday. The Republican establishment, including the Senator Mitch McConnell-aligned Senate Leadership Fund, and former President Donald Trump himself remained staunchly behind Walker on Tuesday in his bid to oust first-term Democratic Senator Raphael Warnock.

The Walker campaign also reported a massive fundraising haul that coincided with the latest allegations.

Trial begins over 2013 train crash that killed 80 in Spain



AP ■ MADRID

A trial opened on Wednesday over a 2013 train accident in Spain that killed 80 passengers and injured 145.

Prosecutors are seeking four-year prison sentences for the train driver and for a former security director at rail infrastructure company ADIF.

On July 24, 2013, a long-distance train derailed and crashed against a concrete wall near the northwestern city of Santiago de Compostela.

The investigation showed the train was travelling at 179 kph (111 mph) on a stretch with an 80 kph (50 mph) speed limit. It was also revealed that the driver was answering a phone call from the conductor moments before the accident. A victims association said that it has taken too long to hold the trial.

“Some of the victims and relatives have died over the years. For them there will never be justice and unfortunately nothing can be done,” they said in a statement reported by Spain’s state news agency EFE.

The victims are claiming damages of 58.6 million euros (USD 57 million).

Lebanese lawmaker demands bank for her ‘trapped’ savings

AP ■ BEIRUT

A Lebanese parliamentarian on Wednesday entered a bank branch near Beirut, demanding some of her trapped savings to cover medical expenses.

Cash-strapped Lebanon in recent weeks has witnessed a surge in depositors storming bank branches to forcefully withdraw their locked savings as the country’s economy continues to spiral. On Tuesday, depositors stormed at least four banks, two of which were armed.

Lebanon’s cash-strapped banks have imposed informal limits on cash withdrawals since late 2019. Since then, three-quarters of the population plunged into poverty, and the Lebanese pound lost some 90 per cent of its value



against the dollar.

Beirut legislator Cynthia Zarazir entered a Byblos Bank branch near the capital, demanding USD 8,500 from her savings to cover expenses for a surgery.

The reformist lawmaker arrived with a lawyer, and for several hours has been negotiating with the bank branch’s management.

“I am a Lebanese citizen

demanding my rights in light of this exceptional situation,” Zarazir told the press and bystanders.

Her lawyer Fouad Debs, a member of legal and advocacy group the Depositors’ Union, told The Associated Press that negotiations are ongoing, and that she has rejected a “ridiculous” proposal to withdraw her savings in Lebanese pounds at a fraction of its dollar value. Meanwhile, dozens of protesters scuffled with riot police near at the Central Bank’s headquarters in Beirut.

And in Byblos, a man fired an assault rifle at the glass facade of a bank branch, after employees did not let him in without an appointment. The general public has commended the bank heists, some even hailing the perpetrators as heroes.

Ethiopia turns over alleged people smuggler to Netherlands

AP ■ THE HAGUE (NETHERLANDS)

Ethiopia has turned over to Dutch judicial authorities a 38-year-old Eritrean man suspected of playing a leading role in a major international criminal network that smuggled Eritreans to the Netherlands.

The journey involved brutal violence — migrants were abused and extorted in camps, prosecutors said in a statement on Wednesday after the suspect was taken into custody by military border police.

Dutch prosecutors said their investigation included cooperation from Italy, Europol, Interpol and the International Criminal Court. The man, whose identity wasn’t released, is suspected of people smuggling from 2014-2020.

“On their way to Europe, victims were beaten, tortured and raped, while they were held in camps in Libya with hundreds of others,” the prosecutors said, adding that several migrants died as a result.

Family members of the migrants in the

“On their way to Europe, victims were beaten, tortured and raped, while they were held in camps in Libya with hundreds of others,” the prosecutors said, adding that several migrants died as a result.

Netherlands were forced to pay large sums of money before the migrants could continue their journey to Europe in “crowded and barely seaworthy boats. Countless migrants did not survive this sea voyage,” prosecutors said. The man extradited to the Netherlands already has been convicted in Ethiopia and sentenced to 18 years.

Prosecutors say he worked with alleged people smuggling kingpin Kidane Zekarias Habtemariam, who was put on the Netherlands most-wanted list last year.

Armed forces to stay out of politics, says Pak Army Gen Bajwa

PTI ■ ISLAMABAD

Pakistan Army chief General Qamar Javed Bajwa has assured the nation that the armed forces have distanced themselves from politics and wanted to continue to do so, according to a media report on Wednesday.

Gen Bajwa, who is in the US, also reiterated his promise to leave office after completing his second three-year term in November, adding that he would fulfill the pledge he made earlier, the Dawn newspaper reported. Chief of the Army Staff (COAS) General Bajwa, 61, would retire on November 29. Bajwa had been given an extension for a second term of three years in 2019.

His remarks came at a lunch hosted at the Pakistan Embassy in Washington.

According to those who attended the event, Bajwa said that the armed forces have distanced themselves from politics and wanted to continue to do so, the newspaper reported.

These remarks came in the wake of former premier Imran Khan making anti-military statements.

Bajwa has held the top post of the Pakistan Army for six years. He was initially appointed in 2016, but after three years of tenure, the then government of Imran Khan in 2019 extended his service for another three years.

The appointment of the Army chief is the sole prerogative of the prime minister. The upcoming appointment of a new Army chief is in the headlines for all the wrong reasons.

Nobel prize for 3 chemists who made molecules ‘click’

AP ■ STOCKHOLM

Three scientists from the United States and Denmark were jointly awarded this year’s Nobel Prize in chemistry for developing a way of “snapping molecules together” that can be used to design better medicines.

Carolyn R. Bertozzi, Morten Meldal and K. Barry Sharpless were cited for their work on click chemistry and bioorthogonal reactions, which are used to make cancer drugs, map DNA and create materials that are tailored to a specific purpose.

“It’s all about snapping molecules together,” said Johan Aqvist, a member of the Royal

Swedish Academy of Sciences that announced the winners Wednesday at the Karolinska Institute in Stockholm, Sweden.

Sharpless, who previously won a Nobel Prize in 2001 and is now the fifth person to receive the award twice, first proposed the idea for connecting molecules using chemical “buckles” around the turn of the millennium, said Aqvist.

“The problem was to find good chemical buckles,” he said. “They have to react with each other easily and specifically.”

Meldal, based at the University of Copenhagen, Denmark, and Sharpless, who is affiliated with Scripps Research, California, indepen-



dently found the first such candidates that would easily snap together with each other but not with other molecules, leading to applications in the manufacture of medicines and polymers.

Bertozzi, who is based at Stanford University in

California, “took click chemistry to a new level,” the Nobel panel said.

She found a way to make click chemistry work inside living organisms without disrupting them, establishing a new method known as bioorthogonal reactions. Such reactions are now used to explore cells, track biological processes and design experimental cancer drugs that work in a more targeted fashion.

Bertozzi said she was “absolutely stunned” to receive the prize.

“I’m still not entirely positive that it’s real, but it’s getting realer by the minute,” she said.

Last year the prize was awarded to scientists Benjamin List and David W.C. MacMillan for finding an ingenious and environmentally cleaner way to build molecules that the Nobel panel said is “already benefiting humankind greatly.”

A week of Nobel Prize announcements kicked off Monday with Swedish scientist

Svante Paabo receiving the award in medicine for unlocking secrets of Neanderthal DNA that provided key insights into our immune system.

Three scientists jointly won the prize in physics Tuesday. Frenchman Alain Aspect, American John F. Clauser and Austrian Anton Zeilinger had shown that tiny particles can retain a connection with each other even when separated, a phenomenon known as quantum entanglement, that can be used for specialized computing and to encrypt information.

The awards continue with literature on Thursday. The 2022 Nobel Peace Prize will be announced on Friday and the economics award on Monday.

WTO says trade growth to slow next yr amid crises

AP ■ GENEVA

The World Trade Organisation is predicting global trade volumes will grow a lackluster 1% next year as crises and challenges weigh on markets, including high energy prices, rising interest rates and uncertainties about Chinese manufacturing output amid the lingering Covid-19 pandemic.

The Geneva-based trade body said Wednesday that the amount of goods shipped between countries are expected to rise 3.5% this year, up from the 3% that WTO anticipated in its first forecast for the year in April.

In 2023, the prediction is for such trade volumes to grow just 1%, down from the 3.4% expected previously.

"The risks are certainly to the downside" next year, WTO Director-General Ngozi Okonjo-Iweala told reporters at its headquarters.

This year, the higher predicted increase in trade volumes stems from better data that arrived in the middle of the year, contributing to a clearer forecast, and a boom in trade volumes from oil- and gas-producing countries in the Middle East as supplies from Russia were shunned and consuming countries sought alternative sources, WTO economists say. The WTO laid out several



factors weighing on trade, including higher energy prices resulting from Russia's war in Ukraine, which prompted a number of countries — including European Union members that are big consumers of Russian oil and gas — to slap economic sanctions on Moscow.

"Today, the global economy faces a multipronged crisis," Okonjo-Iweala said. "Monetary tightening is weighing on growth across much of the world, including in the United States.

In Europe, high energy prices are squeezing households and businesses. And in China, Covid-19 outbreaks continue to disrupt production and ordinary economic life."

"Low-income developing countries in particular face

serious risks from food insecurity and debt distress," she added.

While global trade has rebounded from a deep slump in the early days of the Covid-19 pandemic, U.S. Federal Reserve and other central bank moves to choke off inflation through higher interest rates are likely to have knock-on effects for crucial spending in areas like housing, motor vehicle sales and bond prices, WTO says.

The trade body said, however, that new information from purchasing managers, on final goods prices, and an index of input prices suggested that inflationary pressures "may have peaked" — a factor that could influence decision-making from central bankers in the months ahead.

RBI plans to extensively use AI, ML to improve regulatory supervision

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

The Reserve Bank is planning to extensively use advanced analytics, artificial intelligence and machine learning to analyse its huge database and improve regulatory supervision on banks and NBFCs.

For this purpose, the central bank is also looking to hire external experts.

While the RBI is already using AI and ML in supervisory processes, it now intends to upscale it to ensure that the benefits of advanced analytics can accrue to the Department of Supervision in the central bank. The department has been developing and using linear and a few machine-learned models for supervisory examinations.

The supervisory jurisdiction of the RBI extends over banks, urban cooperative banks (UCB), NBFCs, payment banks, small finance banks, local area banks, credit information companies and select all India financial institutions.

It undertakes continuous supervision of such entities with the help of on-site inspections and off-site monitoring.

The central bank has floated an expression of interest (EoI) for engaging consultants in the use of Advanced Analytics, Artificial Intelligence and Machine Learning for generating supervisory inputs.

"Taking note of the global supervisory applications of AI



& ML applications, this Project has been conceived for use of Advance Analytics and AI/ML to expand analysis of huge data repository with RBI and externally, through the engagement of external experts, which is expected to greatly enhance the effectiveness and sharpness of supervision," it said.

Among other things, the selected consultant will be required to explore and profile data with a supervisory focus. The objective is to enhance the data-driven surveillance capabilities of the Reserve Bank, the EoI said.

Across the world, regulatory and supervisory authorities are using machine learning

techniques (commonly referred to as 'Supertech' and 'regtech') for assisting supervisory and regulatory activities, it added.

Most of these techniques are still exploratory, however, they are rapidly gaining popularity and scale.

On the data collection side, AI and ML technologies are used for real-time data reporting, effective data management and dissemination.

For data analytics, these are being used for monitoring supervised firm-specific risks, including liquidity risks, market risks, credit exposures and concentration risks; misconduct analysis; and mis-selling of products.

India Inc's foreign commercial borrowings rose by 4.6% in Aug

PTI ■ MUMBAI

India Inc's foreign commercial borrowings in August this year rose by nearly 4.6 per cent to USD 2.98 billion, according to the RBI data.

In August 2021, the Indian businesses borrowed USD 2.85 billion in the form of external commercial borrowings.

Of the total borrowings in August this year, over USD 2.47 billion was through the automatic route of raising funds from foreign sources. While more than USD 502.79 million was raised by way of issuing rupee denominated bonds (RDBs) or masala bonds.

Among the major borrowers include mortgage lender HDFC Ltd \$ 1.1 billion for the purpose of sub-lending; FS India Solar Ventures \$500 million for a new project; Fullerton India Credit Co Ltd \$350 million for sub-lending and Toyota Financial Services \$50 million for refinancing of Rupee loans.

No charge for RuPay credit card use on UPI for transaction up to ₹2K: NPCI

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

There will be no charge for RuPay credit card use on Unified Payments Interface (UPI) for transactions up to Rs 2,000 in line with the RBI Direction, a recent NPCI circular said.

RuPay credit card has been operational for the last four years, and all major banks are enabled and are issuing incremental cards for both commercial and retail segments.

"During credit card onboarding on the apps, the device binding and UPI PIN setting process shall include and be construed as customer consent for credit card enablement for all types of transactions," the circular dated October 4 said.

For international transaction enablement, the existing process from the app will apply to credit cards too, the National Payments Corporation of India (NPCI) said in the circular.



Nil Merchant Discount Rate (MDR) would apply for this category up to the transaction amount less than and equal to ₹2,000, it noted.

MDR is the cost paid by a merchant to a bank for accepting payment from their customers via credit or debit cards every time a card is used for payments in their stores. The merchant discount rate is expressed in the percentage of the transaction amount.

"This circular is applicable from the issuance date and members are requested to take note and bring the contents of this circular to the notice of the relevant stakeholders," it said.

‘7.85 L unsold housing stock in top 8 cities in Sept-end’

Builders need 32 months to clear: Report

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

Real estate developers are sitting on around 7.85 lakh unsold housing units across eight major cities and it will take them 32 months to clear these stocks at current sales velocity, according to PropTiger.

However, in Delhi-NCR residential market — which has been adversely impacted due to defaults of many big builders, like Amrapali, Jaypee Infratech and Unitech — it will take 62 months to sell over 1 lakh unsold housing units.

Housing brokerage firm PropTiger.Com data showed that unsold housing inventory has increased to 7,85,260 units as on September 30, 2022 from



7,63,650 unsold units at the end of previous quarter.

The consultant tracks primary housing market of eight cities — Ahmedabad, Delhi NCR (Delhi, Gurugram, Noida, Greater Noida, Ghaziabad, and Faridabad), Chennai, Bengaluru, Hyderabad, Kolkata, Mumbai Metropolitan Region (Boisar, Dombivli, Mumbai, Mazagaon, Panvel, Thane West), and Pune.

Housing sales rose 49 per cent to 83,220 units in July-September 2022 across these eight cities as compared to 55,910 units sold in the corresponding period of the last year.

With revival in housing demand, PropTiger report highlighted that there has been a significant decline in the inventory overhang — the estimated period builders in a particular market are likely to take to sell off their unsold stock at the existing sales velocity — to 32 months in July-September this year from 44 months in Q3 of 2021.

The consultant noted that revival in sales after the second wave of the Covid pandemic has helped in improvement in inventory overhang.

Kolkata has the lowest inventory overhang of 24 months, while Delhi-NCR has the highest 62 months.

Nearly 21 per cent of the unsold inventory across these eight cities falls in ready-to-move-in category.

OPEC+ weighs large oil cutback to boost sagging prices

AP ■ FRANKFURT

The OPEC+ alliance of oil-exporting countries on Wednesday will debate a potentially large cut in the amount of crude it ships to the global economy — a move that could help Russia weather a looming European ban on oil imports and raise gasoline prices for US drivers just ahead of national midterm elections.

Energy ministers from the OPEC cartel, whose leading member is Saudi Arabia, and allied non-members including Russia are meeting in person at the group's Vienna headquarters for the first time since early 2020 at the start of the Covid-19 pandemic.

Russian Deputy Prime Minister Alexander Novak, who has been sanctioned by the



US, was attending the meeting in Austria's capital.

A production cut could benefit Russia by establishing higher prices ahead of a European Union ban on most Russian oil imports, a sanction over the invasion of Ukraine that takes effect at the end of the year, analysts at Commerzbank say.

Russia "will need to find new buyers for its oil when the EU embargo comes into force in early December and will presumably have to make further price concessions to do so," the

analysts wrote in a note. "Higher prices beforehand — boosted by production cuts elsewhere — would therefore doubtless be very welcome."

Moscow also faces a separate push by the US and the other Group of Seven wealthy democracies to impose a price cap on Russian oil by December 5. The EU agreed on Wednesday on new sanctions that are expected to include a price cap on Russian oil, an EU official said.

Oil prices surged this summer as markets worried about the loss of Russian supplies from sanctions over the war in Ukraine, but they slipped as fears about recessions in major economies and China's Covid-19 restrictions weighed on demand for crude.

DLF sells all 292 luxury homes in new project at Gurugram for over ₹1,800 cr

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

Realty major DLF has sold all 292 luxury homes in Gurugram for over ₹1,800 crore within few days of the launch of the project, signalling strong demand despite rise in interest rate on home loans and property prices.

On September 26, DLF had launched its project 'The Grove' located at DLF phase-5 in Gurugram, Haryana.

The company has advertised in leading newspapers that "'The Grove' is now sold out".

According to sources, the project has been completely sold out in just eight days of the launch. The total sales revenue from this project is over Rs



1,800 crore.

Housing sales across all segments -- affordable, mid-income, luxury and super luxury -- have revived significantly after the second wave of the Covid pandemic, which hit India during April-June 2021.

"We have launched a new project which will be low-rise luxury development comprising 292 residences. The total

developable area in this project is 8.5 lakh square feet," DLF Group Executive Director and Chief Business Officer Aakash Ohri had said on September 26.

"We are expecting a sales revenue of ₹1,700-1,800 crore from this project," he had said.

Ohri had noted that properties in DLF phase-5 have shown excellent appreciation in value as well as rentals. More than 50,000 residents already live in DLF5, which features 16 acclaimed premium, luxury and super-luxury residential communities.

On the overall sales bookings of DLF Ltd for 2022-23 fiscal year, he had said that the company has already given guidance of ₹8,000 crore, and "we will stick to that".

Govt plans to auction 22 mineral blocks in next two months

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

The Government plans to auction 22 mineral blocks in Maharashtra, Uttar Pradesh and Goa in November and December.

The mines to be auctioned include six iron ore blocks, three blocks each of limestone and gold, two blocks of bauxite, one block each of copper, phosphorite and glauconite, according to the mines ministry. The notice inviting tenders for the blocks were floated in September. While the mines in Maharashtra will be auctioned next month, those in Uttar Pradesh and Goa will be put on sale in December. So far, more than 180 mineral blocks have been put on sale since the system of auctioning of mineral blocks began. The government started the process of allocating mineral blocks through auctions in 2015-16.

The ministry has expressed hopes of auctioning 500 mines by the end of 2024.

The Centre is aiming to increase the mining sector's contribution to the country's Gross Domestic Product (GDP) to 5 per cent from 2.5 per cent at present. The ministry has also notified the Minerals (Evidence of Mineral Contents) Second Amendment Rules, 2021, and the Mineral (Auction) Fourth Amendment Rules, 2021.

Puri to attend US-India energy dialogue



PTI ■ NEW DELHI

Oil Minister Hardeep Singh Puri will co-chair the ministerial dialogue of the US-India Strategic clean Energy Partnership (USISCEP) in Washington this week, an official statement said on Wednesday.

Puri will lead an official and business delegation to Washington and Houston, the US from October 6-11.

"In Washington, the minister will co-chair the ministerial dialogue of US-India Strategic Clean Energy Partnership (USISCEP), to be held on October 7, 2022, with Jennifer Granholm, Secretary of Energy, USA," it said.

The revamped USISCEP was launched in accordance with the US-India Climate and Clean Energy Agenda 2030 Partnership announced by

Prime Minister Narendra Modi and President Joe Biden at the Leaders' Summit on Climate held in April last year.

The partnership continues to advance energy security and innovation; scaling up emerging clean energy technologies; and deploying technical solutions through 5 pillars - responsible oil and gas, power and energy efficiency, renewable energy, sustainable growth and emerging fuels and technologies.

"The minister will interact with World Bank Officials on climate resilient urban infrastructure. He will also participate in two executive roundtables with the USA India Business Council in Washington and with the US India Strategic Partnership Forum in Houston," the statement said. "The Minister will also hold discussions with CEOs of US-based energy companies."

Tech firm sees 30% growth in e-commerce platforms sales in 1st week of festive season

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

E-commerce platforms during the first week of festive season are estimated to have registered 30 per cent growth year-on-year, inventory and warehouse management tech firm EasyEcom said on Wednesday.

EasyEcom said that e-commerce volume will grow more in Tier-2 and Tier-3 towns compared to Tier-1 cities, with non-metros driving nearly 80 per cent of the total e-commerce sales along with Tier-2 towns adding about 60 per cent to the figure.

"The first week of the festive sales across e-commerce platforms in India will exceed the gross merchandise value on



non-sale days by five times, projecting a figure which will be around 1.3 times up from last year," EasyEcom said.

The company said that its analysis is based on data captured by its software-as-a-service platform which focuses on omnichannel inventory & warehouse management and reconciliations.

The company has seen a 14 per cent growth in product lines on e-commerce platforms.

Mid-course changes in gas pricing to delay investments: Reliance

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

Billionaire Mukesh Ambani's Reliance Industries has told a government-appointed panel reviewing gas pricing that any 'retrograde' move to artificially cap rates will add to fiscal policy instability, delays investment and dent India's attempt to become Atmanirbhar in fuel production.

In a submission to the committee headed by Kirrit Parikh, which has been asked by the Oil Ministry to look at setting a 'fair price to consumers,

the firm detailed how the economics of its about-to-start field in the KG-D6 block, where billions of dollars have been spent to recover reserves lying several kilometres below the seabed, will be impacted under different prices.

The mid-course changes through price caps not just go against pricing and marketing freedom contracts and government policy promises to companies but also add to uncertainty to a fiscal regime which would impact investments, according to sources

briefed on the matter and the presentation.

The government biannually fixes gas prices based on rates prevalent in surplus nations. Rates according to this formula stayed below the breakeven price of \$ 3-3.5 per million British thermal units for six years starting October 2015 but have jumped 5x in the last one year to \$ 8.57 for old fields and \$ 12.46 for difficult fields.

This rise has prompted user industries to complain, following which the ministry set

up a panel to suggest an affordable rate for the users.

The sources said Reliance told the panel that doubling India's production from current levels to cut rising imports and meet the target of raising the share of natural gas in the primary energy basket to 15 per cent by 2030 from the current 6.7 per cent, would require at least ₹2 lakh crore to ₹3 lakh crore investment, which can be viable only if a stable fiscal and contractual regime with market-based pricing is provided.

Gas volume growth to more than halve to 8-10% as cost goes over the roof: Report

PTI ■ MUMBAI

With the cost of natural gas increasing by a steep 40 per cent from this month on top of a steeper 110 per cent hike during April-September, volume growth is seen more than halving to 8-10 per cent this fiscal from the earlier forecast of around 25 per cent, says a report.

Rating agency Crisil sees industrial consumers switching

to other cheaper fuels leading to a demand compression of 10-12 per cent this fiscal, while piped cooking gas demand may fall to 8-10 per cent from an earlier projection of 20-25 per cent as prices since the beginning of this fiscal skyrocketed by 150 per cent.

Based on the administered pricing formula, the oil ministry had on September 30 increased price of natural gas by 40 per cent to an all-time

high of USD 8.57 per mmbtu (metric million British thermal unit) for the second half of the current fiscal. And this hike was after a massive 110 per cent jack-up in the price for the first half ending September.

Gas under the administered pricing mechanism is supplied largely to CNG and domestic piped natural gas consumers, who contribute to 50 per cent and 10 per cent of city gas volume, respectively.

The price for the balance 40 per cent of city gas volume, supplied to industries, have also surged and remain elevated since the Ukraine war.

Over the past 12 months, the average price of liquefied natural gas (LNG) contracts, benchmarked against crude oil prices, rose 45 per cent to \$ 14.5-15 per mmbtu, while spot LNG prices have surged 150 per cent to \$ 38-40/mmbtu.

Inter bounce back to sink Barca

AP ■ MILAN

Hakan Calhanoglu fired Inter Milan to a 1-0 win over Barcelona on Tuesday which ended the Italians' recent troubles and boosted their hopes of making the knock-out stages of the Champions League.

Inter headed into the Group C clash at the San Siro in dreadful form having lost five of the previous 10 matches in all competitions but Turkey midfielder Calhanoglu ended the crisis talk when he lashed in the only goal of the game on the stroke of half-time.

Simone Inzaghi will also be smiling as his position as Inter coach was being discussed before his team won a match which moves them above Barca and into second place in the group.

Inter are now three points ahead of the Catalan giants and the same amount behind leaders Bayern, who smashed Viktoria Plzen 5-0 earlier on Tuesday.

They had to survive a series of scares in the second half, with Ousmane Dembele hitting the post and Pedri having a goal ruled out for handball in the 68th minute following a VAR check as a tired Inter sank back into their own area late on.

But unlike in recent weeks Inzaghi's well-drilled team weren't punished for the few errors they made.

BRUGGE BEAT ATLETICO

Bruges: Surprise package Club Brugge beat Atletico Madrid 2-0 to continue their perfect start to the Champions League.

The Belgian side have won their three opening games without conceding a goal and dominated Diego Simeone's side for much of the game, triumphing thanks to Kamal Sowah and Ferran Jutgla's strikes.

Antoine Griezmann, given a rare start, missed a second-half penalty for Atletico, who are level with Porto and Bayer Leverkusen on three points each, after the German side lost 2-0 in Portugal.

Atletico coach Diego Simeone withdrew Marcos Llorente injured and more bad news quickly followed. Sowah fired the hosts ahead in the 36th minute from former Barcelona forward Jutgla's cut-back across the face of goal. Yannick Carrasco lashed an effort well wide and Griezmann sent a shot into the side-netting as the visitors reacted to the wake-up call.

However the effervescent Buchanan teed up Jutgla to finish with aplomb in the 62nd minute. The 23-year-old striker is in a rich vein of form -- this was his eighth goal in 11 games across all competitions.

Griezmann crashed a penalty off the crossbar after Matheus Cunha was felled in the box, then had a goal ruled out for off-side as Atletico's frustration grew.

Mignolet beat away Joao Felix and Angel Correa efforts in the final stages to secure a noteworthy victory for his team, and leave the 2014 and 2016 runners-up with a lot of



work to do.

SPURS HELD

Frankfurt: Tottenham's strike duo of Harry Kane and Son Hueng-min failed to take advantage of several chances, with Spurs playing out a goalless Champions League draw away at Frankfurt.

Frankfurt dominated the early stages of the match, with Japanese midfielder Daichi Kamada pulling the strings up front while deputising for the injured Mario Goetze.

Captain Sebastian Rode had the home side's best chance of the opening half and was set up just to the right of the penalty spot in the 18th minute, only for Spurs midfielder Ivan Perisic to get his head to a goalbound shot. As the half went on, Tottenham looked more comfortable, appearing to shake themselves out of the funk remaining from their disappointing 3-1 derby defeat against Arsenal on the weekend - their first of the Premier League campaign.

The visitors' best chances of the opening half fell to Kane, but the England captain was unable to connect, scuffing a shot when presented with an open goal in the 39th minute.

Sane double keeps five-star Bayern perfect, Marseille topple Sporting

AP ■ MUNICH

Leroy Sane scored twice as Bayern Munich continued their flawless run in the Champions League on Tuesday with a 5-0 win over outclassed Group C rivals Viktoria Plzen.

But Group D leaders Sporting Lisbon paid for goalkeeping errors in a 4-1 defeat at Marseille which gave the French team their first win of the campaign.

Convincing in Milan against Inter and at home against Barcelona, Bayern shrugged off the absence of Joshua Kimmich and Thomas Mueller, who tested positive for Covid-19 on Saturday.

With nine points, Julian Nagelsmann's side have almost booked their ticket to the knockout phase.

German international Sane struck from a distance after seven minutes past a passive Czech defense, adding a second five minutes after the break.



Between Sane's two goals, Serge Gnabry added a second on 13 minutes following a counter-attack led by Alphonso Davies, Jamal Musiala and

Liverpool outclass Rangers

AP ■ LIVERPOOL

Liverpool put their Premier League problems to one side as goals from Trent Alexander-Arnold and Mohamed Salah secured a comfortable 2-0 win over Rangers at Anfield.

Jurgen Klopp's men had won just three of their first nine Premier League and Champions League games of the season, but could not have asked for more obliging guests as an outclassed Rangers were happy to limit the damage.

Alexander-Arnold's stunning free-kick after only seven minutes could have opened the floodgates, but 40-year-old goalkeeper Allan McGregor kept Rangers in the game until half-time.

Salah's penalty early in the second period ended any doubt over the result to leave Rangers still waiting for their first point in Group A after three games.

Liverpool move three points clear of Ajax, who were thrashed 6-1 at home by group leaders Napoli.

All that was missing for Klopp was a first Anfield goal for Darwin Nunez as the Uruguayan missed a series of glorious chances on his return to the starting line-up.

Alexander-Arnold has also been under intense scrutiny for his lack of defensive qualities during Liverpool's



slow start to the season.

But the right-back showcased his ball striking ability with a sumptuous free-kick into the top corner to settle any Liverpool nerves.



Jabeur eases into 2nd round

AP ■ MONASTIR

Tunisian tennis star Ons Jabeur eased into the second round of her home tournament at Monastir on Tuesday with a straight sets win over American Ann Li. Top seed Jabeur, a finalist at both Wimbledon and the US Open this year, won 6-2, 6-3 in the first ever WTA tour event to be hosted in Tunisia.

The world number two took 73 minutes to dispatch her 67th ranked opponent in their first meeting.

The Monastir tournament, staged on the central coast of Tunisia, is just the second

women's professional circuit organised in Africa, after that of Rabat in Morocco.

Jabeur is hugely popular in north Africa, and the world number two is hoping "to reach the final and win in Monastir to make Tunisians happy".

The 28-year-old, whose ambition is "to be a good example for all the young people who follow her" has won three WTA titles including two this year in Madrid and Berlin.

"Young people must gain self-confidence to achieve their ambitions," said the player dubbed "Minister of Happiness" in a Tunisia hit by a deep political and economic crisis.

Fritz recovers from Covid to oust Duckworth in Tokyo

AP ■ TOKYO

American Taylor Fritz said he surprised even himself after climbing out of his sickbed, flying to Tokyo and beating Australian James Duckworth at the Japan Open on Wednesday.

Fritz spent seven days in quarantine in a Seoul hotel room after getting "pretty sick" upon arriving last week for the Korea Open, which he was forced to withdraw from.

The 24-year-old left South Korea and flew to Japan on Wednesday morning and barely had time to practice before he was due on court for his first-round match against the unseeded Duckworth.

The number three seed still emerged a 6-2, 6-7 (2/7), 6-1 winner and said the match had been "better than I thought it would be".

"I don't feel amazing but I'm really happy that I was able to go through all that and still show up for my match," said



Fritz.

Earlier in the day, Canadian number seven seed Denis Shapovalov beat American Steve Johnson 6-3, 7-6 (7/3).

Shapovalov lost to Japan's Yoshihito Nishioka in the final of last week's Korea Open and he said the Wednesday start to his Tokyo campaign had helped him recover.

"I think the most important thing for me is to feel mentally

fresh," said the world number 22.

"I feel mentally very motivated, and when you do lose in a final it almost motivates you a bit more than winning, to play the next week."

Nishioka was looking to make a triumphant homecoming after winning his second ATP Tour title in Seoul but he lost 2-6, 7-6 (7/1), 6-2 to Serbia's Miomir Kecmanovic.

Ukraine to join Spain and Portugal in 2030 World Cup bid

AP ■ NYON

War-torn Ukraine will join Spain and Portugal in a bid to host the 2030 World Cup, presidents from the three countries' football associations announced on Wednesday.

The original proposal was made public two years ago and the Spanish football association (RFEF) said in a statement the idea was backed by UEFA president Aleksander Ceferin.

"The Royal Spanish Football Federation and the Portuguese Football Federation (FPF) have incorporated the Ukrainian Football Association (UAF) into the Iberian Bid to organise the 2030 World Cup," the RFEF said in a statement.

"With the full support of Aleksander Ceferin, the Iberian bid incorporates the federation chaired by Andriy Pavenko in order to build bridges and project a message of unity, solidarity and generosity from all of European football," it added.

Ronaldo happy at Man Utd despite frustrations: Ten Hag

AP ■ MANCHESTER

Erik ten Hag admitted on Wednesday that Cristiano Ronaldo is frustrated when he is not playing for Manchester United but insisted he is happy at Old Trafford.

The summer transfer window was dominated by speculation over the 37-year-old's future after the club's disappointing campaign in 2021/22.

Ronaldo reportedly received an eye-watering offer from Saudi Arabia, but no Champions League giants made their move for the Portugal attacker, who missed United's pre-season tour of Thailand and Australia due to a family issue.

The forward could start just his fourth match in all competitions when United take on Omonia Nicosia in the Europa League on Thursday.

Ronaldo was left on the bench for Sunday's 6-3 derby hammering at Manchester City, leading to renewed questions about his future before the trip to Cyprus.

"I never talk about my conversations with the players," United manager Ten Hag said at his pre-match press conference.

"They are between us. That's quite clear.

"But when I tell you all the players, when you're here and you're happy, or satisfied, when you're on the bench, this is not a club where you have to be, and especially Cristiano.

"He's really competitive, as we all know. He's not happy of course when he's not playing.

"But I already said and, I have to repeat, he's training well, he has a good mood, he's motivated and he gives his best. That is what we expect."

Ten Hag thanked City manager Pep Guardiola and his team for the reality check dished out at the Etihad.

Erling Haaland and Phil Foden scored hat-tricks in a



match that showed the chasm between Ten Hag's side and back-to-back Premier League champions City.

"Obviously it was a difficult day," said the Dutch boss.

"As always we analyse and we do that tough, the reality. It was a reality check, so we have to learn from it and carry on.

"You always take respect of the opponent but we will still stick to our philosophy, our rules, our principles."

He added: "So thank you for the lesson, from Pep and City. We will take that and we have to understand we have to do things much better."

Bruno Fernandes said United's players had held a meeting after the defeat to go through "the tough things, the mistakes that we did".

"Obviously we know the game we played was not good enough for our standards, for what we have set for ourselves, for what we want to achieve this season," said the attacking midfielder.

"We have let down the club altogether, not just one or two players. Altogether we didn't do enough to win the game, to get points from that game."

Defenders Harry Maguire and Raphael Varane are among the absentees for United's trip to Cyprus.

Verstappen says rain could 'spice up' the Japanese Grand Prix

AP ■ TOKYO

Title-chasing Max Verstappen on Wednesday said that the prospect of rain at this weekend's Japanese Grand Prix could "spice things up" as he looks to clinch his second straight F1 championship.

The flying Dutchman can claim the title with four races to spare in Suzuka if he gains eight points on nearest rival Charles Leclerc of Ferrari and six on Red Bull teammate Sergio Perez.

The Japanese Grand Prix is returning after a three-year absence because of the coronavirus pandemic, and rain has been forecast for Sunday's race.

Verstappen has dominated this season's championship with 11 wins from 17 Grands Prix and he predicted an "exciting



race with changing conditions" as he spoke to reporters in Tokyo.

"Let's see what the weather will do because I see there is a

bit of rain forecast, that might spice things up a little bit," said the 25-year-old, who finished seventh at last week's Singapore Grand Prix.

"We're looking forward to Suzuka again because we're on a high as a team, we've won a lot of races in a row now, and of course we want to keep that momentum going."

A heavy rain storm caused a delay of more than an hour to the start of the Singapore Grand Prix, which was won by Perez.

Verstappen's seventh-place finish edged him closer to the title and he will become only the third driver after Michael Schumacher and Sebastian Vettel to clinch the championship with four races to spare if he gets the job done in Suzuka.

Verstappen has never won the Japanese Grand Prix but he said he was looking forward to racing on the "special" Suzuka track again.

India announce 21-member squad for FIFA U-17 Women's WC

PTI ■ BHUBANESWAR

Head coach Thomas Dennerby on Wednesday named a 21-member Indian squad for the FIFA U-17 women's World Cup, scheduled to begin here on October 11.

Hosts India have been drawn in Group A alongside USA, Morocco and Brazil.

They will face USA on October 11, followed by matches against Morocco and Brazil on October 14 and October 17 respectively, at the Kalinga Stadium in Bhubaneswar.

"It's a new situation for everyone. India have never played the World Cup before. This is different ball game altogether," Dennerby said.

"It's a unique chance to show everyone that we have prepared well and will not

allow anyone to run over us."

The prestigious tournament will be held in Bhubaneswar, Margao in Goa, and Navi Mumbai from October 11-30.

The Kalinga Stadium will host three pool matches of India.

THE SQUAD

Goalkeepers: Monalisha Devi Moirangthem, Melody Chanu Keisham, Anjali Munda.

Defenders: Astam Oraon, Kajal, Naketa, Purnima Kumari, Varshika, Shilky Devi Hemam.

Midfielders: Babina Devi Lisham, Nitu Linda, Shailja, Shubhangi Singh.

Forwards: Anita Kumari, Lynda Kom Serto, Neha, Rejija Devi Laishram, Shelia Devi Loktongbam, Kajol Hubert Dsouza, Lavanya Upadhyay, Sudha Ankita Tirkey.

SA ODI BIG OPPORTUNITY FOR INDIAN FRINGE PLAYERS TO MAKE A STATEMENT



PTI ■ LUCKNOW

A new-look Indian team, led by Shikhar Dhawan, will aim to make a statement and be in the reckoning for next year's 50-over World Cup when the three-match ODI series against South Africa begins here on Thursday.

In the absence of big guns like Rohit Sharma, Virat Kohli, Mohammed Shami and Ravichandran Ashwin, who are off to Australia for the T20 World Cup, the Indian selectors opted for a fresh squad that includes Mukesh Kumar and Rajat Patidar, who earned their maiden call ups.

The squad also features a few T20 World Cup reserve players.

Middle-order batter Shreyas Iyer, who is part of the reserves named for the T20 World Cup, will serve as Dhawan's deputy in the series.

Right-arm pacer Deepak Chahar and leg-spinner Ravi Bishnoi, the other players from the standby list, have also been included in the ODI team for the matches against South Africa.

Dashing opening batter Shubman Gill, who has impressed in limited opportunities in ODIs, is likely to resume his partnership with Dhawan at the top.

Among other batters, either Rahul Tripathi or Patidar is likely to make an ODI debut on Thursday.

Madhya Pradesh batter Patidar has been rewarded for his stellar performances in domestic cricket, IPL, where he turned out for Royal Challengers Bangalore, and more recently, his brilliant run for India A against New Zealand A in the four-day games. He smashed two centuries against the Kiwis.

Ruturaj Gaikwad, Sanju Samson and Ishan Kishan are the other batters in the squad who will form the fulcrum of India's middle-order.

Left-arm spinner Shabbaz Ahmed,

who was recently called up to the T20I squad for the South Africa series, Bishnoi and Kuldeep Yadav form India's spin attack.

The pace department will be spearheaded by Shardul Thakur, Chahar, Avesh Khan and Mohammed Siraj and will also have new face Mukesh, a prolific red ball bowler for Bengal, who emerged as top wicket-taker in the first class games

against New Zealand 'A' and produced a stellar show in the Irani Cup match against 2019-20 Ranji champions Saurashtra.

The squad features as many as six players who could potentially make an ODI debut.

The series provides a big opportunity to the second-string players to make their presence felt and impress the selec-

tors with noticeable performances to be in the fray for a place in next year's ODI World Cup.

But it will be a tough test for India as the South Africans will be playing for points which they need to qualify for the World Cup next year.

The Proteas will be banking on the experienced Quinton de Kock, skipper Temba Bavuma, Aiden Markram, David

Dravid hints Shami as Bumrah's replacement subject to fitness

PTI ■ INDORE

Head coach Rahul Dravid has indicated that Mohammad Shami could replace the injured Jasprit Bumrah in the India squad for the T20 World Cup if the former is able to regain full fitness weeks after contracting COVID-19.

Shami, who was among the reserve pacers for the ICC event alongside Deepak Chahar, was forced to miss the six home games against Australia and South Africa after catching the virus.

The BCCI is yet to name Bumrah's replacement and after the conclusion of the series against the Proteas, Dravid hinted that Shami is the team's preferred choice though Chahar and Mohammad Siraj are also in the reckoning.

"In terms of replacement we are looking at (options), we have time till October 15 (ICC deadline). Shami is someone who

is in the standbys but he could not play unfortunately in these two series," said the head coach on Tuesday night.

"It would have been ideal from that perspective but he is in the NCA at the moment. We will have to get reports as to how he is recovering and what his status is after 14-15 days of Covid and we will take a call after that."

India are in dire need of an express pace bowler in Bumrah's absence. He was ruled out of the World Cup in Australia earlier this week due to a back injury.

Following the six games against two top teams, India's death bowling has emerged as the team's biggest concern going into the World Cup.

India leave for Australia on October 6. They will play a couple of practice games in Perth besides acclimatising to the pace and bounce Down Under before moving to Brisbane for two ICC warm up games.

TEAMS (FROM)

India: Shikhar Dhawan (C), Ruturaj Gaikwad, Shubhman Gill, Shreyas Iyer, Rajat Patidar, Rahul Tripathi, Ishan Kishan (WK), Sanju Samson (WK), Shabbaz Ahmed, Shardul Thakur, Kuldeep Yadav, Ravi Bishnoi, Mukesh Kumar, Avesh Khan, Mohd. Siraj, Deepak Chahar.

South Africa: Temba Bavuma (C), Quinton de Kock (WK), Reeza Hendricks, Heinrich Klaasen, Keshav Maharaj, Janneman Malan, Aiden Markram, David Miller, Lungi Ngidi, Anrich Nortje, Wayne Parnell, A ndile Phehlukwayo, Dwaine Pretorius, Kagiso Rabada, Tabraiz Shamsi.

Harman, Smriti, Axar nominated for ICC 'Player of the Month'

PTI ■ DUBAI

The Indian trio of Smriti Mandhana, Harmanpreet Kaur and Axar Patel was on Wednesday nominated ICC 'Player of the Month' award in the women and men's categories for September.

Skipper Kaur and vice-captain Mandhana have been shortlisted for the very first time and if one of them goes on to win will then become the first ever India player to win the Women's Player of the Month award, thanks to stellar performances in both ODI and T20I series in England.

Axar, on the other hand, has been nominated for the men's Player of the Month following a series of impressive and restrictive bowling displays against Australia and South Africa.

Despite a disappointing T20I series in England at the start of the month, Kaur was in imperious form during the subsequent ODI series which followed.

Scoring 221 runs across the three matches, she guided her side over the finishing line in the first match with a controlled 74 not out, before she clinched the series for her team in style in the second match, striking an unbeaten 143 to seal a historic first ODI series victory for her side in England since 1999.

Another of the leading lights of India's batting line-up, and last year's winner of the Rachael Heyhoe Flint Trophy for ICC Women's Cricketer of the Year, Mandhana also excelled dur-



ing her time in England in September.

She scored consistently across both white-ball series, highlighted by her unbeaten 79 during the first T20I in Derby and 91 in the first ODI in Canterbury – both match winning contributions.

Mandhana also ended the month averaging over 50 in both formats, and with a strike-rate of 137 in the T20Is, underlining the scale of her successes during the month.

Bangladesh's Nigar Sultana, who captained her side to seal their place at the ICC Women's T20 World Cup in South Africa in 2023 is the third nominee in the women's category.

So often a key threat in India's bowling attack, Axar

enjoyed a prolific September to earn his first nomination for Player of the Month.

Claiming a total of nine wickets at an average of 11.44 and with a superb economy rate of just 5.72, he most notably excelled in the home series against Australia, where he took three for 17 in Mohali, two for 13 in Nagpur, and three for 33 in Hyderabad to underline his significant credentials as a key asset for India in the shorter format.

Australia's Cameron Green, was an instrumental figure in notable victories over New Zealand and India, and Pakistan wicketkeeper batter Mohammad Rizwan, who dazzled with a glittering run of performances with the bat, are the other nominees.

Going early to Aus is important, it takes time to get used to unique pace: Dravid

PTI ■ INDORE

Getting used to the "unique" space and bounce in Australia will be the Indian team's primary objective at the preparatory camp in Perth ahead of the T20 World Cup, said head coach Rahul Dravid.

Speaking to the media following the home series win over Australia and South Africa, Dravid said the idea behind reaching Australia well in advance ahead of the World Cup was to familiarise the players with the conditions, especially the ones who have not played Down Under.

The team leaves for Perth on Thursday morning. Besides training, the squad will play a couple of practice games before moving to Brisbane for the warm up games organised by the ICC. India open their World Cup campaign against Pakistan



on October 23.

"We will get an opportunity to spend a few sessions in Perth and then have couple of matches there. Australia is quite unique in terms of the pace and bounce and a lot of our players

have not played a lot T20 cricket in Australia," Dravid said at the post-match press conference. "The idea was to give ourselves a chance to practice a little bit more, acclimatise and get some game time in. Having

ICC Rankings: Surya slips to No. 2 in T20I batting list

PTI ■ DUBAI

In-form India batter Suryakumar Yadav lost his top position in the ICC T20I list by a few ranking points to Mohammad Rizwan of Pakistan, who has regained his pole position in the latest standings published on Wednesday.

The difference between the two is a mere 16 ranking points with Rizwan reclaiming his top spot with 854 points and Surya in second spot with 838.



Surya continued his stunning rise in 2022 by finishing India's recent T20I series at home against South Africa with

two half centuries and as their leading run scorer with a total of 119 runs.

The 32-year-old Yadav should get the chance to claim top billing during the upcoming ICC T20 World Cup in Australia.

Rizwan finished the recent seven-match T20I series against England as the leading run scorer with an impressive haul of 316 runs, but the fact the keeper-batter was rested for the sixth game of the series.

Shooting included in 2026 CWG but wrestling and archery miss out

PTI ■ MELBOURNE

Shooting will return to the Commonwealth Games roster in the 2026 edition in Victoria, Australia, while wrestling has been dropped in a bitter-sweet turn of events for India.

The Commonwealth Games Federation (CGF) and the Commonwealth Games Australia on Wednesday unveiled the full sport programme for the Victoria 2026 CWG, featuring 20 sports and 26 disciplines, including nine fully integrated para sports.

The return of shooting, which was controversially dropped from the Birmingham CWG earlier this year, is a welcome development for India. Shooting has been India's strongest sport in the Commonwealth Games with 135 medals (63 gold, 44 silver and 28 bronze) till now. Wrestling is in third spot with 114 (49 gold, 39 silver and 26 bronze) medals.

In the 2018 Gold Coast edition, Indian shooters won 16 medals -- 25 per cent of the country's total medals of 66 -- with 7 gold, 4 silver and 5 bronze.

The addition of para-shooting in the 2026 Games will also add to India's medal tally.

But the absence of wrestling which yielded the most number of medals -- 12 (6 gold, 1 silver,

the squad a bit and get the players at the NCA, (Hardik and Bhuvneshwar) get their strengths up and build on the workloads leading into the World Cup. We got we wanted from the two series.

"There were tough games for the bowlers as it is always in India. Both of them (last two against SA) were high scoring games but the boys will be very happy that we got the right result."

Bowling remains a concern for India and the head coach said the team is trying to address the issue. "To be fair it has been very flat wickets, not easy bowling in the death for both teams not just us. Australia and South Africa, they have a lot of experience in their bowling and they struggled in the death as well. But we have to look at ourselves and see how we can improve.

5 bronze) at the Birmingham Games is a big loss. The sport has been dropped after featuring in four successive Games since 2010.

Archery, on the other hand, has featured only twice in the CWG -- in 1982 and 2010 -- and India stands second in the all-time medal tally for the sport.

The dropping of wrestling is, however, not on unexpected lines. Wrestling is not a sport that is very popular in Australia and the host nation usually picks sports where home athletes are expected to do well.

Shooting is a popular sport in Australia which finished second behind India in the 2018 CWG with nine medals (3 gold, 5 silver, 1 bronze) from the sport.

However, the 2026 edition will not have full bore shooting events and will be competed in pistol, rifle and shotgun disciplines. This development will, however, have no impact on the medal prospects of the Indian shooters as they are not traditionally strong at full bore events.

"The shooting programme will include air pistol, air rifle, shooting para sport and shotgun trap. However, full bore are not included," according to an Australian shooting official.

"It is better for shooting to be on the programme in a reduced way than not at all."

Sreejesh, Savita voted FIH Goalkeepers of Year

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

India's PR Sreejesh and Savita Punia were on Wednesday voted FIH Men's and Women's Goalkeeper of the Year respectively for the second year running, on the back of their strong shows under the bar.

In his 16th year as a full international for India, Sreejesh once again showed his value to the team, playing in all 16 games in the FIH Hockey Pro League as India finished in the third position.

He also played in all six games at 2022 Birmingham Commonwealth Games where India won the Silver medal.

"The longevity of PR Sreejesh's career continues to defy logic as the 34-year-old Indian shot-stopper continues to raise his game as the years roll on," the FIH said in a statement

on Sreejesh, who had also won the award last year.

Sreejesh got 39.9 total points in the voting, followed by Belgium's Loic van Doren (26.3 points) and Netherlands' Primin Blaak (23.2 points).

Sreejesh is the third player to win back-to-back FIH Goalkeeper of the Year award. A similar feat was achieved in the past by David Harte (Ireland) who won the award in 2015 and 2016, and Vincent Vanasch (Belgium) who won it three consecutive times from 2017 to 2019.

During the course of the season, Sreejesh also completed 250 international appearances, becoming the eighth Indian and the only goalkeeper to achieve the feat.

"No doubt, this is a special award because the hockey fans are voting for us. This is a big honour for me and a



testimony to all the hard work," said Sreejesh.

"Winning awards, no matter at what stage in your career you are at, is always a motivating factor. This

award surely motivates me to further improve and do well in an all-important year where we will play the FIH Hockey Men's World Cup Bhubaneswar-Rourkela 2023."