

**WORLD 5**  
ISRAEL BOMBS SOUTHERN  
GAZA FOLLOWING US VETO

**MONEY 6**  
'INDIA TO BE \$5 TRILLION  
ECONOMY BY END OF 2025'

**SPORT 8**  
YOUNG INDIA FACES  
TOUGH PROTEAS TEST

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## NIA smokes out ISIS module

44 locations in Maharashtra, Karnataka raided; 15 held



T N RAGHUNATHA ■ MUMBAI

In one of the biggest ever crackdowns on Islamic State of Iraq and Syria (ISIS) in recent years, the National Investigation Agency (NIA) on Saturday arrested as many as 15 operatives of the banned terror outfit in widespread raids across Maharashtra and Karnataka. The NIA teams swooped down on as many as 44 locations at Padgha-Borivali, Thane, Mira Road and Padga in Maharashtra, and Bengaluru in Karnataka early in the morning, and apprehended the 15 accused for allegedly promot-

ing terror and terror related acts and activities of the proscribed organisations. The NIA sleuths seized huge amounts of unaccounted cash, firearms, sharp edged weapons, incriminating documents, smartphones and other digital devices during the raids, conducted as part of their ongoing efforts to disrupt and demolish the ISIS attempts to carry out violent acts of terror and take innocent lives. The arrested accused — all members of ISIS Maharashtra module — who were operating on the directions of their foreign handlers — had been actively involved in various

terrorist activities, including fabrication of IEDs, for furthering the violent and destructive agenda of ISIS. The NIA said the arrested included Saqib Nachan, the main accused and the leader and head of the ISIS module, "who was also administering the 'bayath' (oath of allegiance to the Khalifa of ISIS to the persons joining the proscribed organisation". Informed NIA sources identified the arrested accused as Saqib Nachan, Firoz Kuwar, Hasib Mulla, Musab Mulla, Rehan Suse, Farhan Suse, Adil Khot, Mukhlis Nachan, Raphael Nachan, Razeel Nachan, Saif

Atiq Nachan, Yahya Khot, Shakub Divkar, Kasif Belare. The NIA investigations have revealed that the accused based in the strip between Padgha and Borivali, had hatched a conspiracy to spread terror and carry out acts of violence across India. The accused, who were pursuing the path of violent Jihad, Khilafat, ISIS etc., had aimed to disturb the peace and communal harmony of the country and to wage a war against the Government of India. As per the findings of the initial investigations, the arrested accused had self-declared the village of Padgha in rural Thane as a 'liberated zone' and as 'Al Sham'. They were motivating impressionable Muslim youths to relocate in Padgha from their place of residence for strengthening the Padga base. The ISIS is a Global Terror Organisation (GTG), also known as Islamic State (IS) /Islamic State of Iraq and Levant (ISIL) / Daish/Islamic State in Khorasan Province (ISKP)/ISIS Wilayah Khorasan/Islamic State of Iraq and the Sham Khorasan (ISIS-K). The ISIS has been spreading its terror network in India by putting in place localised ISIS modules and cells in various States of the country.

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## Modi achieves global leadership pinnacle

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

Prime Minister Narendra Modi is the most popular leader in the world with an approval rating of 76 per cent, according to a survey conducted by the US based consulting firm Morning Consult. The next highest ranking leader on the list had an approval rating of less than ten percentage points lower than Modi's. The consultancy firm's 'Global Leader Approval Rating Tracker' said 76 per cent of people in India approve of Modi's leadership, while 18 per cent disapprove of it and six per cent did not give any opinion. Notably, this is a huge number by a far margin, as the second-best approval rating is enjoyed by Mexico President Andres Manuel Lopez Obrador (66 per cent) and Switzerland President Alain Berset (58 per cent). The information was gathered from a survey of 22 world leaders by the research company. With just 18 per cent of the vote, Modi also has the lowest disapproval rating on the list, based on data gathered from September 6-12, 2023. In previous surveys too, Modi had topped the global ratings. At the same time, the approval ratings of other big global leaders are at a modest level. US President Joe Biden has a 37 per cent approval rating, Canadian Prime Minister Justin Trudeau has 31 per cent, UK Prime Minister Rishi Sunak ratings stands at 25 per cent, and France President Emmanuel Macron stands at 24 per cent. Notably, these ratings come after Modi-led Bharatiya Janata Party registered



huge victories in three Assembly elections in Hindi heartland States of Madhya Pradesh, Rajasthan and Chhattisgarh. This is being seen as a huge boost for Modi and his party ahead of the general elections slated to be held in 2024. As he promoted Uttarakhand as a top investment destination on Friday, Modi stated that the public votes for a strong and stable administration. An ambitious India is not interested in instability. Referring to the most recent Assembly elections, in which his party, the BJP, won Rajasthan, Madhya Pradesh, and Chhattisgarh, Modi stated, "Today, it seeks a stable Government." Meanwhile, Modi recently participated at the Conference of Parties-28 (COP28) Climate Action Summit in UAE. He said India is among the few countries which are on course to meet Intended Nationally Determined Contribution (NDC) as part of efforts to combat climate change and proposed that the country will host COP33 in 2028.

## Lekhi denies signing document, seeks probe

New Delhi: Ministry of External Affairs (MEA) said here on Saturday a technical correction is being made mentioning V Muralaeeharan's name as the Minister who replied to a Parliament question on the designation of Hamas. This clarification from MEA spokesperson Arindam Bagchi came hours after Union Minister Meenakshi Lekhi said she did not approve any answer to the question. Both Lekhi and Muralaeeharan are Ministers of State in the MEA. Responding to a post on X, Lekhi on Saturday said she did not approve any answer to the question and said an "inquiry will reveal the culprit". The written answer to the unstarred question number 980, uploaded on the Lok Sabha's website, was attributed to Lekhi.

## BJP objects to Akbaruddin as Protem Speaker

Hyderabad: The first session of the third Telangana Legislative Assembly began here on Saturday with the oath taking process of the newly-elected MLAs getting underway. The BJP MLAs, however, stayed away from the House, alleging that AIMIM MLA Akbaruddin Owaisi was appointed as Pro Tem Speaker in violation of rules. BJP MLAs later submitted a memorandum in the Raj Bhavan requesting Governor Tamilisai Soundararajan to set aside the nomination of Akbaruddin Owaisi as Pro Tem Speaker. Chief Minister A Revanth Reddy was the first to take oath, followed by Deputy Chief Minister Mallu Bhatti Vikramarka.

## BJP to pick three Chief Ministers by Monday

DEEPAK KUMAR JHA ■ NEW DELHI

With a few rounds of meetings and interactions by the elected MLAs of Madhya Pradesh, Rajasthan, and Chhattisgarh with the party-appointed Central observers completed, the BJP is all set to announce the chief ministerial picks by Monday and expedite the oath ceremony before the beginning of the inauspicious period called 'Malemas' or 'Kharma's' in the Hindu Sanatan Dharma tradition. "The CM for all three States are likely to be announced by the party by Monday and the party wants to wrap up the swearing-in exercise by December 15," a senior BJP leader said. The Central observers for Madhya Pradesh, Rajasthan, and Chhattisgarh were announced on Friday. The party is in a hurry because Malmas, also known as Kharma, begins on December 16 — an inauspicious time when all auspicious activities are forbidden. Sources said the BJP Legislature Party Meeting has been called on Monday in Bhopal at 4 pm. Haryana Chief Minister Manohar Lal Khattar, Dr K Laxman, and Asha Lakra will be overseeing the entire process of electing the leader of the legislature party. The CM designate

of Madhya Pradesh is likely to be announced by Monday evening itself. The party this time did not go to the election with incumbent Chief Minister Shivraj Singh Chouhan's face and got a massive mandate of 163 seats out of 199. The BJP has scheduled the Legislature Party Meeting in Chhattisgarh for Sunday, during which Union Ministers Arjun Munda, Sarbananda Sonowal, and Dushyant Kumar Gautam will oversee the process of electing the leader of the legislature party. It is widely speculated that Dr Raman Singh, who was the Chief Minister of Chhattisgarh till 2018, won't be repeated. While the BJP is said to be keen on an OBC or tribal chief ministerial face, the party isn't sensing any Opposition from Dr Singh. The BJP sprung a surprise in the State where it won 54 seats, ousting the Bhupesh Baghel Government. Defence Minister Rajnath Singh's expertise as a master troubleshooter will be tested since former CM Vasundhara Raje has been pressing to get into the hot seat again. Nearly 25 newly elected BJP MLAs recently met Raje, seen as a show of strength by her. Despite no contenders openly vying for the post, Raje has met with BJP chief JP Nadda.



## Pictures of Lord Ram Lalla sanctum released

PNS ■ LUCKNOW

As the highly anticipated consecration ceremony of the Ram Lalla temple approaches on January 22, the Sri Ram Janmabhoomi Tirath Kshetra Trust's general secretary, Champat Rai, shared a glimpse into the sanctum-sanctorum's final stages. On Saturday, Rai unveiled images of the nearly completed sanctum-sanctorum on X platform, announcing, "The sanctum-sanctorum of Lord Shri Ram Lalla is almost ready. Recently, the lighting-fitting work has also been completed. Sharing some photographs with you." The construction of the Ram Janmabhoomi temple, diligently overseen by the trust, has been progressing smoothly. Rai disclosed earlier that a 4'3" idol depicting the 5-year-old child form of Lord Ram is

nearing completion at three locations in Ayodhya. "At Ram Janmabhoomi temple, a 90 per cent ready idol is being constructed on three different pieces of stone by three artisans. The finishing touches will take about a week," said Rai. "The idol will be installed in the 'Grabgriha' on the ground floor, which is nearly completed, ensuring a seamless 'Praan-Pratishtha' ceremony." Rai, said 21 Vedic Acharyas from Kashi will conduct the consecration of the Ram temple. The throne for Lord Ram Lalla, eight feet long and four feet wide, is ready, with the final touch of a gold layer pending. "The Trust is making meticulous preparations to enshrine Ram Lalla on this golden throne during the Pran Pratishtha ceremony," he said.

Continued on Page 2

Every dish becomes tasty with Patanjali Spices Pure and Healthy

Our ancestors researched on food science to make food nutritious and tasty thus, they added spices to it. They aid digestion to keep the body healthy and enhance immunity. But these benefits can only be reaped when spices are pure and their formulation is scientific. Patanjali range of spices is prepared with the method inherited from our ancestors.

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## India records decade high tiger deaths

ARCHANA JYOTI ■ NEW DELHI

India registered 163 tiger deaths from January to November 11 this year, marking the highest figure since 2012, as per the data available from the National Tiger Conservation Authority (NTCA) with Maharashtra reporting the highest mortalities at 40, followed closely by Madhya Pradesh (38). The numbers could be on the higher side given that at times some deaths go unreported or the States fail to ascertain the cause of mortalities. India has reported 121 tiger mortalities in 2022 against 127 in 2021 and 106 in 2020. Of the 163 tiger deaths so far



this year, 28 were of cubs while at least 10 were adults. This can directly impact the reproductive potential of the tiger population, say wildlife experts. At

least 78 big cats deaths have been reported inside various tiger reserves in the country while 86 died outside or on the periphery of their habitat, indicating man-animal con-

licts as tigers tried to compete with each other in the territorial fights. Nearly 19 tiger deaths have been reported from Uttarakhand, 11 each from Assam and Karnataka, and 13 from Kerala, among others. As per the NTCA officials, some potential factors contributing to tiger deaths could include poaching, habitat loss, human-wildlife conflict, and diseases. NTCA Chief SP Yadav said, "If there has been record tiger deaths only because there has been record tiger population as has been estimated by the latest census. Number is increasing because of better protection and conservation planning."

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# Viksit Bharat Sankalp Yatra surpasses 1 crore participants

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

The Viksit Bharat Sankalp Yatra, inaugurated by Prime Minister Narendra Modi last month from Khunti in Jharkhand, has emerged as a transformative expedition fostering connections with citizens nationwide. The Yatra is a collaborative effort among diverse government entities, states, and people, aligning efforts toward a shared national vision of making India a developed nation.

In an unprecedented effort to bring together every individual across the nation, the Yatra strives to cover over 2.60 Gram Panchayats and 3600+ urban local bodies using Information, Education, and Communication (IEC) vans that call upon people to utilise government schemes for their benefit.

On day 1 itself (November 15), over one lakh people participated in the events organised as part of the Yatra, giving it a thumping approval. The people's participation has gathered further momentum with each passing day. While the first week saw participation of 500,000 citizens, by the 3rd week the Yatra has witnessed



participation of more than one crore citizens.

The rate of people's participation has picked up dramatically with over 77 lakh people across the country attending the Yatra events in just the last 09 days. The momentum is likely to continue as the Yatra progresses ahead.

"As of December 7, 2023, the Yatra has reached over 36,000 Gram Panchayats, demonstrating its extensive coverage. Impressively, more than 79 lakh individuals have pledged their commitment to drive

India's development through this initiative. Within a short span, the urban segment of the Yatra has reached over 700 locations. Over 20 lakh people shared their stories under Meri Kahani, Meri Zubani part of the Yatra, highlighting the diverse experiences and aspirations of citizens across the nation," said a Press Information Bureau release. During the Viksit Bharat Sankalp Yatra, more than 18,000 Gram Panchayats were recognized as "100 percent Har Ghar Jal," meaning every

household has access to clean drinking water. The government release claimed significant strides have been made in promoting public health and sanitation, with over 22 lakh individuals screened at various health camps organised across the country. Other verticals like Financial Inclusion; Technological Progress, Viksit Bharat Sankalp Yatra embodies unity, cooperation, and a collective commitment to a brighter future, mentioned the PIB research.

# Omar fears J&K leaders detention ahead of Article 370 verdict by SC

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ JAMMU

Former Jammu and Kashmir Chief Minister and National Conference (NC) Vice President Omar Abdullah spent an anxious weekend fearing mainstream politicians may once again be put under house arrest ahead of the Supreme Court's verdict on Article 370 petitions on Monday.

The Supreme Court is scheduled to pronounce its verdict on December 11 on a batch of petitions challenging the abrogation of Article 370 of the Constitution which bestowed special status on the erstwhile state of Jammu and Kashmir.

On the other hand, PDP Chief and former Chief Minister Mehbooba Mufti invoked the Supreme Court's prior decisions, highlighting that the court had previously maintained that Article 370 could only be scrapped based on the recommendations of the constituent assembly of Jammu and Kashmir. Emphasizing the constitutional implications, Mufti asserted that any decision contrary to this established process would not only be against the constitution but also the very spirit of



the idea of India. Addressing a gathering of the party workers in Bijbehara, Anantnag Mehbooba Mufti urged the people of Jammu and Kashmir not to lose hope and emphasized the importance of unity to secure their rights and restore their identity and dignity. In Jammu, the Democratic Progressive Azad Party expressed hope that the Supreme Court judgment on Article 370 will meet the expectations of the people of Jammu and Kashmir. The senior party leaders also flayed the BJP-led government for delaying assembly polls and restoring statehood to the Union Territory.

Interacting with the media persons in Kulgam on Saturday, Omar Abdullah said he could only hope and pray the decision is in favor of the people of Jammu and Kashmir. "They need an excuse to put us under house arrest and they have an excuse. As we are unaware of the decision, so are they. If they know, then there should be an investigation." "Who will say with authority what is to happen? I do not have any such machinery or way by which I can come to know today what those five honorable judges have in their hearts, or what they have written in the judgment.

# Another cop attacked ahead of verdict

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ JAMMU

Amid heightened security measures in the run-up to the Supreme Court's verdict on the Article 370 case, an unidentified terrorist late Saturday evening targeted another policeman at Hamdaniya colony, Bemina.

The injured cop has been rushed to the nearby hospital for treatment. Meanwhile, the entire area has been cordoned off to track the footprints of the attackers.

Kashmir Zone Police posted a message on X (earlier Twitter), "Terrorists fired upon & injured one police personnel namely Mohammad Hafiz Chad S/o Gh Hassan Chad R/o Bemina at Hamdaniya colony Bemina. He has been shifted to the hospital for treatment. The area has been cordoned off. Further details shall follow."

# Kerala doctor commits suicide over dowry demand

KUMAR CHELLAPPAN ■ KOCHI

Keralites' infatuation with youths employed in UAE and other West Asian nations have become a thing of the past at least in their search for a suitable match for their daughters. A bridegroom with MBBS degree who is also a card holding member of the CPI-M in Kerala commands a hefty premium in the wedding market if recent developments are any indication.

Dr Shahna, a post graduate student in the prestigious Government Medical College, Thiruvananthapuram was found dead in her apartment on Tuesday morning. Autopsy revealed that she committed suicide late Monday night following the refusal of her fiancée to marry her as Shahna's family could not meet the demands of the would-be bridegroom.

The bridegroom, Dr Ruwais is a medical doctor in Thiruvananthapuram Medical College and the proposal had been accepted in principle by the families of the bride and her beau. But problems cropped in as Ruwais and his family demanded something more as dowry. They made it known to Dr Shahna, a M S student in surgery that her family should part with 150 sovereigns, a high-end BMW car costing nearly Rs two crore, one acre of prime real estate and cash of Rs two crore (which the parents of



Ruwais were willing to bring down to Rs 1.5 crore!).

They told the bride's family that Dr Ruwais is no ordinary doctor. He was working in the orthopedic department of Medical College as a post graduate doctor and was a senior office bearer of the CPI-M frontal organization, the Post Graduate Doctors Association. Though the media in Kerala did not disclose the identity of Dr Ruwais for two days, the social media played its part and the mainstream media had to fall in line. Ruwais was suspended from the Orthopedics Department on Friday and he was arrested by the police following a state wide public outcry against the suicide of Dr Shahna.

The deceased had left a suicide note in which it has been mentioned that she was forced to resort to the extreme step following the decision of Ruwais and his family not to go ahead with the marriage as her family was not in a position to meet the demands made by the

would-be in-laws.

Ruwais has been remanded to judicial custody till 21 December and has been slapped with charges including prohibition of demanding dowry and abatement to commit suicide. If found guilty, Ruwais may be sentenced to ten years imprisonment. Chief Minister Pinarayi Vijayan, who is on a state wide junket in a bus nicknamed as "Cabinet Bus" that costs Rs 2 crore, told the young ladies in the state to ask the prospective bridegrooms demanding dowry to get lost.

The State of Kerala saw more than a dozen dowry related suicides during the last one year. Shocked over the ever increasing number of such cases, Governor Arif Mohammed Khan made the university students in the State to take an oath that they would not accept dowry or be a part of any marriages which are solemnized because of the exchange of cash and gifts as part of tying the nuptial knots.

# NGT asks States to step up efforts to improve air quality

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

The National Green Tribunal (NGT) has directed several states to make "further efforts" to improve the air quality and "fully utilise" the funds received under the National Clean Air Programme (NCAP) and the 15th Finance Commission.

The tribunal, the order passed on December 5, also instructed the states concerned to file a further action taken report within eight weeks.

A bench of NGT Chairperson Justice Prakash Shrivastava noted the deteriorating air quality across various cities from November 22 to December 4 in Bihar (Patna, Purnia and Rajgir), Uttar Pradesh (Ghaziabad, Noida and Greater Noida), Punjab (Bhatinda) Haryana (Faridabad, Manesar, Rohtak and Bhiwadi), Rajasthan (Tonk) and Meghalaya (Brynihat). The bench, also comprising judicial member Justice Sudhir Agarwal and expert member A Senthil Vel, noted that the AQI was 'severe' and 'very poor' in some cities, while in others it fluctuated between 'moderate' to 'severe' and 'poor' to 'very poor'.

The AQI in Delhi was 'severe' on November 24, while on most days it was 'very poor'. The cities in Punjab, however, showed an improvement after the stubble burning season ended, the bench said. Last month, the NGT took cognisance of the online air quality bulletins of the Central Pollution Control Board (CPCB) and directed the chief secretaries of the states where the AQI had dipped or was in the 'severe', 'very poor' and 'poor' categories to "take all possible immediate remedial measures".



Noting the reports filed by several state authorities, the tribunal, in its hearing on December 5, said most of the states did not "fully utilise" the funds received under the National Clean Air Programme (NCAP) and the 15th Finance Commission.

It said only a few states utilised the funds for establishing AQI monitoring stations, while in some other states, funds were utilised for purposes not "directly connected" with the improvement of air quality. The NGT bench said states are required to utilise the funds "promptly" for the specific purpose, without leaving any gaps. "Funds are required to be utilised as per the approved action plan for non-attainment cities under the NCAP and action plans approved for cities not falling as non-attainment cities," the tribunal said. A non-attainment region is an area considered to have air quality worse than the National Ambient Air Quality standards. "The cities concerned where apportionment study has not been done are required to complete the said study in respect of the factors contributing to pollution and focus on those factors which have a larger share in contribution," the green panel said. "Further efforts are required to ensure that the air quality improves in the cities under consideration," it added.

reserves, it is crucial to thoroughly investigate the causes of these deaths to ensure the well-being and sustainability of the tiger population, said a wildlife expert on the condition of anonymity.

It is essential for wildlife authorities to conduct detailed analyses of each case to determine the specific causes and take appropriate conservation measures, he said. The fact that the tiger census indicates a rise in the number of big cats is positive for the overall conservation effort. However, it is equally important to focus on maintaining a healthy and sustainable tiger population by addressing the threats they face. Public awareness, community involvement, and the implementation of effective conservation strategies are key elements in ensuring the long-term survival of tigers in India. Authorities should continue to monitor and adapt conservation efforts to safeguard these iconic and endangered species, the wildlife expert said.

# NIA smokes out...

From Page 1

The NIA has, in recent months, conducted large scale raids and busted different ISIS modules by arresting several terror operatives in the ISIS terror conspiracy case in a bid to scuttle the organisation's heinous and violent anti-India agenda. As part of its efforts towards that end, the NIA had registered a case against the ISIS Maharashtra module earlier this year. The agency has, since then, undertaken strong and concerted actions to destroy the various ISIS modules and networks operating across the country.

# India records decade...

From Page 1

Yadav also stated that the average age in the wild is 10-12 years only, so those becoming old are bound to die natural death. On the higher number of cubs' mortalities, he said this shows that more births are taking place and on an average 50 per cent neonatal mortality happens in big cats like tigers. India is home to two-thirds of the global wild tiger population. According to the recent Tiger Census, India's tiger population rose to 3,682 in 2022, up from 2,967 in 2018. Madhya Pradesh reported the highest number of tigers in the country at 785 predators. Karnataka was the second largest home with 563, Uttarakhand had 560 and Maharashtra 444. However, wildlife experts said the increase in the number of reported tiger deaths in India is indeed notable and raises concerns about the conservation of these magnificent creatures. While officials may attribute the rise in fatalities to the growth in the tiger population across

# Pictures of Lord Ram Lalla sanctum...

From Page 1

Invitations have been extended to over 7,000 guests, including 3,000 VVIPs, comprising priests, donors, and various political figures. The guest list includes representatives from Kedarnath, Badrinath, Baba Vishwanath Dham, and Vaishno Devi Temple, who have been invited to witness the historic event. While the participation of priests from major temples remains uncertain, representatives from these temples are expected to attend.

"To accommodate the influx of devotees expected for the Pran Pratishtha ceremony on January 22, several tent cities are being established in the temple town," Rai said.

As the Sri Ram Janmabhoomi Tirath Kshetra Trust is making preparation for the upcoming grand consecration programme of the Shri Ram Janmabhoomi temple, the entire city of Ayodhya is undergoing a rejuvenation process as the key routes leading to the temple will adorned with captivating

depictions of significant episodes from the Ramayana period. The Ayodhya Development Authority (ADA) has initiated the adornment of walls along the major roads leading to Shri Ram Janmabhoomi Temple with terracotta fine clay mural artifacts. As part of this endeavor, the authority is inviting applications to engage potential agencies through a Request for Proposal.

In another development, 600 kilograms of desi ghee has arrived in Kar Sevak Puram, Ayodhya, from Jodhpur's Goshala. This ghee is set to be used in the auspicious Aarti ceremony during the consecration of Ram Lalla's idol. Prime Minister Narendra Modi is set to grace the inauguration, performing rituals in the sanctum sanctorum around 12:15 pm during the pran-pratishtha. The foundation stone for the Ram temple was laid by Modi on August 5, 2020, marking a historic milestone in Ayodhya's spiritual landscape.

# 'Modi Government committed to welfare of every citizen'

PTI ■ PATIALA

Union Health Minister Mansukh Mandaviya Saturday said the Modi government is committed to the welfare of every citizen of the country.

The Union minister visited Patiala MP Preet Kaur, Punjab BJP president Sunil Jakhar and the entire state leadership of Bharatiya Janata Party. It was being ensured through the Viksit Bharat Sankalp Yatra (VBSY) that the benefits of public welfare schemes reach the ground level, Mandaviya said.

"The Narendra Modi ji-led government is completely committed to the welfare of every citizen of this country and with this Sankalp Yatra we are ensuring that the benefits of hundreds of public welfare schemes started by Modi ji reach the ground level and people are able to avail their benefits at their doorstep," he said, addressing a gathering of beneficiaries of various central schemes. He said, "Everyone can register



for various welfare schemes being run by the central government during this 'Viksit Bharat Sankalp Yatra'. These are not only welfare schemes, these are Modi ji's guarantees and the PM never fails to fulfill his guarantees." "This Yatra, which was inaugurated by Prime Minister Narendra Modi on November 15 from Jharkhand, has emerged as a transformative expedition fostering connections with citizens nationwide and has witnessed participation of over one crore citizens till now," he said. Patiala MP Preet Kaur said the Modi government is running many public welfare schemes providing much needed assistance to the citizens. "One of the schemes is the Ayushman Bharat scheme which has provided major relief to the common peo-

ple of India as now everyone can afford proper healthcare free of cost." Thanking the central government for this Yatra, Kaur said, "I am extremely grateful to the Modi government for ensuring doorstep delivery of welfare schemes to every village, every town through this 'Viksit Bharat Sankalp Yatra'." Taking aim at the Aam Aadmi Party government in Punjab, Kaur said, "It's saddening that the AAP government does not want this programme to succeed and is trying to create blockades in it, which is very wrong because this programme does not care that the beneficiaries belong from which party, the only thing that matters is that the benefits of public welfare schemes reach the common man."

# Odisha cash haul set to be highest ever with ₹290 crore seizure

PTI ■ NEW DELHI/HUBANESWAR

The seizure of "unaccounted" cash after the income-tax department raided an Odisha-based distillery group and entities linked to it is expected to reach Rs 290 crore, making it the "highest-ever" black money haul by any agency in a single operation, official sources said on Saturday.

The tax department has deployed about 40 large and small machines to count the currency notes and brought in more department and bank staffers to finish the process, which began on December 6 following raids against Boudh Distillery Private Limited and others, the sources said. Besides these, more vehicles have also been requisitioned by the department to transport the seized cash to government banks in the state.

A premises linked to Congress's Rajya Sabha MP from Jharkhand, Dhiraj Prasad Sahu, was also searched as part of the operation, the sources said. Sahu's staff expressed their

inability to get a comment from the MP when PTI called on his phone for a reaction to the I-T department's action. An e-mail sent by PTI to the distillery group also elicited no response.

The tax sleuths are now recording the statements of various company officials and others, the sources said, adding that the counting of cash is expected to be over by Saturday. The total seizure of unaccounted cash is expected to be about Rs 290 crore, they told PTI.

Cash amounting to more than Rs 250 crore has been seized till now and the money is continuously being deposited in government bank branches in Odisha, the sources said. Most of the currency notes are of Rs 500 denomination. This is the highest-ever cash seizure made by an agency in the country as part of an action against a single group and its linked entities, the sources said. Some of the high-value seizures in the past include one from 2019 when the GST Intelligence raided a Kanpur-based businessman and seized cash

amounting to Rs 257 crore and another instance where cash amounting to Rs 163 crore was unearthed by the I-T department during searches against a road construction firm in Tamil Nadu in July 2018.

The sources said cash amounting to almost Rs 230 crore was seized from about 10 almirahs kept on the premises of the company in Bolangir district, while the remaining amount was seized from locations in Titlagarh, Sambalpur and Ranchi. Around 200 big and small bags were used to pack the cash.

The searches were launched after the taxman got "actionable intelligence" of a huge amount of "out-of-book" sales and cash being remitted by liquor distributors, sellers and business groups. Prime Minister Narendra Modi also took note of the development. In a post on X on Friday, he said: "Countrymen should look at the pile of these notes and then listen to the honest 'speeches' of their leaders.... Whatever has been looted from the public, every penny will have to be returned, this is Modi's guarantee."

# MCD sees spike of ₹400 crore in revenue

## Milk bank, AI driven civic monitoring system proposed in MCD 2024-25 Budget

STAFF REPORTER ■ NEW DELHI

The MCD's budget for next fiscal year will see the establishment of its first Lactation Management Unit, or Milk Bank, and use of Artificial Intelligence for monitoring of civic amenities. The civic body has in its budget estimates for 2024-25 provisioned funds for construction of around 20 school buildings in different zones of the city. The Municipal Corporation of Delhi on Saturday presented a budget estimate of Rs 16,683.02 crore for the year 2024-25 with estimated income to be Rs 15,686.99 crore.

The civic body saw a spike of Rs 400 crore in the revenue, as it earned Rs 2,417 crore in the financial year 2022-23 — the highest revenue in the history of the Corporation through property tax, according to the MCD.

The MCD's first milk bank will be set up in Swami Dayanand Hospital, it said. The corporation has proposed a pilot project for Preet Vihar, East Patel Nagar, and Kotla Mubarakpur wards for the extension of civic services through artificial intelligence. It proposed to construct approximately 20 school buildings in areas like Punjabi Bagh



and Paschim Vihar in the West zone, Ibrahimpur, Wazirabad Village, GTB Nagar in the Civil Lines zone, and Mangolpuri in Rohini zone. In addition, the body made a provision under its Sabhagita scheme to provide 5 per cent additional incentive to educational institutions with land area exceeding 10 acres, on condition they deposit 100 per

cent of the property tax. The municipality plans to hire 420 nursery attendants, security guards, and sanitation workers for schools' upkeep. The budget proposes to establish libraries in the 44 schools and install smart interactive panels in 25 proposed model schools. The MCD also listed approximately 1 lakh stray dogs' ster-

ilisation in the coming financial year.

According to the civic body, the FASTag parking facility is being introduced in 21 parking spaces. "Construction of multi-level parking facilities is underway in Punjabi Bagh for 225 cars, GK-1 market for 399 cars, Amar Colony, Lajpat Nagar for 81 cars, Shiva Market for 500 cars, Gandhi Maidan for 2,338 cars, Qutub Road for 174 cars, Nigam Bodh for 95 cars, and Bagh Diwar Market, Fatehpuri, for 196 cars. These will be completed in this financial year," it said.

A waste-to-energy plant with a capacity of 3,600 TPD in Narela-Bawana and an expansion of capacity in Okhla and Tehkhand waste-to-energy plants are planned for implementation for the year 2024-25. An agreement has been made with ASCI-Hyderabad for an audit of these plants in compliance with solid waste management rules, 2016, aimed at

identifying deficiencies and providing suggestions for improvement.

The civic body plans to set up various testing labs in 60 primary health centres under the PPP model. A blood storage facility will be started at Mata Gujri Hospital.

The completion of the Delhi Darshan Park Phase-II, Dinosaur Park, and Heritage Park under the Waste-to-Art theme is underway and the Roshanara Nursery in Keshav Puram is being developed as a 'High-Tech Nursery'.

The MCD said it will work on computerisation of almost all cremation grounds and linking them to birth-death offices for easier issuance of cremation receipts and death certificates. Additionally, it said, development and construction of around 30 more cremation grounds and cemeteries is in process in places like Dakshinpur, Harkesh Nagar, and Kishangarh

## City records minimum temperature of 8.5 degrees Celsius



STAFF REPORTER ■ NEW DELHI

The national capital on Saturday recorded a minimum temperature of 8.5 degrees Celsius, one notch below the season's average, according to the India Meteorological Department (IMD).

The city's air quality index (AQI) at 6 pm stood at 322 in the 'very poor' category. The mercury recorded a high of 25.3 degree Celsius, one notch above the season's average, while the relative humidity oscillated between 100 per

cent and 69 per cent, the IMD said.

The weather department has predicted mist for Monday. The maximum and minimum temperatures are likely to settle around 24 and 9 degrees Celsius respectively, it said.

The national capital has recorded 10 severe air quality days this November so far. An AQI between zero and 50 is considered 'good', 51 and 100 'satisfactory', 101 and 200 'moderate', 201 and 300 'poor', 301 and 400 'very poor', 401 and 450 'severe' and above 450 'severe-plus'.

## BJP protests against Congress, alleges corruption in party

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

Delhi BJP leaders and workers staged a demonstration outside Congress headquarters here on Saturday, against the alleged corruption of the grand old party in the backdrop of the recovery of huge amounts of "unaccounted" cash from Odisha.

The BJP protesters led by state president Virendra Sachdeva marched towards Congress party headquarters at Akbar Road but were stopped by the police at a barricade.

"Unaccounted" cash amounting to around Rs 250 crore was estimated to have been recovered through searches conducted by the income-tax department against an Odisha distillery group and entities linked to it, official sources said on Friday.

Premises linked to the Congress's Rajya Sabha MP from Jharkhand, Dhiraj Prasad



Sahu, were also covered during the searches, the sources said. The protesters raised slogans against the Congress leaders and demanded action against Sahu. It's a guarantee of Prime Minister Narendra Modi that the corrupt will be caught and

the agencies are doing their job, Sachdeva said. The protest was also attended by West Delhi MP Parvesh Verma, Leader of Opposition in Delhi Assembly Ramvir Singh Bidhuri, and MLA Vijendra Gupta among others.

## Good Samaritan should not be harassed: HC

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

A person who chooses to help a person in distress should not be harassed for showing kindness and if he or she suffers in the process, the law must come to the rescue, the Delhi High Court has said.

The court's observation came while granting interim payment of over Rs 5 lakh as compensation to the widow of a truck driver who died in 2018 while helping a victim of a road accident.

"While he was returning back to his vehicle, which by all probabilities was properly parked on the side way, that he got struck by another unknown speeding vehicle and sustained injuries... We have to assume that being a 'Good Samaritan', he stopped his truck and responded to somebody in distress," said Justice Dharmesh Sharma in a recent order.

"A person who chooses to take steps to aid a person in distress should not be harassed for



showing kindness and if in the process the Good Samaritan suffers some injury or fatal consequence, the law must come to his rescue," the court said.

The widow approached the high court against the claims commissioner's refusal to grant compensation her on the ground that the deceased added peril when he met with an accident at own will, which was not in the course his employment, and thus no liability could be fastened for compensation. The court said

that a bystander who is a witness to the accident or is a good samaritan should not be harassed or intimidated in any manner merely because he voluntarily comes forward to provide immediate assistance to a victim of motor vehicle accident on public road and highways.

The court stated that in the present case, there was no evidence before the commissioner to exclude the employer's liability for payment of compensation under the Employee's Compensation Act

on account of any blemish on the part of the driver, including that he was under the influence of any alcohol or drug etc.

"This court finds that the learned commissioner while passing the impugned judgment clearly overlooked the broader or the larger aspect of the whole scenario that helping an injured on a public road/highway is prime duty of everyone.

An individual, who out of sheer generosity helps someone in distress, is a 'Good Samaritan' according to the parable in Gospel of Luke in the Holy Bible," it said. The court stated that "Good Samaritan laws" shield a rescuer from being sued if the rescue miscarries except in cases of gross negligence or recklessness.

"Bad Samaritan laws - 'oblige persons, on pain of persons in grave peril' i.e., by operation of such laws, statutory duty is imposed on people to take positive steps to rescue a person in 'grave peril'. Such posi-

tion of law can at times lead to morally disturbing instances such as the one in Uttarakhand wherein people chose to video graph a victim of motor vehicle fire instead of taking steps to rescue her," the court stated.

The court said it has no hesitation in setting aside the order of the commissioner and remanded the matter to him to access and decide the quantum of compensation to be payable to the victim's family claimants within a period of two months.

"However, considering the long intervening time that must have left the claimants virtually on the verge of vagrancy, the claimants shall be paid interim payment of Rs. 5 lakhs with interest 12% p.a. From the date of accident i.e., 25.06.2018, which be released to the claimant wife within a month from today, subject to future adjustment on final determination of quantum of compensation and payment thereof to the claimants," the court ordered.

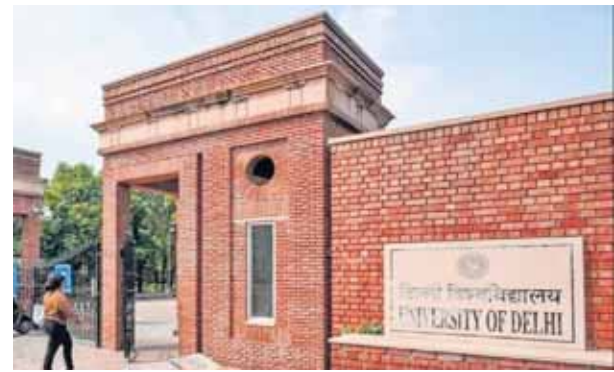
## 'Make DU Campus Law Centre divyang friendly'

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

The Delhi High Court has asked a lawyer, appointed to assist it in a case to ensure that the Campus Law Centre (CLC) in the Delhi University is accessible to persons with disabilities to file a comprehensive report after visiting the premises.

Amicus curiae (friend of the court) Kamal Gupta suggested that he should be allowed to visit the campus so that a comprehensive affidavit could be filed indicating the further requirements to be complied with by the university. The counsel for the university said all necessary cooperation would be rendered to Gupta.

"Learned amicus curiae shall intimate the learned counsel for respondent no.1-university regarding the proposed date of his visit to the Campus Law Centre," Justice Purushendra



Kumar Kaurav said in a recent order.

"Learned amicus curiae, after visiting the Campus Law Centre, shall place on record a comprehensive report/suggestion to be further implemented by the respondent no.1-university. During his visit, let all necessary assistance be rendered," the court ordered.

The Delhi University (DU) submitted that it has taken various steps to ensure that the provisions of the Rights of Persons with Disabilities Act are complied with. It said it has always been sensitive and concerned towards the needs of persons with disabilities and enabling measures have been taken and an access audit was conducted in

this regard. The university is adopting a proactive approach through its own resources and has taken a further initiative to get access audits conducted of the CLC, Faculty of Law and other buildings within the campus, the affidavit filed by the DU said.

The court granted a last opportunity to the DU last month to file a comprehensive affidavit on the implementation of the provisions of the Right of Persons with Disability Act.

The court had also asked the university to file the affidavit showing how the suggestions of the amicus curiae on physical infrastructure and accessibility for persons with disability at the CLC were implemented.

The DU had earlier said repairing work in toilets, corridors, open areas and a provision for tactile and other

facilities for persons with disabilities at the CLC have been completed by the agency to the satisfaction of the competent authority of the university.

The court was hearing a plea moved by Jayant Singh Raghav, a visually-impaired DU student, who raised the issue of providing assistive devices to differently-abled students during examinations. The court had earlier appointed Gupta as amicus curiae in the matter and he had put forward several suggestions in his report regarding the physical infrastructure and accessibility of the CLC. The report said according to the guidelines issued by the University Grants Commission (UGC), an access audit of the CLC be directed to be conducted and a report submitted to the court.

The matter would next be heard by the court on February 21.

## Modi visits PTI headquarters

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

Prime Minister Narendra Modi visited the Press Trust of India office here on Saturday in his first visit to any newsroom since he assumed office in 2014, and saw from close quarters the news agency's newly-launched video service. During his one-hour stay, Modi interacted with the entire PTI staff in batches, and also spent time with the senior editorial and executive staff, discussing in detail the challenges and opportunities before the media. The prime minister also showed keen interest in the teleprinter and creed machine, which were once considered cutting edge technology in news transmission. Walking the length of the entire newsroom at the PTI headquarters, he interacted with all news and non-news verticals of the premier news agency, which was established in 1947 and started operations in 1949.



Since then, the agency, owned by a group of newspapers, has been at the centre and forefront of the Indian news space.

Traditionally dominant in text and photos, PTI started its video service in February this year, and in a short span of time has come to be recognised as a major player in the video news agency business.

The prime minister also had a one-on-one chat with PTI's CEO and Editor-in-Chief Vijay

Joshi and discussed recent political developments and his own political journey.

Modi also signed a visitor's book and penned a poem on 'aachar, vichaar or ab samachar...', talking about conduct, thought process and news. Modi was presented with an iconic PTI picture that showed him in the midst of a sea of supporters during a roadshow in Varanasi during the 2019 election campaign.

## AIIMS to work to advance medicine in high altitude, space

STAFF REPORTER ■ NEW DELHI

The All India Institute of Medical Sciences (AIIMS), Delhi has decided to join hands with the Directorate General of Armed Forces Medical Services (DGAfMS) to advance expertise in the critical fields of high altitude medicine and space medicine.

The premier institute said the collaboration represents a strategic alliance between two leading institutions, combining academic excellence with the specialized knowledge and experience of the Armed Forces Medical Services (AFMS).

The partnership is expected to propel advancements in high altitude medicine and space medicine, benefiting not only the academic and research communities but also contributing to the overall



advancement of medical knowledge and practice, it said. AIIMS Director M Srinivas said, "This collaboration between AIIMS Delhi and Armed Forces Medical Services is a significant milestone that will undoubtedly enhance our capabilities in high altitude medicine and space medicine. I look forward to working closely with DGAfMS."

Dr Rima Dada, Professor in charge of the Media Cell said, "The signing of the memorandum of understanding (MOU) is anticipated to take place in the coming weeks, marking the formal commencement of this collaborative venture. Both AIIMS Delhi and DGAfMS are committed to fostering a spirit of innovation, research, and academic excellence

through this partnership." Dr Rajesh Khadgawat, Professor of Endocrinology at AIIMS, has been appointed as the Nodal Officer for this collaborative initiative.

In yet another unrelated development, the AIIMS said that to ensure safety of the occupants and to track real-time movement of staff cars, it has decided to install GPS devices in these vehicles, excluding those used by faculty/officials to visit restricted/high security areas.

According to an office memorandum, staff cars are often used to transport AIIMS' faculty, residents, and staff for urgent patient care duties during off duty hours and sometimes even late at night. In a recent instance, which came to officials' notice, a staff car broke down at night and the replacement car took substantial time to find its location.

## Constable stabbed during raid in Wazirpur

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

A man accused of robbery allegedly stabbed a Delhi Police constable when the latter tried to nab him in Delhi's Adarsh Nagar area, police said on Saturday.

The policeman sustained injuries and has been sent to a hospital for treatment, they said.

A police team had gone to nab Ajay alias Ganja, who is accused to have been previously involved in a snatching and robbery case near Macchi Market in Wazirpur on Friday night, they said.

"Ajay was sitting along with his friend Akash. On seeing the police team, Ajay and Akash tried to run but constable Bhopender tried to restrain them," a police officer said.



"Ajay whipped out a knife and stabbed Bhopender in the chest and hand, and fled from the scene," the officer said, adding that Akash was however nabbed.

The constable has been admitted to Fortis Hospital in Shalimar Bagh, where his condition is said to be out of danger, police said.

Police said teams have been constituted to arrest Ajay, who is accused of involvement in seven cases of Arms Act and robbery in Adarsh Nagar area.

## Woman found dead in Khirki



PTI ■ NEW DELHI

The body of a 30-year-old woman was found at an apartment in south Delhi's Khirki Extension area, police said on Saturday.

"A PCR call was received at around 7.30 pm on Friday at Malvia Nagar police station, about a foul smell coming from the woman's flat," a senior police officer said.

According to the police, a staff was immediately sent to the spot and the apartment, which

was locked from inside, was opened in the presence of the owner and neighbours.

The woman has been identified as Saniya Rai was found inside, an official said, adding that no external injury was seen as the body was decomposed.

The spot was inspected by the crime team and the body was sent for postmortem, the official said. Police said that further proceedings under section 174 of the CrPC have been initiated and further investigation is underway.

# Poll results show Modi guarantees resonate with people: PM

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

Buoyed by the success in recent Assembly polls, Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Saturday said some political parties do not understand that they would achieve nothing by making "false announcements". The PM reiterated that the recent Assembly poll results have made it clear that 'Modi's guarantee' resonates among people.

Also attacking on the recent caste based census initiated by certain opposition parties, Modi cautioned women against "divisive politics" seeking to split them and said they are one big "caste" who can take on any challenge together.

Modi's comments are seen as a swipe at the Congress and other parties which have been

pushing for a caste census while the prime minister has asserted that the poor, women, youths and farmers are the four biggest castes whose progress will lead to a developed India. In his remarks after interacting with the beneficiaries of the Viksit Bharat Sankalp Yatra, Modi asserted that it is necessary to win people's hearts before winning elections and it is not right to underestimate people's wisdom.

"Our government is not a 'maibaap' government but a government that serves mothers-fathers. The manner in which a child serves his parents, in the same way this Modi works to serve you," the prime minister said.

"Modi cares for the poor, the deprived whom nobody cares for and for whom the doors of offices were closed. Not only

does he care for them but he worships them. For me, every poor is VIP, every mother, daughter, sister is VIP, every farmer is VIP, every youth is VIP," he said.

The recent assembly poll results have made it clear that 'Modi's guarantee' resonates among people who trust it, he said and thanked the electorate.

"But the question is that why the country does not trust those opposed to us. Some political parties do not understand that they would not be able to achieve anything by making false announcements. Elections are won by going among the people, not on social media," the prime minister said.

"It is necessary to win people's hearts before winning elections. It is not right to underestimate people's wisdom. If



some opposition parties had given primacy to serving people over their selfish political interests, then a big part of the population would not have lived in deprivation and hardships." Had those who ran the government for decades worked with honesty, then the guarantees that Modi has to give now would have been fulfilled 50 years ago, the prime minister said.

The Viksit Bharat Sankalp Yatra is being undertaken across the country with the aim to attain the saturation of flagship schemes of the government by ensuring that benefits reach all targeted beneficiaries in a time-bound manner. Modi said it is a matter of sat-

isfaction that people's enthusiasm increasing as the Yatra vehicles reach more and more places.

He said nearly one lakh new beneficiaries of free cooking gas connection scheme have been added after vehicle of 'Modi's guarantee' reached them.

"All women should remain together. Nowadays, some people are creating rift among women... All women have one caste which is so big that they can take together on any challenge," he said while interacting with women beneficiaries of the Viksit Bharat Sankalp Yatra (VBSY). An official statement later added that he cautioned women to be aware of divisive politics seeking to create a rift among them.

The ruling BJP has assiduously courted women voters with several welfare schemes, some

surveys have shown that they have voted for the party more enthusiastically in a number of state elections.

He made the caste and women remarks while interacting with Priyanka Yadav from Darbhanga in Bihar as she noted as to how a number of welfare schemes of the central government helped her family tide over the financial crisis following the Covid-19 outbreak as they received free grain and cash benefit as well.

He urged her to create awareness about government schemes in her village and expressed satisfaction that the "Modi ki Guarantee" vehicles is reaching every village in the country.

He stressed that any welfare scheme must reach every beneficiary for it to be successful and said such programmes

were earlier confined to papers and ribbon-cutting ceremonies. Nazia Nazir, a milk vendor and VBSY beneficiary from Sheikh Pura, Jammu and Kashmir, said 'Jal Jeevan Mission' has proved to be transformative for her village, with clean and safe tapped water supply reaching their homes while water issues once prevailed there.

Among the other beneficiaries with whom Modi interacted was Mona, a transgender, who hailed from Ranchi and now owns a tea shop in Chandigarh after availed a loan of Rs 10,000 through 'PM Svanidhi Scheme'. He reiterated the need for more transgender people to avail government benefits, underlining his government's spirit of 'Sabka Saath Sabka Vikas' to ensure that development reaches every strata of the society.

## India providing new direction to world: Rajnath

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

India has emerged as a global growth engine and is providing a new direction to the world, Defence Minister Rajnath Singh said here on Saturday. He also said India has shown that there is no irreconcilable trade-off between growth and distributive justice.

Making these assertions at the 96th Annual General Meeting and Convention of the Federation of Indian Chambers of Commerce and Industry (FICCI), he said the Indian growth story is the result of the hard work and ability of more than one billion Indians under the guiding leadership of Prime Minister Narendra Modi.

Rajnath highlighted that the transformative policies and programmes of the government have powered the Indian growth story, various facets of which are shaping up the world of today.

"India has committed that its growth will not be at the cost



of environmental degradation. We've chosen the path of green growth. We signed the Paris Agreement. We've formed the International Solar Alliance. We've taken initiatives to promote clean energy. We have also reduced the emission intensity of GDP," he said.

Stressing that the economic growth must be gender neutral, Rajnath pointed out that the Government, under the Prime Minister's leadership, has successfully changed the earlier narrative which credited the growth of the economy to the

contribution made by men and women alone.

"Empowering women has been our priority. We've ensured that India's economic, political, and social development takes place not just on the strength of men, but Nari Shakti too," he said.

Enumerating the steps taken by the Ministry of Defence to empower women, the defence minister said "Girls are now studying in Sainik Schools, while women officers are being trained at the National Defence Academy. Women are now

being appointed as fighter pilots, deployed on warships, and posted on forward posts across the border. In addition, a large number of young girls are joining the Armed Forces through Agnipath scheme."

Rajnath highlighted another major aspect of India's growth story and stated that the government has created a growth web across the country by decentralising the activities and taking them to far-flung areas.

He also listed out the initiatives and accomplishments undertaken by the government in the field of infrastructure development.

"We promoted infrastructure development in roads, airports and railways. Till 2014, India had 91,000 kilometres of national highways; today it has increased to about 1.5 lakh kilometres. While India had only 74 airports in 2014, today it has increased twofold. Through PM Gati Shakti Yojana and National Infrastructure Pipeline, we have

planned infrastructure development worth up to Rs 100 lakh crore in the country," he said.

He said the government is making all efforts to further strengthen India's position as a growth engine. "But you know that the government cannot do this work alone. For that we also need the support of the wealth creators and thought leaders of this country," he told the industry captains.

Rajnath said the industry leaders have a "special responsibility" to help the government write the next chapter of the "Indian growth story".

"If India is the growth engine of the global economy then all of you wealth creators and thought leaders are the motor of that growth engine," he said.

"Therefore, there is a special responsibility on all of you to help the government write the next chapter of the Indian growth story by integrating the needs of everyone from the engine to the last coach," the defence minister added.

## Shah to chair Eastern Zonal Council meet in Patna

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

Union Home Minister Amit Shah will on Sunday chair a meeting of the Eastern Zonal Council to be held in Patna where a host of issues like minimum price for a number of minor millets, creation of infrastructure, water sharing are expected to be discussed.

Eastern Zonal Council comprises the states of Bihar, West Bengal, Odisha and Jharkhand from where Chief Ministers along with two senior ministers and officials are expected to attend the day-long meeting, according to an official statement.

The home minister will chair the 26th meeting of the eastern zonal council in Patna on Sunday, it said.

In council meetings many important decisions such as the minimum support price of Kodo, Kutki and other minor



millet crops at par with Ragi and, the release of the National Framework for Sediment Management in 2022 among others are expected to be discussed.

The zonal councils discuss a wide range of issues including mining, central financial assistance on certain items, creation of infrastructure, land acquisition and land transfer, water sharing, implementation of Direct Benefit Transfer Scheme (DBT), state reor-

ganisation and other matters of common interest at the regional level.

Zonal councils believes that strong states create a strong nation and provide a platform and systematic mechanism for regular dialogue and discussion on issues affecting two or more states or the Centre and the states, the statement said.

Five zonal councils were established in 1957 under Section 15-22 of the States Reorganization Act, 1956.

## Congress holds separate meetings to review poll debacles in 5 States

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

After the dismal performance in just concluded assembly polls of five States including within Hindi heartland, top Congress leadership during the last two days held separate meetings to review the party's performance in Madhya Pradesh, Chhattisgarh, Rajasthan and Mizoram.

Of the five states which went to polls last month the Congress could wrest power only on Telangana while it lost Rajasthan and Chhattisgarh and failed to dislodge BJP Govt in MP.

Congress president Mallikarjun Kharge convened the review meeting at the All India Congress Committee (AICC) headquarters where former party chief Rahul Gandhi and other senior leaders were also present in all sessions done to review separately.

Saturday was the second day of review of election results where the Congress failed to win in the just concluded assembly elections.

The party first reviewed the humiliating defeat in Madhya Pradesh and Chhattisgarh. While the meeting was said to be cordial, sources said those at the helm of affairs in both the states came in for harsh criticism.

While the Madhya Pradesh campaign was led by PCC president Kamal Nath and Digvijaya Singh, the election efforts in Chhattisgarh were led by the Congress's incumbent chief minister, Bhupesh Baghel.

Sources said state party leaders flagged complacency, the lack of coordination and unity, the lack of resources, the failure to counter the BJP campaign and the inability to take the Congress promises to the people as the reasons for the defeat.

In Madhya Pradesh, Nath is under pressure to step down as party chief. Sources said he too is not keen to continue.

After the meeting, Chhattisgarh Congress election in-charge Kumari Selja told mediapersons that their women candidates had performed well and asserted the



party will do better in the Lok Sabha elections.

"We gave tickets to 18 women, out of which 11 won. The media, agencies and everyone said we were winning in Chhattisgarh, and to some extent they were right as our vote percentage did not change much.

There are plenty of reasons which are being reviewed. We have not lost the trust of the people. We will win more seats in the Lok Sabha elections."

AICC general secretary in-charge of Madhya Pradesh Randeep Surjewala said: "We openly discussed the reasons for the party's defeat and leaders analysed the shortcomings of the party... The Congress president heard us patiently.

All the leaders authorised him to take a decision on how to strengthen the organisation.

We urged him to hold a meeting of the Congress Legislature Party in Madhya Pradesh and appoint an observer for its next meeting to enable it to elect the new Leader of the Opposition."

While the review meeting for Mizoram was held earlier, the leaders from Rajasthan including former Chief Minister Ashok Gehlot and other senior leaders attended the review meeting for Rajasthan.

AICC general secretary, organisation, K C Venugopal, were also present at the review meeting.

AICC in-charge for Rajasthan Sukhjinder Singh Randhawa said, "Our vote share was also a little less than the BJP and it also improved a little bit

from the last time."

"Many of our candidates lost by a narrow margin and we told the senior leaders that we would start our preparations for the parliamentary elections from today itself.

We will look into our shortcomings and work on them. We assured the leadership that we would fight the BJP unitedly in the Lok Sabha elections. The Congress fought the election in Rajasthan unitedly," he told reporters after the meeting.

The leadership felt that it was after a long time that the Congress party had performed very well in Rajasthan.

After a long time, the party got so many seats, he said.

"On whether he offered to resign as in-charge of Rajasthan, Randhawa said, "I told the leadership that I was there only till the elections as I have to concentrate on Punjab also."

"I had said earlier that I would be there till the assembly elections. How we were left behind, we will look into this," he said while asserting that "we will fix accountability."

AICC in-charge for Mizoram Bhakt Charan Das later said, "We discussed every aspect of the Mizoram election, including the organisational structure of the state at the grassroots level and state level, as well as the various events that occurred during the elections." "We also deliberated on our future plans.

All these matters were carefully and intensively discussed," he said.

## Modi wishes Sonia on her 77th birthday

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

Political leaders across the party lines including Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Saturday greeted former Congress president Sonia Gandhi on her 77th birthday.

"Best wishes to Smt Sonia Gandhi Ji on her birthday. May she be blessed with a long and healthy life," Modi said in a social media post.

Sonia Gandhi, the longest serving Congress president, has taken a back seat from active politics in the last few years for health reasons, with her son Rahul Gandhi and daughter Priyanka Gandhi Vadra playing



a key role in the party. Several Congress leaders on Saturday greeted Congress Party Chairperson Sonia Gandhi with party chief Mallikarjun

Kharge visiting her at her residence to extend his greetings. After meeting Sonia Gandhi, Kharge said in a social media post, "On behalf of all Congress workers, hearty greetings to Congress Parliamentary Party Chairperson and former Congress president Sonia Gandhi on her birthday today."

"Her courageous and dignified contribution towards the country and the party is inspiring for everyone. We all wish for her good health and long life," Kharge added.

The Congress also posted on its official X handle a video of Sonia Gandhi with the caption, "Strength in her vision, India in her heart."

"Happy birthday to someone who embodies the highest virtues of integrity, compassion and courage. She's a pillar of strength who, making great sacrifice, has dedicated her life to public service," the party said in another post.

"Gandhi -- the longest serving Congress president -- has taken a backseat from active politics in the last few years for health reasons, with her son Rahul Gandhi and daughter Priyanka Gandhi Vadra taking up key roles in the party," the Congress said.

INDIA bloc opposition leaders including chief ministers of several states took social media to wish Sonia Gandhi.

## Coordinated exercise Prasthan conducted by Navy, other agencies

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

A co-ordinated exercise code-named 'Prasthan' was conducted on Friday by the Indian Navy and other defence, state and civil agencies in the Offshore Development Area off Mumbai, navy officials said here on Saturday.

The exercise is conducted every six months to validate measures and procedures to address various contingencies that may arise in the oil production platforms. The current exercise was conducted on R12A (Ratna) platform of Oil and Natural Gas Commission (ONGC), located about 45 nautical miles west of Mumbai harbour.

The exercise commenced in the early hours on Friday and was conducted in two phases over the day. The first phase saw security emergencies such as attack by terrorists and bomb threat from IEDs.

Upon receiving information of the threat, Flag Officer Commanding-in-Chief, Western Naval Command, based at Mumbai, who is also the Commander-in-Chief (Coastal Defence), West activated the requisite contingency plan.

The Crisis Management Committee, comprising senior officials from various defence, State and civilian agencies, assembled at the Indian Navy's



Operation Centre to facilitate a co-ordinated response to all emergencies involved.

The Crisis Management Group assessed various aspects of the emergencies and initiated co-ordinated actions by concerned agencies as per established Standard Operating Procedures. The Indian Navy, in conjunction with the Indian Air Force, deployed its anti-sabotage teams to neutralise security threats in the affected oil platform.

The first phase of the exercise also saw actions to counter contingencies such as terrorist intrusion, bomb threat, man overboard, medical evacuation of platform crew and oil spill in the area.

This was followed by the second phase which witnessed action against contingencies such as fire in the oil platform and assisting a disabled vessel in the offshore development area.

A number of ships and heli-

copters from the Indian Navy, the Indian Air Force, the Indian Coast Guard, ONGC, Ministry of Petroleum and Natural Gas and Director General of Shipping were deployed for the exercise. Personnel from Maharashtra Police, Customs, Fisheries Department, Mumbai Port Authorities, JN Port Authorities, India Met Department and other concerned State and Central civilian agencies also participated in the exercise.

The drills and procedures were undertaken in a synergetic and coordinated manner. The exercise provided a realistic setting to assess the preparedness of all concerned agencies to tackle these contingencies as also the procedures for co-ordinating actions among various agencies. A detailed analysis of all activities would be undertaken to refine existing procedures and assess aspects that need to be further strengthened and improved.

## BSP suspends Danish for anti party activities

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

The Bahujan Samaj Party on Saturday suspended its Lok Sabha member Danish Ali for "anti-party" activities.

In a brief statement, the party's Uttar Pradesh unit said Ali, the MP from Amroha, has been suspended for anti-party activities.

The move comes a day after Ali walked out of Lok Sabha proceedings along with other opposition members on Friday to protest against the government's motion to expel TMC member Mahua Moitra for "unethical conduct". Other Bahujan Samaj Party (BSP) members remained seated in the House.

Ali has been actively joining opposition ranks in attacking the BJP and its policies even though the Mayawati-led BSP has maintained a distance from the ruling alliance as well as the opposition.

Satish Chandra Misra, the party's general secretary, said in a letter to Ali, "You were told verbally many times that you should not make any statement or take any action against the policies, ideology and discipline of the party, but despite this you have been continuously acting against the party."

Misra reminded Ali that he



was a member of HD Deve Gowda's Janata Dal (Secular) till 2018.

"... On the request of Deve Gowda, you were given a ticket from Amroha as a candidate of the Bahujan Samaj Party and before giving this ticket, Gowda had given an assurance that you will always follow all the policies and instructions of the Bahujan Samaj Party and will work in the interest of the party," the letter read.

The party charged him with forgetting the assurances he had given and indulging in anti-party activities.

"Therefore, now, in the interest of the party, you are suspended from the membership of the Bahujan Samaj Party with immediate effect," the letter in Hindi said.

# Israel bombs southern Gaza following US veto

AP ■ RAFAH

Israeli warplanes struck parts of the Gaza Strip overnight into Saturday in relentless bombardments, including some of the dwindling slivers of land Palestinians had been told to evacuate to in the territory's south.

The latest strikes came a day after the United States vetoed a United Nations resolution demanding an immediate humanitarian cease-fire in Gaza, despite it being backed by the vast majority of Security Council members and many other nations. The vote in the 15-member council was 13-1, with the United Kingdom abstaining.

"Attacks from air, land and sea are intense, continuous and widespread," UN Secretary-General Antonio Guterres said before the vote. Gaza residents "are being told to move like human pinballs - ricocheting between ever-smaller slivers of the south, without any of the basics for survival."

Guterres told the council that Gaza was at "a breaking point" with the humanitarian support system at risk of total collapse, and that he feared "the



consequences could be devastating for the security of the entire region."

Gaza's borders with Israel and with Egypt are effectively sealed, leaving Palestinians with no option other than to try to seek refuge within the territory. The overall death toll in Gaza since the start of the war has surpassed 17,400, the majority of them women and children, according to the Health Ministry in Hamas-controlled Gaza, which does not differentiate between civil-

ians and combatants in its count. Israel holds Hamas responsible for civilian casualties, accusing the militants of using civilians as human shields, and says it's made considerable efforts with its evacuation orders to get civilians out of harm's way.

On Saturday, Gaza residents reported airstrikes and shelling in the northern part of the strip as well as in the south, including the city of Rafah, which lies near the Egyptian border and where

the Israeli army had ordered civilians to evacuate to.

The main hospital in the central city of Deir al-Balah received the bodies of 71 people killed in bombings in the area over the past 24 hours, the Health Ministry said Saturday morning. The hospital also received 160 wounded, the ministry said. In the southern city of Khan Younis, the bodies of 62 people and another 99 wounded were taken to Nasser Hospital over the past 24 hours, the ministry said.

Israel has been trying to secure the military's hold on northern Gaza, where furious fighting has underscored heavy resistance from the territory's Hamas rulers. Tens of thousands of residents are believed to remain in the area despite evacuation orders, six weeks after troops and tanks rolled in during the war sparked by Hamas' deadly Oct. 7 raid targeting civilians in Israel.

About 1,200 people, mostly civilians, were killed in the Hamas raid, and more than 240 people taken hostage. A temporary truce saw hostages and Palestinian prisoners released, but more than 130 hostages are believed to remain in Gaza.

More than 2,200 Palestinians have been killed since the December 1 collapse of the truce, about two-thirds women and children, according to Gaza's Health Ministry.

As fighting resumed after a brief truce more than a week ago, the US urged Israel to do more to protect civilians and allow more aid to besieged Gaza. The appeals came as Israel expanded its blistering air and ground campaign into southern Gaza, especially the southern city of Khan Younis, sending tens of thousands more

fleeing. Despite growing international pressure, the Biden administration remains opposed to an open-ended cease-fire, arguing it would enable Hamas to survive and pose a threat to Israel. Officials have expressed misgivings in recent days about the rising civilian death toll and dire humanitarian crisis, but have not pushed publicly for Israel to wind down the war, now in its third month.

"We have not given a firm deadline to Israel, not really our role," deputy national security adviser Jon Finer told a security forum a day before the US veto in the UN Security Council. "That said, we do have influence, even if we don't have ultimate control over what happens on the ground in Gaza."

Israeli Defense Minister Yoav Gallant argued a cease-fire would be a victory for Hamas. "A cease-fire is handing a prize to Hamas, dismissing the hostages held in Gaza, and signalling terror groups everywhere," he said. "Stand with Israel in our mission - we are fighting for our future, and we are fighting for the free world."

## WORLD BRIEFS

### FIVE TERRORISTS KILLED IN NW PAKISTAN

**Peshawar:** At least five wanted terrorists were killed in a clash with security forces during an operation in the restive northwest Pakistan, the Pakistan Army said on Saturday. The incident occurred on Friday in the volatile Tank district bordering South Waziristan where the forces launched the operation on the reported presence of terrorists in the area. In the lethal exchange of fire, five militants were killed, the Inter-Services Public Relations, the media wing of the Army, said. The forces seized huge quantities of arms and ammunition from the possession of the slain terrorists. The terrorists killed were wanted by the forces for their attacks on the forces, target killings, and money extortion. Clearance operations are still underway in the area due to the possible presence of more terrorists, it said. Pakistan has witnessed an uptick in terror activities in recent months, especially in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa and Balochistan provinces after the banned militant Tehreek-i-Taliban Pakistan ended its ceasefire with the government in November last year.

### INDIAN-AMERICAN SEEKS RE-ELECTION IN KANSAS

**New York:** Indian-American Senator Usha Reddi from the 22nd district of Kansas state of the US has submitted her candidacy for another term in the state legislature. The Democrat, who has held the seat following previous senator Tom Hawk's withdrawal from the legislature in January this year, announced her candidacy on her social media platform X. "Just filed as a candidate for the Kansas State Senate in the 2024 election! Public service is a significant part of my life, and I am dedicated to continuing to work for the people as your State Senator!" she wrote on X. Her term is expected to end by January 2025. Reddi will focus on addressing health care, mental health, public education, safety, equity, jobs, security, economic growth, infrastructure, housing, and childcare, her campaign website said. "I will continue to work with legislators, experts on issues, and community members to develop and support policies that will assist and empower individuals, families, businesses, and nonprofits," her pitch on the website reads.

### HOSPITAL FIRE KILLS AT LEAST 3 IN ROME

**Rome:** A fire broke out in a hospital on Rome's outskirts, killing at least three people and forcing the overnight evacuation of the smoke-filled facility and its patients, officials said on Saturday. Patients in intensive care at St John the Evangelist hospital in Tivoli were transferred immediately to other hospitals via ambulance, the Tivoli mayor's office said in a statement. Less-critical patients were moved into a nearby municipal gymnasium and then transferred to other facilities. The governor of the Lazio region, Francesco Rocca, said from the scene that three people were killed and an investigation would determine the cause of the blaze. He acknowledged there were "notable delays" in updating Italy's aging hospitals with sprinkler systems and other fire safety infrastructure. The fire department initially said four people were killed after the blaze broke out on late Friday. Italian news reports said the confusion arose because a body, already in the hospital morgue, was initially counted among the fire victims.

### 11 KILLED IN CRIMINALS-VILLAGERS CLASH IN MEXICO

**Mexico City:** Eleven people were killed in a clash Friday between gunmen from a criminal gang and residents of a small farming community in central Mexico, authorities said. Dramatic video of the fight posted on social media showed villagers in cowboy hats with sickles and hunting rifles chasing down suspected gang members amid bursts of automatic gunfire. Police in the State of Mexico, which abuts Mexico City, said the clash occurred in the hamlet of Texcaltilan, about 130 kilometers southwest of the capital. State police said eight of the dead were members of the criminal gang, while three were village residents. Police did not identify the gang, but the violent Familia Michoacana drug cartel has been dominant in that area for a decade. The video appeared to show the attackers wore military-style uniforms, some with helmets. Villagers apparently set their bodies and vehicles on fire.

# I was ousted for opposing Kargil: Nawaz

PTI ■ LAHORE

Pakistan's former prime minister Nawaz Sharif on Saturday said he was ousted from the government in 1999 by (late) Gen Pervez Musharraf for opposing the Kargil misadventure, as he underlined the importance of having good relations with India and other neighbours.

The three-time prime minister questioned why he was ousted from the office of the prime minister prematurely.

"I should be told why I was ousted in 1993 and 1999. When I opposed the Kargil plan saying it should not happen... I was ousted (by Gen Pervez Musharraf). And later what I said proved right," Sharif said here while talking to the aspirants of his party tickets for upcoming polls.

The Pakistan Muslim League-Nawaz (PML-N) supreme leader said that on all three occasions



being the premier he was delivering but he was sent packing and that he did not know why.

"I want to know why I was ousted every time," he asked. Sharif also talked about the visit of two Indian prime ministers to Pakistan only when he was the prime minister of Pakistan.

"We have delivered on every front. During my tenure as PM, two Indian prime ministers visited Pakistan. Modi sahab and Vajpayee sahab had come to Lahore," the former prime minister said, stressing improved rela-

tions with India and other neighbouring countries.

"We will have to improve our relations with India, Afghanistan, and Iran. We need to make more stronger relations with China," Sharif said.

He regretted that Pakistan lagged behind its neighbours in economic growth development.

Lashing out at Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI) party's jailed former chairman Imran Khan, Sharif said he did not know why an inexperienced man was given the reins of the country.

"The economy witnessed a downfall during Imran Khan's government (2018-2020). Then the Shehbaz Sharif government took over in April 2022 and rescued the country from default."

Sharif reiterated his demand for accountability of former military generals and judges for ruining the country by ousting his gov-

ernment in 2017.

"Those who brought this country to this level should be made accountable as patriotic people can't do this to their country," he said.

On Friday, Sharif had said: "We do not want to come into power to roam around in luxury cars but we want accountability of those (who) ruined this country and made false cases against us."

A month before his return to Pakistan after four years of self-imposed exile in the UK, Sharif had hinted at bringing former army chief Gen Qamar Javed Bajwa, former ISI head Lt-Gen Faiz Hamid, and former chief justices of Pakistan Saqib Nisar and Asif Saeed Khosa for their crime of ousting his government and causing economic disaster.

Sharif is holding meetings daily to award party tickets for the February 8 general elections next year.

# Pak admits some political dissidents' ties to terrorists

**Islamabad (PTI):** Pakistan has acknowledged that some of the political dissidents, who have sought asylum in the United Kingdom and other countries, had links with terrorist entities inside the country.

Foreign Office spokesperson Mumtaz Zehra Baloch made the statement during her weekly media briefing here on Thursday while responding to a question on the alleged acid attack on jailed prime minister Imran Khan's aide.

The Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf leader and former special assistant to the prime minister, Mirza Shahzad Akbar, last week claimed that he was attacked at his home in the UK, adding that 'acidic liquid' was thrown at him.

When asked about the incident, the Foreign Office spokesperson rejected any insinuations of Pakistan's involvement and that of Pakistani agencies in the attack, saying it is not 'our policy to target our own nationals abroad.'

She, however, said that many political dissidents have sought political asylum and have been living in the UK and other countries around the world for several decades.

"Many of them have had links with terrorist entities inside Pakistan," she said.

She asserted that Pakistan has not engaged in any extra-territorial attacks against such individuals.

# Opposition vows to fight, as Putin all set for another term

AP ■ TALLINN

Behind bars in penal colonies or in self-exile abroad, Russian opposition figures vow they will still put up a fight against President Vladimir Putin as he seeks yet another term in office in an election in March.

Although they believe Putin will be declared the winner no matter how voters cast their ballots, they say they hope to undermine the widespread public support he enjoys, turn popular opinion against the devastating war he unleashed on Ukraine, and show those who oppose it already that they are not alone.

"No one but us will step into this battle for the hearts and the minds of our fellow citizens. So we need to do it and win," imprisoned Russian opposition leader Alexei Navalny said in an online statement relayed from behind bars.

Putin, 71, announced Friday that he will run for president again, to pile another six years onto his two dozen in power. He could even run again in 2030.

The vote is scheduled for March 15-17, with his victory all but assured. The vast major-

ity of opposition figures are either imprisoned or have fled the country, almost all independent news outlets have been blocked, and any criticism has been muted by a slew of repressive laws adopted over the last decade.

"This is, basically, a guarantee that (the Kremlin) can declare any result whatsoever," said Nikolay Petrov, visiting researcher at the German Institute for International and Security Affairs, in an interview with The Associated Press.

Some activists agree there is no point in trying to influence the election's outcome. They say they will take advantage of the election campaign to press their views about Putin and his government - a time when "Russians will be more politically active than usual," according to Leonid Volkov, Navalny's top strategist and chief of staff.

"Our task is to make sure that the issues we will be able to raise and bring into the public agenda in January, February, March stick - stick with Russians even after the election," said Volkov, who left Russia several years ago.

To that end, Volkov and his team launched a project called "Navalny's Campaigning Machine."

# Biden blasts Trump on infrastructure

**Las Vegas (AP):** President Joe Biden went to Las Vegas on Friday to say he's "putting high-speed rail on the fast track," and he used the moment to blast Donald Trump — his predecessor and likely 2024 challenger — as a do-nothing politician.

"Trump just talks the talk. We walk the walk," Biden said at a hall for unionised carpenters. "He likes to say America is a failing nation. Frankly, he doesn't know what the hell he's talking about. I see shovels in the ground, cranes in the sky. People hard at work rebuilding America together."

The president showcased USD 8.2 billion in new federal funding for 10 major passenger rail projects across the country. He also emphasised the fundamental differences between Trump and himself, a sign that his policy speeches are taking an ever greater political bent with the election now roughly 11 months away.

The Democrat said Trump 'failed' to deliver on his promises to invest in US infrastructure. Biden countered that his rail funding could help to connect Las Vegas to Los Angeles via high-speed trains before LA hosts the summer Olympics in 2028, slashing travel times, helping the environment and creating jobs.

Biden hopes that investment through federal and state partnership programs will help to boost prospects for the long-discussed project, which supporters say could revitalise travel in the American West but critics argue is too costly.

The 350.8-kilometre train route linking Las Vegas and Rancho Cucamonga, California, about 65 kilometres east of downtown Los Angeles, may one day serve more than 11 million passengers annually.

Another electric rail line getting funding has been billed as the nation's first high-speed route and is eventually planned to traverse California's Central Valley and extend to San Francisco and on to Los Angeles, with trains reaching up to 354 kph.

# US, Philippines condemn China coast guard's cannon blasts

AP ■ MANILA

The Philippines and its treaty ally, the United States, separately condemned a high-seas assault on Saturday by the Chinese coast guard together with suspected militia ships that repeatedly blasted water cannons to block three Philippine fisheries vessels from a disputed shoal in the South China Sea.

The nighttime assault by China's ships off the Scarborough Shoal, one of the most aggressive this year, caused "significant damage" to the communication and navigation equipment of one of the three Bureau of Fisheries and Aquatic Resources ships of the Philippines, Filipino officials said.

They said without elaborating that suspected militia vessels accompanying Chinese coast guard ships used a long-range acoustic device that could impair hearing causing "severe temporary discomfort and incapacitation to some Filipino crew".

It's the latest flare out of the long-seething territorial disputes in the South China Sea, a flashpoint in Asia that has put the US and China on a collision course. China claims virtually the entire strategic waterway, but the Philippines, Vietnam, Malaysia, Brunei and Taiwan have also pressed their separate claims.

Territorial standoffs between China and the Philippines over a number of disputed offshore areas, including the Scarborough and the Second Thomas shoals, have been particularly heated this year.

The US has warned that it's obligated to defend the Philippines, its longtime treaty ally, if Filipino forces, aircraft and ships come under an armed attack, including in the South China Sea.

China has warned the US to stay away from what it calls a purely Asian dispute. It has deployed ships and aircraft to closely shadow US Navy ships and aircraft which periodically undertake freedom of navigation and overflight

patrols in one of the world's most hotly disputed seas.

A Philippine government task force that deals with the long-seething territorial disputes said Saturday it "vehemently condemns the illegal and aggressive actions carried out by the Chinese coast guard and Chinese maritime militia against the civilian Bureau of Fisheries and Aquatic Resources vessels".

US Ambassador to Manila MaryKay Carlson condemned the People's Republic of China's "aggressive, illegal actions against the Philippine BFAR vessels lawfully operating in the Philippines' exclusive economic zone".

"This PRC behaviour violates international law and endangers lives and livelihood," Carlson said in a post on X, formerly Twitter. "We stand with our Philippine friends, partners, allies in support of a free and open Indo-Pacific."

There was no immediate reaction from Chinese officials.

The Philippine fisheries bureau's ships sailed to the Scarborough Shoal to provide humanitarian aid, mainly free fuel and Christmas grocery packs, to poor Filipino fishermen onboard nearly 30 boats in the rich but far-flung fishing area, Philippine officials said.

The swarm of Chinese coast guard and accompanying ships took dangerously aggressive actions, including the use of water cannons at least eight times, as the Philippine government ships approached about 2.6 kilometers to 3.5 kilometers (1.6 to 2 miles) from Scarborough Shoal, Philippine officials said.

They added that the Chinese coast guard installed a floating barrier at an entrance to the vast fishing lagoon of Scarborough Shoal and deployed personnel aboard small motor boats to drive away Filipino fishermen waiting for the distribution of fuel and food supplies at sea.

"To prevent the distribution of humanitarian support is not only illegal but also inhumane," the Philippine government task force said.

# Olaf Scholz confident of resolving budget crisis

**Berlin (AP):** German Chancellor Olaf Scholz said on Saturday he is confident that his troubled government will find a good solution to a budget crisis triggered by a court ruling last month, and promised his centre-left party there will be no dismantling of the country's welfare state. Leaders of Scholz's three-party coalition have been wrangling over money since Germany's highest court annulled a decision to repurpose 60 billion euros (USD 65 billion) originally meant to cushion the fallout from the COVID-19 pandemic for measures to help combat climate change and modernise the country.

The immediate challenge is to plug a 17 billion-euro hole in next year's budget. Scholz, Vice Chancellor Robert Habeck and Finance Minister Christian Lindner have met repeatedly to seek to resolve the impasse, but have run out of time to get the budget through parliament before the new year starts.

The issue has added to tensions in the 2-year-old coalition, which has become notorious for infighting and has seen its poll ratings slump. The alliance brings together Scholz's Social Democrats and Habeck's environmentalist Greens, who also traditionally lean to the left, with Lindner's pro-business Free Democrats. Lindner and his party have portrayed themselves as guarantors of solid finances and adherence to Germany's strict self-imposed limits on running up debt — the rules at the centre of last month's court ruling — and have advocated spending cuts.

Some members, along with the conservative opposition, have questioned a roughly 12 per cent increase in unemployment benefits that is due to take effect in January. Germany's inflation rate has now declined to 3.2 per cent from much higher levels earlier this year.

"I want to impart confidence here that we will succeed" in finding a solution, "and that we will succeed in a way that is important for the future of this country", Scholz told a regular convention of the Social Democrats in Berlin on Saturday.

# Europe reaches deal on the world's first comprehensive AI rules

AP ■ LONDON

European Union negotiators clinched a deal on Friday on the world's first comprehensive artificial intelligence rules, paving the way for legal oversight of technology used in popular generative AI services like ChatGPT that has promised to transform everyday life and spurred warnings of existential dangers to humanity.

Negotiators from the European Parliament and the bloc's 27 member countries

overcame big differences on controversial points including generative AI and police use of facial recognition surveillance to sign a tentative political agreement for the Artificial Intelligence Act.

"Deal!" tweeted European Commissioner Thierry Breton, just before midnight. "The EU becomes the very first continent to set clear rules for the use of AI."

The result came after marathon closed-door talks this week, with the initial session lasting 22 hours before a

second round kicked off on Friday morning.

Officials were under the gun to secure a political victory for the flagship legislation but were expected to leave the door open to further talks to work out the fine print, likely to bring more backroom lobbying.

The EU took an early lead in the global race to draw up AI guardrails when it unveiled the first draft of its rulebook in 2021. The recent boom in generative AI, however, sent European officials scrambling

to update a proposal poised to serve as a blueprint for the world.

The European Parliament will still need to vote on it early next year, but with the deal done that's a formality, Brando Benifei, an Italian lawmaker co-leading the body's negotiating efforts, told The Associated Press on late Friday.

"It's very very good," he said by text message after being asked if it included everything he wanted. "Obviously we had to accept some compromises but overall very good." The

eventual law wouldn't fully take effect until 2025 at the earliest, and threatens stiff financial penalties for violations of up to 35 million euros (USD 38 million) or 7 per cent of a company's global turnover.

Generative AI systems like OpenAI's ChatGPT have exploded into the world's consciousness, dazzling users with the ability to produce human-like text, photos and songs but raising fears about the risks the rapidly developing technology poses to jobs, privacy and copyright protection and even

human life itself.

Now, the US, UK, China and global coalitions like the Group of 7 major democracies have jumped in with their own proposals to regulate AI, though they're still catching up to Europe.

Strong and comprehensive regulation from the EU "can set a powerful example for many governments considering regulation," said Anu Bradford, a Columbia Law School professor who's an expert on EU and digital regulation. Other countries "may not copy every pro-

vision but will likely emulate many aspects of it."

AI companies who will have to obey the EU's rules will also likely extend some of those obligations to markets outside the continent, she said. "After all, it is not efficient to re-train separate models for different markets," she said.

Others are worried that the agreement was rushed through. "Today's political deal marks the beginning of important and necessary technical work on crucial details of the AI Act, which are still missing,"

said Daniel Friedlaender, head of the European office of the Computer

Communications Industry Association, a tech industry lobby group.

The AI Act was originally designed to mitigate the dangers from specific AI functions based on their level of risk, from low to unacceptable. But lawmakers pushed to expand it to foundation models, the advanced systems that underpin general purpose AI services like ChatGPT and Google's Bard chatbot.

# India to be \$5 trillion economy by end of 2025, says Shah

PTI ■ DEHRADUN

Union Home Minister Amit Shah on Saturday said India will become a USD 5 trillion economy by the end of 2025. Addressing the valedictory session of the Uttarakhand Global Investors Summit at the Forest Research Institute here, Shah said India has grown exponentially on every front over the past one decade due to the far-sighted and visionary leadership of Prime Minister Narendra Modi.

Never before did the country make so big a leap during 75 years of Independence," he said, and attributed all this to Modi's visionary leadership and his capacity to translate his vision into a reality. Modi is leading the movement for climate change, and he is trying to impart pace to the world's slowing GDP through the Make in India programme, besides leading the campaign for a terror-free world, Shah said. On G-20, he said the Delhi Declaration was India's big achievement on the diplomatic front, which the world will remember for decades to come.



The country's per capita income has doubled in the last ten years, Shah said, adding that 13 and a half crore people have come out of poverty across the country during the period. "The IMF described India as a bright spot in a dark zone. Morgan Stanley said by 2027, India will emerge as the third-largest economy in the world, forging ahead of Japan and

Germany. These are good signs. India's time has arrived," he noted. About the Uttarakhand Global Investors Summit, he said when Chief Minister Pushkar Singh Dhami told him that he had set a target of getting investments worth Rs 2 lakh crore for the summit, he thought it was impossible. "But I congratulate him for already signing investment MoUs worth Rs 3 lakh crore with different companies. The two-day summit marks the beginning of many new things for Uttarakhand. After two decades of Uttarakhand's creation, I can say with confidence that Atal ji created it and Modi

ji is building it," Shah said. He asked investors to come to the state and unlock its limitless investment potential in various sectors, saying apart from the state government's investment-friendly policies, it has a corruption-free administration, which will help them. Shah said Uttarakhand was the country's most peaceful state in close proximity to Delhi, which would give investors a big advantage. The minister also said former prime minister Atal Bihari Vajpayee had created smaller states with great hope, and it is the collective responsibility of all to ensure that the experiment succeeds.

## Sebi mulling framework for issuance of subordinate units by REITs, InvITs to sponsors

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

Capital markets regulator Sebi is looking to come out with a framework for the issuance of subordinate units by REITs and InvITs to sponsors and their associates. Additionally, the regulator has proposed a framework for unit-based employee benefits (UBEB) in the context of REITs (real estate investment trusts) and InvITs (infrastructure investment trusts).



The Securities and Exchange Board of India (Sebi) has sought comments from the public till December 29 on the proposals. Under the proposed framework, subordinate units can be issued only to the sponsor, its associates and sponsor group, such units should carry only inferior voting as compared to ordinary units and the units can be issued to the eligible entities in the initial offer or in any offering subsequent to the initial offer, Sebi said in its consultation paper. It further suggested that subordinate units can only be transferred inter-se amongst the sponsor entities. "Any issuance of subordinate units post initial offer shall require prior approval from 75 per cent of the unitholders by value. Sponsor(s), sponsor group, associates of sponsor(s) and any other parties related to the transaction shall not vote on such matters," Sebi suggested. The regulator suggested that subordinate units and ordinary units must be issued under separate ISINs and such units should not be considered for the purpose of mandatory minimum unitholding requirements applicable to sponsors. It further recommended that the entitlement date including performance benchmark for conversion of subordinate units to ordinary units should be clearly defined and specified in the offer document.

Further, a one-time extension in the entitlement date should be permitted for a maximum period of one year subject to certain conditions. "The minimum time gap between issuance of subordinate units and entitlement date / event for conversion of subordinate units to ordinary units shall be one year," Sebi suggested. The current rules permit REITs and InvITs to issue subordinate units only to the sponsors and associates. However, there is no framework detailing the mechanism for issuance of subordinate units. On unit-based employee benefits, Sebi has proposed that the manager of REIT or the investment manager of InvIT can offer UBEB schemes for their employees based on the units of REIT or InvIT. The implementation of the scheme should be done through a separate Employee Benefit Trust (EB Trust) which can be created by the manager of a REIT or investment manager of InvIT. The units held by EB Trust should be used only for the limited purpose of providing unit-based employee benefits. The EB trust should not undertake any transfer or sale of units of REIT/InvIT held by it except for providing unit-based benefits to the employees of the manager or investment manager.

## 'Office space demand may fall 18-22 per cent this calendar year on high base effect'

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

Demand for office space across six major cities is likely to decline 18-22 per cent this year on higher base effect and delays in decision making by corporates related to their expansion plans, according to CREDAI and CRE-Matrix. In their joint report, real estate developers' apex body CREDAI and data analytic firm CRE Matrix have estimated that the fresh leasing of Grade A premium office space stood at 55-57 million square feet in the 2023 calendar year. The data excludes renewals. The absorption of office space was 70 million square feet during 2022. During January-September period of this year, the leasing activities have already touched 41.8 million square feet across six

major cities -- Delhi-NCR, Mumbai Metropolitan Region (MMR), Bengaluru, Pune, Chennai and Hyderabad. IT/ITES, BFSI and co-working sectors drove two-third of office demand at a pan-India level. The report highlighted that the Grade A office space stock is 770 million square feet at the end of the third quarter of this calendar year. The vacancy level is 17.4 per cent. Commenting on the office market, CREDAI National President Boman Irani said, "With the diversification of various industries in India and the increasing number of global capability centres, we are seeing a future-first innovation in infrastructure and design which has supplemented the growth of modern Indian workspaces." Abhishek Kiran Gupta, CEO & Co-founder of CRE Matrix, said



the upward trend in office demand is just the beginning of a long-term growth cycle with India racing towards becoming a USD 5 trillion economy by 2030. "We predict two trends in the near term -- formats such as managed spaces are likely to see double-digit growth rates as occupiers opt for convenience and employee-centric spaces," he said.

Secondly, Gupta noted that cities such as Pune, Noida, Navi Mumbai and Thane will pose as strong challengers to established office hubs of Mumbai, Bengaluru and Gurugram. "We will see developers allocating more capital to these younger cities as lower talent costs, better infrastructure/connectivity and affordable housing attract larger office demand," he said. As per the data, the demand for office space was highest in Bengaluru at 10.5 million square feet during January-September, followed by Delhi-NCR 8.6 million square feet, Hyderabad 6.8 million square feet, Pune 5.1 million square feet and Chennai 4.1 million square feet. Among occupiers of office space, IT/ITES sector accounted for 35 per cent, BFSI 17 per cent and co-working 14 per cent.



## Hospitality industry expects hiring to accelerate after robust growth in 2023

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

The Indian hospitality and tourism sector is expected to see accelerated hiring going forward after witnessing a robust growth this year with domestic travels leading the way, according to industry players. With a report by the Hotel Association of India (HAI) projecting the hotel industry's direct contribution to India's GDP to reach USD 1 trillion by 2047, experts believe there will be a minimum of 25 per cent rise in the need for workforce, with the adjacent industries like travel, aviation, ticket booking, travel guides, and consultants to be increasingly in demand. "The hotel industry's direct contribution to India's GDP reaching USD 1 trillion by 2047 is a significant milestone. This substantial growth will undoubtedly bolster job creation within the sector, providing employment to millions of individuals across diverse skill sets," HAI Vice President K B Kachru told PTI. Kachru, who is also Chairman Emeritus & Principal Advisor, South Asia Radisson Hotel Group, further said following the pandemic, the hospitality sector has undergone a huge transformation, entirely reshaping

the employment landscape. "We have witnessed a paradigm shift in how we operate, with more emphasis being put on adaptability, digital innovation, and a heightened focus on guest safety and well-being," he added. Expressing similar views, Chalet Hotels Chief Human Resources Officer (CHRO) Urvi Aradhya said, "Post-pandemic employment landscape in the hospitality sector reflects a blend of technological integration, an increased emphasis on health and safety, a focus on local tourism, and a shift towards more flexible work arrangements." In terms of the expected hiring trend, recruitment agency Gi Group Vice President Sudeep Sen said, "With the world of work specific to the hospitality industry, along with allied ones, looking extremely bright, we are going to witness a minimum influx of 25 per cent increase in the need of workforce." He further said adjacent industries like travel, aviation, ticket booking, travel guides/consultants will be increasingly in demand and it is estimated that the increase will also be in the range of 15-18 per cent, depending on the seasonality of the travel destinations.

## 'Crucial for Government to identify real beneficiaries of interest subvention scheme'

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

It is crucial for the government to identify real beneficiaries of the interest subvention scheme provided to various export sectors, think tank GTRI said on Saturday. The Union Cabinet on Friday approved an additional allocation of Rs 2,500 crore for the continuation of interest equalisation or subsidy scheme on pre- and post-shipment rupee export credit up to June 30 next year. Launched on April 1, 2015, the scheme was initially valid for five years up to March 31, 2020. It has been continued thereafter, with a one-year extension during COVID, and further extensions and fund allocations.

"No detailed study of the scheme has been done yet. It is important for the government to identify the actual beneficiaries. Considering the low spending, it is possible that a few large entities, rather than MSMEs, are reaping the most benefits," the Global Trade Research Initiative (GTRI) said. It is also necessary to find out which product groups receive the most credit and the effectiveness of banks in assisting small firms through this scheme should be examined, it added. "A thorough study might provide insights on whether to exclude certain items, like low-volume, high-value goods, such as diamonds and gold jewellery, which are susceptible to misuse. Only a detailed study can reveal



the full truth," GTRI co-founder Ajay Srivastava said. The scheme costs about Rs 3,000 crore on average. There are over 50,000 MSMEs exporting various products from India, plus over a lakh of other exporters for products covered under the scheme. It said that despite the high value of these exports, the scheme's low expenditure suggests it is underused.

Given that Indian MSMEs struggle with credit access and this scheme eases the burden, the government might think about making it permanent, similar to the drawback scheme, the think-tank suggested. "Alternatively, extending it for another five years could be considered. Annual extensions lead to uncertainty, making it hard for exporters to include this in

their cost calculations," Srivastava said. The pre and post-shipment rupee export credit, known as packing credit, assists exporters in covering production and packing costs, with credit accessible upon presenting a confirmed export order. The credit rate is usually the bank's rate plus 2-3 per cent, averaging about 8 per cent. "The scheme offers additional discounts - 3 per cent for MSME exporters on all products and 2 per cent for select products for all exporters. Thus, with this scheme, MSMEs can access credit at 5 per cent and others at 6 per cent," Srivastava said. He added that these rates are comparable with prevailing global interest rates like 5.5 per

cent in the US, 3.5 per cent in China, and 5.3 per cent in the UK. "Thus the scheme lowers the cost of capital for Indian exporters, benefiting MSMEs in particular," he said, adding that "however, despite its potential, there is a lack of comprehensive analysis on its utilisation and impact, especially concerning its actual beneficiaries and effectiveness in reaching the intended MSME sector". Manufacturer and merchant exporters shipping specified 410 products will get a 2 per cent subsidy and all the MSME exporters will get 3 per cent. These sectors include handicrafts, leather, certain fabrics, carpets and readymade garments.

## Startup hBits offers ₹28 crore property in Mumbai to HNIs for fractional ownership

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

hBits, which facilitates fractional real estate ownership, has identified a Rs 28 crore commercial property in Mumbai and is approaching high-net-worth individuals for investments.

The company has identified 13,500 square feet of commercial real estate in Goregaon, Mumbai. Through this asset, it aims to create an investment opportunity worth Rs 27.31 crore for retail investors. The commercial asset will be leased to an Indian-origin tech multinational firm, which will renew the agreement for the fourth term, hBits said in a statement. The lease duration will be five years, with a tenant lock-in peri-

od of three years. "Further, the purchase price of the asset translates to a gross entry yield of 9 per cent with an expected internal rate of return of 15.49 per cent," the company said. With the launch of this new property, the total assets under management (AUM) of hBits has reached about Rs 260 crore. By March 2024, the platform aims to achieve an AUM of Rs 500 crore. hBits founder and CEO Shiv Parekh said, "The launch of our latest asset comes at a strategic time when Mumbai is solidifying its spot as the commerce capital of the country. Several global businesses are setting up offices in the city, which is driving a rapid surge in the demand and popularity of commercial real estate."

## IndiGrid raises ₹670 crore via institutional placement

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

Infrastructure investment trust IndiaGrid has raised Rs 670 crore through institutional placement. IndiGrid, India's first publicly listed power sector Infrastructure Investment Trust (InvIT) has successfully raised Rs 670 crore through an Institutional Placement process as laid out by SEBI, a statement said. According to the statement, the IP process, launched on December 5, 2023, saw strong demand from both existing and new Indian and global institutional investors. In September 2023, IndiGrid had raised over Rs 400 crore through a preferential issue. With the recently concluded Institutional Placement, the company has successfully

raised equity funds of Rs 1,070 crore in FY2023-24. "This fundraise has helped us expand our unit holder base with more than 90 per cent demand from long-term investors across insurance companies, pension funds, mutual funds and domestic institutions to IndiGrid's investor base," Harsh Shah, Chief Executive Officer of IndiGrid, said in the statement. Proceeds from the recently concluded institutional placement and those from the preferential allotment would be used for paring down debt. "With the capital raise, IndiGrid has created a significant debt headroom of around Rs 6,000-7,000 crore at the leverage cap of 70 per cent," the statement said. The board of directors of

IndiGrid Investment Managers Ltd, acting in the capacity of investment manager of IndiGrid, approved the issuance and allotment of 5.27 crore new units through this Institutional Placement to 11 eligible investors on December 8, 2023. More than 90 per cent of incremental units were issued to insurance companies, mutual funds, pension funds and domestic institutions. Axis Capital Limited, Ambit Private Limited, HSBC Securities and Capital Markets (India) Private Limited, and SBI Capital Markets Ltd served as Book Running Lead Managers for this placement. Cyril Amarchand Mangaldas (CAM) and S&R Associates acted as issuer counsel and bankers counsel respectively.

**PUBLIC NOTICE**  
This is to inform to all concerned that Mr. M.L. Kapoor S/o Late Shri Ramji Das Kapoor R/o D-45, Sector-12, Noida, Gautam Buddha Nagar, U.P. had sold residential flat number C-32, Jalvayu Vihar, sector-21, Noida, Gautam Buddha Nagar, U.P. area 65 sq. mtrs. on General Power of Attorney basis. General power of attorney was executed on 30-03-2001 in Favour of Mr. Dinesh Negi S/o Late Sh. Rajee Singh Negi R/o E-101, D.V.B. Generation staff Colony, KirtiKari, New Delhi 110014, which is registered with the sub registrar II, Noida vide book no. 4, vol no. 1767 on pages 361 to 368 as document number 159 dated 30-03-2001 and agreement to sell was not registered because the agreement to sell is not registered so it is informed to all concerned that the said property is going to be transferred in favour of Sh.D.S. Rawat S/o Shri K.S. Rawal R/o C-32, Sector 21, Noida, Gautam Buddha Nagar, U.P., if anyone have any objection they can contact in the Residential department (group housing) of the Noida Authority with the sufficient proof within 30 days after this publication.

**PUBLIC NOTICE**  
Notice is hereby given to the General Public that Mrs. Fatima khatun (GPA holder), the owner of B.U.I. ON PROPERTY BEARING NO. 1245-A/13, THIRD FLOOR LEFT HAND SIDE WITHOUT ROOF RIGHTS, TOTAL MEASURING 88 SQ. YARDS, OUT OF KHASRA NO. 53, GOVIND PURI KALKAJI NEW DELHI, vide Special Power of Attorney Dated 26.04.2010 Executed By Mr. Surya Nandan Sahay S/o Mr. Hari Keshwar, General Power of Attorney dated 26.04.2010 All Persons are hereby informed that Mr. Sarwar & Mrs. Pampa Sharma mortgaging the said property with SMFG India Credit Company Limited (Formerly Fullerton India Credit Company Limited) General public hereby informed that if anybody has any charge/interest in the said property or any kind of dispute kindly inform the undersigned in writing on the below mentioned address within 07 days of the present. Mrs. Prasenjit. Late. Advokate SG Associates (Law Firm) FF H. Lotus Pond Plaza, Vaidyan Khand, Indrapuram, Ghaziabad-201014 E-mail: sgpsocollaw@gmail.com Ph: 9111737264, 9130308573

**NATIONAL INSTITUTE OF FASHION TECHNOLOGY**  
(Ministry of Textiles, Govt of India)  
NIFT Campus, Mithapur Farms, Patna-800001  
**NOTICE FOR CANCELLATION OF RECRUITMENT PROCESS**  
It is notified for general information that the recruitment process as per the Advertisement No.: 10001(01)/Rectt. of group C/2021-22 Dated 10.10.2021 and 10771(8)/NIFT/patna/Estt./2021-22 dated 1/06/2022 inviting applications for the post of various Group C posts has been cancelled by the institute due to administrative reasons. Candidates are suggested to periodically visit NIFT Patna's website <https://www.nift.ac.in/patna/Careers> for subsequent advertisement regarding these vacancies.  
Director, NIFT Patna

## 'Hike price of ethanol made from B & C heavy molasses'

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

Indian Sugar Mills Association (ISMA) has demanded the government to give compensatory increase in the price of ethanol made from B and C heavy molasses, to compensate losses to be incurred by mills due to the ban on use of sugarcane juice for ethanol production. On December 7, the government banned use of sugarcane juice and sugar syrup for

ethanol production in the 2023-24 ethanol supply year (November-October) due to likely fall in domestic sugarcane production. But permitting using B and C heavy molasses and foodgrains subjected to a monthly review. While acknowledging the government's intent to balance the needs of consumers, ISMA has proposed specific measures to ensure a smooth transition, minimize potential dis-

ruptions and support the farmer. "Because of this pause, the crushing capacity of sugar mills will come down drastically leading to delay of the crushing season resulting in loss, not only to the mills but more importantly to the farmers, whose payments get stretched and at the same time who are not able to clear the sugarcane field in time for further use," it said in a statement. Among key measures pro-

posed, ISMA said the government should consider compensatory increase in pricing for ethanol derived from B and C heavy molasses. This will ensure sufficient cash flow for sugar mills to fulfil their financial obligations to farmers. The government has fixed the price of ethanol from C heavy molasses route at Rs 49.41 per litre and from B heavy molasses route be at Rs 60.73 per litre.

## BUSINESS BRIEF



**VIT-AP UNIVERSITY ORGANISES BLOOD DONATION CAMP AMARAVATI:** On the occasion of the 85th birth anniversary of VIT Founder and Chancellor, Dr G Viswanathan, VIT-AP University organized a blood donation camp in collaboration with Government General Hospital (GGH) Guntur. In a notable event hosted at the university premises today, 483 students, faculty, and staff actively engaged in the altruistic act of blood donation, underscoring their commitment to a noble cause. The blood donation camp was inaugurated by Dr SV Kota Reddy, Vice Chancellor of VIT-AP University, and Dr Y Kiran Kumar - Superintendent - Government General Hospital (GGH), Guntur and highlighted the significance of such initiatives in saving lives.



**SRM EASWARI COLLEGE HOLDS GRADUATION CEREMONY Kattankulathur:** Upskilling, deep learning of technology, transformation of innovative ideas to arrive at solutions for problems to improve the lives of people, along with inculcation of universal human values was essential and critical for students and young engineers of the country today, Prof (Dr) TG Sitharam, Chairman, All India Council of Technical Education, said on Saturday. Delivering his Graduation Day Address and handing over degrees and awards at the 23rd Graduation Ceremony of Easwari Engineering College (an SRM Group Institution) and affiliated to Anna University at SRMIST, Kattankulathur, Prof. Sitharam said the rapid strides in the development of advanced technologies especially generative Artificial Intelligence, had created possibilities for people to lose jobs, and hence continuous learning, upskilling, and reskilling had become very critical.

# Kartik, Gopi to lead Indian challenge at Kolkata 25K

PTI ■ KOLKATA

Asian Games silver medalist Kartik Kumar and Olympian Gopi Thonakal alongside in-form Tamsi Singh will challenge an exciting international line-up at the Tata Steel Kolkata 25K here on Sunday.

Long-distance runner Kartik, who bagged silver in the men's 10,000m race at the Hangzhou Asian Games, will be the one to watch out for in the Indian elite men's race.

The 24-year-old had become the first Indian to win a medal in the 10,000m since Gulab Chand in 1998.

Kartik finished as runner-up among Indians with a timing of 1:04:08 at the Delhi Half Marathon in October and had also won the Indian elite crown in 2022 with a personal best time of 1:04:00.

Challenging Kartik in every step will be another champion runner and experienced Gopi. The 35-year-old Olympian is the first Indian to win the Asian Marathon Championship in 2017 in China with a timing of 2:15:48.

He was also a winner of the New



Delhi Marathon in 2017 and 2018, clocking 2:15:37 and 2:15:16 respectively.

Besides Kartik and Gopi, Asian Games bronze-medallist Gulveer Singh is also in the fray. The 25-year-old had bagged a bronze in the men's 10,000m race at Hangzhou with a timing of 28:17.21.

He narrowly missed out on another medal at the Games after finishing fourth in the 5000m race.

At the 2023 National Games in Bambolim, Goa, last month, he finished third in the 10,000m race.

The current event record in the Indian elite men's category stands in the name of Avinash Sable - 1:15:17 - and L Suriya holds the Indian elite women's mark with a timing of 1:26:53.

Tamsi will start as favourite for Indian women's honours and will be looking to sign off a successful year on a high, having won the Indian women's category at the World 10K in Bengaluru, clocking 00:34:12.

Challenging Tamsi will be Ekta Rawat, who finished eighth among Indian women's elite field at the Delhi Half Marathon with a timing of 1:21:30.

# SAI warns air weapons shooters



**OF STRICT ACTION AFTER GRIEVOUS INJURIES TO MARKSMAN AT PRIVATE RANGE**

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

The Sports Authority of India (SAI) has warned shooters training at the National Centre of Excellence (NCOE) and those under the come-and-play scheme at the Karni Singh ranges here to not use air cylinders more than 10 years old, failing which strict action could be taken against them.

A national-level shooter partially lost his left thumb when the 10m air pistol cylinder he was filling with compressed air exploded at a private range in Greenfield, Faridabad on December 2.

Pushpender Kumar, a corporal with the Indian Air Force, was training at the shooting range for the National Championships when he suffered severe damage to his left thumb, which required immediate hospitalisation.

A national coach had told PTI on condition of anonymity on December 4 that while Pushpender was filling compressed air into the pistol cylinder from the main cylinder, the incident happened.

Air pistols and air rifles have a sleek detachable gas cylinder attached just below the barrel. When the shooter presses the trigger, the compressed gas in the cylinder is released, which hits a hammer inside the air gun, ejecting the lead pellet.

The air pistol's cylinder develops low pressure after a certain number of shots and has to be refilled with the help of a portable cylinder, which looks like a scuba-diving cylinder. Due to wear and tear, air pistol cylinders have to be replaced after a certain period of time and

the gun manufacturers usually do it for free after 10 years, or if there are any manufacturing issues the entire batch could also be recalled.

An advisory issued by the SAI administrator at Karni Singh ranges said, "In reference to the incident occurred on November 2 (December 2) at a private range in Delhi-NCR, the advisory is issued to all athletes (NCOE, national campers and come-and-play) that anyone who owns faulty... Air pistol should get their air pressure cylinder replaced, until then athletes would not be entertained at Karni Singh range."

"Apart from that any athlete carrying air cylinder more than 10 years old will not be allowed to train at Karni range."

Athlete found training with defective cylinders, or those that are more than 10 years old, risk a "review of their stay at the National Centre of Excellence" while come-and-play shooters could lose their membership cards.

A top former shooter said on condition of anonymity that air pistol and air rifle shooters carry refilling cylinders in their vehicles to the Karni Singh range and top up their pistols and rifle cylinders, posing a big threat to everyone.

"They are not just risking their own lives by carrying big refilling cylinders in cars but also the lives of others. What if the cylinder explodes inside the vehicle. You can't imagine what compressed air can do when the outside temperature touches 45 degrees centigrade. The cylinder can explode like a bomb," he said.

# Mumbai City FC ropes in Kratky as new head coach



Mumbai City on Saturday named Czech Republic's Petr Kratky as the new head coach of the club ahead of the upcoming season of the Indian Super League.

Kratky continues his journey within the City Football Group as he arrives from sister club Melbourne City. The 42-year-old joins Mumbai City in his new role until the end of the 2024-25 season.

Kratky enjoyed a 15-year playing career as a right back and represented some of the biggest Czech clubs, including Mlada Boleslav and Slovan Liberec before finishing his career with Heidelberg United in Australia.

He then joined A-League side Melbourne City as an academy coach, taking charge of the club's developmental squad in the NPL2, before coaching them in the NPL Seniors.

Following Des Buckingham's move from Melbourne to Mumbai in October 2021, Kratky was promoted to the role of assistant coach of Melbourne City's first team. As assistant, the Czech-Australian coach served under Patrick Kisnorbo, Rado Vidosic and most recently, under

Aurelio Vidmar. During his seven-year stint at Melbourne City, Kratky coached and nurtured several young players from his developmental squad, creating a pathway for them into senior football.

As an assistant coach, Kratky was instrumental in guiding Melbourne City to consecutive A-League Men's Premiers titles in 2021-22 and 2022-23.

"I am excited to embark on this new opportunity at Mumbai City FC and to continue working as part of the City Football Group. One thing that I value most within CFG is that we are aligned by the same vision and philosophy which is centred around playing the City way," Kratky said in a release.

"Our philosophy has the overarching goal to succeed, and I'm very excited to get started in Mumbai as I know the club has set strong foundations for long-term success. I hope to build on everything Mumbai City has achieved in recent years and to uphold our proud legacy of winning whilst playing attractive football."

Kratky will take charge in his first game for the Islanders against FC Goa in the ISL on December 12.

# Ashwini, Tanisha pair enters Guwahati Masters final

PTI ■ GUWAHATI

India's Tanisha Crasto and Ashwini Ponnappa continued their impressive run and stormed into the women's doubles final of the Guwahati Masters super 100 badminton tournament here on Saturday.

The second seeded Indian combination, which finished runners-up at the Syed Modi International Super 300 tournament last week in Lucknow, beat third seeds Debora Jille and Cheryl Seinen of the Netherlands 21-12 21-12 in a 36-minute semifinal clash.

Tanisha and Ashwini will face the winner of the other semifinal between Taiwanese pair of Sung Shuo Yun and Yu Chien Hui in the final on Sunday.

However, Malvika Bansod couldn't cross the semifinal hurdle in women's singles. She found Thailand's Lalintat Chaiwan too hot to handle, going down 12-21 14-21. Earlier, Tanisha and Dhruv Kapila lost 18-21 15-21 to second seeds Hee Yong Kai Terry and Tan Wei Han Jessica of Singapore in the last-four round



of mixed doubles event.

Later, men's doubles pair of Hariharan Amsakarunan and Ruban Kumar Rethinasabapathi also failed to make it to the summit clash, going down 10-21 to 19-21 Chinese Taipei's Lin Bing-Wei and Su Ching Heng.

Tanisha and Ashwini carried on the momentum from Lucknow and overcame all the obstacles that came their way to go deep into the tournament. The semifinal started on an even keel before the Indians stepped up.

A 3-1 lead turned into 6-4 before the Indian duo grabbed a slender 11-10 advantage at the break. But things changed on resumption with Ashwini and Tanisha reeling off four points on the trot twice to leave their opponents far behind.

In the second game, Ashwini and Tanisha came out all guns blazing, galloping to 6-1 and then 11-4 lead at the interval.

The Dutch duo found the gap too much to bridge as the Indians closed out the match comfortably.



**Kyrgios confirms he won't compete at Australian Open**

AP ■ MELBOURNE

Nick Kyrgios has confirmed he won't compete at the Australian Open next month because of injuries.

The 28-year-old Australian said on social media he'll miss the Grand Slam for a second straight year because he needs "a little more time" to recover.

Kyrgios, whose name was absent from the entry list for the tournament, pulled out of last season's Australian Open because he needed knee surgery. He later dealt with a wrist problem.

Kyrgios was the runner-up to Novak Djokovic at Wimbledon in 2022 but played in just one official singles match in 2023.

Kyrgios teamed with Thanasi Kokkinakis to win the 2022 Australian Open men's doubles championship.

# Zorawar aims to represent India at Olympics

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

A 15-year-old doing remarkably well in a demanding sport like skeet shooting and also managing academics is tough, but Zorawar Singh Bedi is trying his best, with the driving force being the aspiration to represent India at the Olympics one day.

The teenage shooter from Punjab made the six-shooter final in a 40-strong field and gave stalwarts like Sheeraz Sheikh and Asian Games medallist Anantjeet Singh Naruka a tough time in the national selection trials 1 on Friday, though he failed to finish among the top three at the Karni Singh range here.

Prior to featuring in the skeet national selection trials 1, Zorawar has participated in three National championships so far.

He is a class X student and now will be taking a break from shooting to prepare for the board exams. After the exams, he plans to participate in the national trials and wants to represent the country in the World Cup next year and eventually the Olympics.

Zorawar says he avoids looking at the scoreboard during competition and just focuses on the next shot.

"In order to stay calm and composed during competition, I focus on breathing and try to avoid looking at the scoreboard and just focus on the next shot," said Zorawar, whose father Mahinderjeet Bedi is very supportive of his son's shooting aspirations.

"My school is also very supportive, making it easier for me to concentrate on my shooting," he said.

The teenager expressed his gratitude to cel-



brated shotgun shooter and Khel Ratna awardee Ronjan Sodhi, and his grandfather who got him started in the sport.

Zorawar's parents withdrew him from a boarding school in Dehradun and brought him back to Chandigarh because of the unavailability of shooting infrastructure there.

Zorawar's father Mahinderjeet hoped his son will be able to strike a balance between shooting sport and studies.

"I express my gratitude to Ronjan (pistol coach), Samaresh Jung and the shooting federation for my son's exploits," said Mahinderjeet.

Ronjan said he had not come across a more talented shotgun shooter than Zorawar in his career and added that he needs to be groomed well.

"He is probably one of the most talented kids I've come across in my shooting career. At this age for someone to shoot a 121 (out of 125 in trial 1) and to top the senior trials is absolutely remarkable," said Ronjan, the 2010 Asian Games gold medallist in double trap.

"Only thing, I would say, is that he has to be groomed well, and, for grooming, he needs proper guidance. When we talk about talent search, the federation (National Rifle Association of India)... The talent is in front of them, so they must support him in whatever manner they can. He doesn't have any coach at the moment."

"At the age of 15, I don't remember anyone in India shooting such a high score. Very balanced as far as the mental aspect is concerned," he added.

# Wrestling Federation elections to be held on December 21

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

The much-delayed Wrestling Federation of India (WFI) elections will be held on December 21 and the results will be announced the same day, said returning officer for the polls on Saturday.

A statement issued by the office of the returning officer, Justice (ret'd) MM Kumar said polling, counting of votes and declaration of results will be done on the same day and the result of the elections shall be subject to the outcome of the writ petition

pending before the Punjab and Haryana High Court.

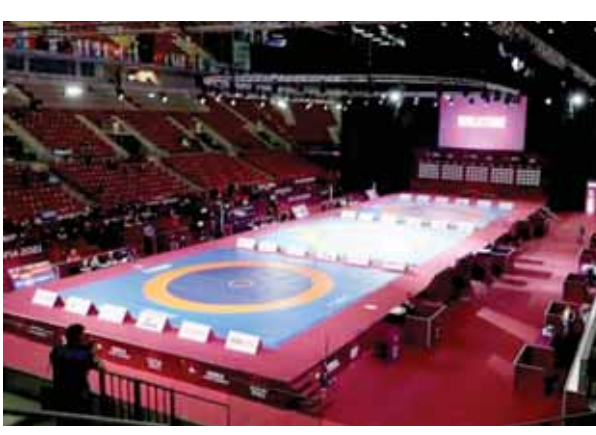
The elections, to be held during the Special General Body Meeting, will be staged as per the electoral list made on August 7, quelling apprehensions that the entire process might start all over again.

"All steps up to the stage of preparation and display of the final list of contesting candidates were completed (on Aug 7) and various activities like polling, counting of votes and declaration of result alone were left," said a statement issued by

the returning officer for the polls.

"The elections of the WFI were stayed by the Punjab and Haryana High Court on 11.08.2023 just a day before the poll and therefore, polling could not be held on 12.08.2023... The Supreme Court has vacated the stay orders and therefore the remaining steps like polling etc. Will now commence on 21.12.2023 as per the following revised schedule," said the statement.

"Result of the above elections



shall, however, be subject to the outcome of the Writ Petition pending before the Punjab and Haryana High Court," added the statement.

After several postponements, the WFI elections have been made possible after the Supreme Court recently set aside the stay imposed by the Punjab and Haryana HC.

An IOA-constituted ad-hoc panel, led by Wushu Association of India chief Bupender Singh Bajwa, is currently managing the day-to-day activities of the WFI after

the sports ministry suspended the federation headed by Brij Bhushan Sharan Singh over allegations of sexual harassment levelled against him by top Indian grapplers.

Several wrestlers, including Olympic medallists Bajrang Punia and Sakshi Malik, sat in protest at the Jantar Mantar here for more than two months to protest against the alleged sexual harassment of female grapplers by Brij Bhushan.

The election process, which was set in motion in July, has been delayed because of court

cases. This has further led to the suspension of the WFI by the international federation, United World Wrestling, for failing to conduct fresh polls in the time stipulated by them.

Indian wrestlers continue to participate in international competitions under the UWW flag because of the suspension of the national body.

The ad-hoc panel head Bajwa said the polling will be held at the Olympic Bhawan here and the 'agenda/items will be the same as per notice issued earlier on 21st July 2023."

# YOUNG INDIA FACES TOUGH PROTEAS TEST

**PTI ■ DURBAN**  
A young Indian outfit will be asked tough questions, answers to which might not be readily available, when it faces a sturdy South African side in a three-match T20 International starting here on Sunday.  
With injured skipper Hardik Pandya out till the start of IPL, lead pacer Jasprit Bumrah taking a break and not much clarity over Virat Kohli and Rohit Sharma's T20 future ahead of the World Cup in June, one wouldn't be able to read much into either success or failure of the team in South Africa.  
A clearer picture about India's core for the T20 showpiece would only emerge after a month of cash-rich IPL, with form and fitness at that point being the criteria for selection. If Rohit and Virat are picked in the playing XI, the core will suddenly become very different from the team that is now touring 'Rainbow Nation'.  
Suryakumar Yadav led side beat Australia 4-1 on fabulous batting tracks at home but even the most partisan Indian fan would agree that there was so much less at stake in a series that was held within 72 hours of the World Cup.  
Australia's core bowling attack was rested and some of the seniors were so tired that they

left for home after the third game, having spent almost nine weeks in India.  
The South Africa series in that context is the last big international T20 series that India play followed by one against Afghanistan in mid-January. Even with their pace bowling mainstays, Kagiso Rabada (retired) and Anrich Nortje and Lungi Ngidi injured, the Proteas at home will be more than a handful.  
**BATTING COMBINATION CONUNDRUM:** India are carrying 17 players for the T20 series and only three of them — Shreyas Iyer, Mukesh Kumar and Ishan Kishan are also part of the 50-over format.  
There will be multiple bone of contention, the openers and No. 3, who will have to shed their archaic safety first approach that had been in India's bane in previous T20 World Cups.  
Yashasvi Jaiswal has already shown that he belongs to this level and Shubman Gill is now one of the first picks across formats while Ruturaj Gaikwad after his 52-ball-100 will be that much difficult to ignore.  
And herein lies the problem as Ishan Kishan isn't a great option beyond No. 4 if the trioka of Jaiswal, Gill and Gaikwad bat. And at No. 4 is India's No. 1 T20 batter and skipper Suryakumar Yadav, who is the only automatic choice as far as T20 World



1ST T20I

Cup is concerned.  
Then there is the wicketkeeper's slot where Kishan, who will have stiff fight from Jitesh Sharma, who is evolving nicely as a finisher at No. 6.  
There is a No. 5 slot where Shreyas, who is not exactly a slam-bang from word 'go' but an IPL skipper, is expected to be challenged with short-pitched stuff by the likes of Marco Jansen, Gerald Coetzee and Andile Phehlukwayo.  
But if one plays Iyer, then there would be no place for Rinku Singh, another designated finisher, who himself said on BCCI.TV, that he will be batting at No.5.  
In case Kishan doesn't find a place in top four, then Jitesh is the option at No. 6.  
For the likes of Ruturaj, Jaiswal, Rinku and Jitesh, the extra bounce on offer at Kingsmead will pose a different sort of challenge as those with superior back-foot play will be paramount.  
**BOWLING PICKS ARE EASIER:** The Indian bowling attack was put to sword by Australia in most games but in South Africa, the length would be doubly important as the younger crop might find it enticing to dig it in due to the extra bounce.  
While there won't be Quinton de Kock in the mix anymore but Heinrich Klaasen, David Miller, skipper Aiden Markram, hard-

hitting Tristan Stubbs and new batting sensation Matthew Breetzke could make life difficult for Indian bowlers.  
While Ravindra Jadeja is the vice-captain in this series and is expected to bat at No.7, Axar Patel, who hasn't been picked for the series, will certainly be around when squad for the marquee event is selected.  
The second spinner will certainly be googly specialist Ravi Bishnoi, who is now world's No. 1 ranked T20 spinner.  
Deepak Chahar, Arshdeep Singh and Mukesh Kumar are expected to be the three straight-forward pace bowling choices.  
**TEAMS**  
**India:** Suryakumar Yadav (C), Yashasvi Jaiswal, Shubman Gill, Ruturaj Gaikwad, Tilak Varma, Rinku Singh, Shreyas Iyer, Ishan Kishan (wk), Jitesh Sharma (wk), Ravindra Jadeja (VC), Washington Sundar, Ravi Bishnoi, Kuldeep Yadav, Arshdeep Singh, Mohd. Siraj, Mukesh Kumar, Deepak Chahar.  
**South Africa:** Aiden Markram (c), Ottiel Baartman, Matthew Breetzke, Nandre Burger, Gerald Coetzee (1st and 2nd T20Is), Donovan Ferreira, Reeza Hendricks, Marco Jansen (1st and 2nd T20Is), Heinrich Klaasen, Keshav Maharaj, David Miller, Andile Phehlukwayo, Tabraiz Shamsi, Tristan Stubbs, and Lizaad Williams.



## Extra pace, bounce of SA pitches will need some more practice: Rinku

**PTI ■ DURBAN**  
India middle-order batter Rinku Singh feels the extra pace and bounce on offer on South African pitches will need a little more effort and practice to get used to.  
Giving his assessment about the South African wickets after India's first practice session here, Rinku, who played a vital role in India clinching the five-match T20I series against Australia recently said, "When I batted here today, there was extra bounce here compared to Indian wickets.  
"The pace is a bit more, so will practice against pace bowling." India will play the first of their three T20Is against the Proteas here on Sunday and Rinku is expected to bat at the crucial No. 5 or No. 6 position.  
He said that head coach Rahul Dravid had also asked him to just play his natural game and bat at No.5 or No.6.  
"The first practice session, I enjoyed it a lot because of the fine wether. Getting the opportunity to work with Rahul Dravid sir, so that was a good feeling. He told me to continue playing the way I do and contin-

## Uncapped Indians Kashvee, Vrinda break bank at WPL auction

**PTI ■ MUMBAI**  
Punjab pacer Kashvee Gautam fetched a winning bid of Rs 2 crore from Gujarat Giants at the WPL auction here on Saturday.  
The 20-year-old's base price was Rs 10 lakh. Both Gujarat Giants and UP Warriorz bid for Kashvee before the former managed to secure her services for the second edition of WPL.  
In another big payday for an uncapped Indian cricketer, UP Warriorz bid Rs 1.3 crore for 22-year-old Karnataka batter Vrinda Dinesh.  
Both Vrinda and Kashvee had recently featured for India A in their three-match series against



England A.  
In the early stages, Australian cricketers attracted the highest bids with all-rounder Annabel Sutherland being sold to Delhi Capitals for Rs 2 crore and batter Phoebe Litchfield to Gujarat Giants for Rs 1 crore.  
The 22-year-old Sutherland was released by Gujarat Giants after the inaugural edition of WPL held in March this year.  
She attracted bids from defending champions Mumbai Indians but they pulled out, with the player eventually going to the

Capitals.  
Gujarat Giants went for the left-handed 20-year-old Litchfield who has made her debut across formats for Australia.  
South Africa fast bowler Shabnim Ismail was added to Mumbai Indians squad for Rs 1.20 crore, three times her base price.  
Royal Challengers Bangalore went for Australia's Georgia Wareham in the earlier stages of the auction, paying Rs 40 lakh for the deal.  
RCB also bought England's Kate Cross for Rs 30 lakh and the 37-year-old Indian spinner Ekta Bisht for Rs 60 lakh, two times her base price.



## New Zealand beat Bangladesh in second cricket test

**AP ■ MIRPUR (BANGLADESH)**  
Glenn Phillips and Mitchell Santner held their nerve to help New Zealand chase down 137 runs on a difficult wicket for a series-leveling four-wicket win over Bangladesh in the rain-hit second test on Saturday.  
Phillips and Santner shared a 70-run partnership for the seventh wicket as New Zealand recovered from 69 for 6 to reach 139 for six on Day 4 to give the team its first victory on Bangladesh soil since 2008.  
The home side, which won the first test by 150 runs, is chasing a first-ever test series victory against the Black Caps.  
Phillips, who struck a 72-ball 87 in the first innings, hit off-spinner Mehidy Hasan for a boundary through cover to confirm the victory as he was not out on 40 off 48 after smashing four fours and a six. Santner hit three fours and a six for his 39-ball 35 not out.  
Phillips was key in helping the side take an eight-run lead when New Zealand was bowled out for 180 in the first innings, in reply to Bangladesh's 172.  
Left-arm spinner Ajaz Patel then claimed 6-57 as Bangladesh was dismissed for 172 in its second innings, chasing a 137-run target for New Zealand to win the match.  
Mehidy Hasan had figures three for 52 and left-arm spinner Tajul Islam grabbed two for 58, as Bangladesh kept the hopes alive on an increasingly deteriorating pitch.  
Pacer Shofirul Islam (1-9) broke through as he had Devon Conway (2) leg-before with a length delivery that kept pretty low.  
Tajul got into the act with a flighted delivery that spun sharply to baffle Kane Williamson (11) before Mehidy joined the party, extending Henry Nicholls' (3) lean patch. With 33 for three, Tom Latham made 26, but his vigil came to an end when Bangladesh skip-

## Cricket life ban on former NZ opener Lou Vincent is relaxed

**AP ■ WELLINGTON**  
The disciplinary arm of the England and Wales Cricket Board has relaxed a life ban imposed in 2014 on former New Zealand opening batsman Lou Vincent.  
The Cricket Disciplinary Commission agreed that under the revised penalties Vincent will be able to participate in cricket at or below domestic level.  
The decision followed submissions to the CDC on Vincent's behalf by the International Cricket Council, New Zealand Cricket, the ECB and the New Zealand Cricket Players' Association.  
Vincent received 11 life bans in 2014 after admitting to 18 breaches of the ECB anti-corruption code while playing in three county matches, for Sussex against Lancashire and Kent in 2011 and for Lancashire against Durham in 2008.  
The appeal committee also took into account comments made by



former New Zealand captain and current England Test coach Brendon McCullum in the MCC spirit of cricket lecture in 2016 in which McCullum highlighted Vincent's admission of

al domestic level or below.  
"Perhaps the worst part is that Lou is unable to go to a cricket ground anywhere in the world. He can never watch his children play at any level," McCullum said at the time.  
"I struggle with the severity of this when a player has co-operated fully and accepted responsibility."  
Vincent told New Zealand media on Friday he was grateful to be given a second chance.  
"I made a terrible mistake many years ago which I'll deeply regret for the rest of my life and I remain very sorry for the harm I caused," he said.  
"Being able to return to the cricket environment means the world to me and I feel very fortunate to again have that opportunity. I want to thank the ECB and the Cricket Discipline Committee and Gerald Elias for their consideration of my application and their ultimate determination.

## Prepare turners at your own peril: Healy dares India

**PTI ■ MELBOURNE**  
Newly appointed Australia women's team captain Alyssa Healy has dared Indian team management to prepare rank turners during their upcoming tour of the country, "at your own peril" as the visitors too boast of a potent slow bowling attack.  
Healy was officially named as Australia full-time skipper across formats on Saturday following Meg Lanning's shock retirement last month.  
She said that India would risk themselves by opting for tracks that offer turn as the Australian spinners are on par with their sub-continental counterparts.  
"I'm actually really intrigued to see as to what sort of wickets they prepare. I think we've got a really, really good spin attack.



So do that at your own peril. Don't get me wrong, the Indians have got a strong spin attack as well," Healy was quoted as saying by 'Sydney Morning Herald'.  
"But I mean, we've got some of the best leg-spinners in the world. We've got Ash Gardner, who took nine wickets on English soil with

the ball in hand. So yeah, prepare spinning wickets at your own peril.  
"It will be interesting to see if they make it nice and flat. But I haven't played at Wankhede (Stadium) since the IPL exhibition game a couple of years ago, so I'm excited for that experience," she added.  
In Gardner, veteran left-arm twowler Jess Jonassen and leg-spinners Alana King and Georgia Wareham, Australia have named four spinners in their 16-member touring squad for India. The tour will feature a one-off Test, three ODIs and as many T20s. The series will commence with the Test on December 21 in Mumbai.  
Healy was originally doubtful for the tour after the wicket-keeper suffered a severed injury in her right index finger, while trying to separate

her two dogs.  
But since then she has recovered and is hopeful of featuring in the series opener. If Healy is unavailable, her newly-appointed deputy Tahlia McGrath will lead the side. "Everything is going really, really well. I started back in the nets over the last week-and-a-half, so I'm on track to fly to India for a big series over there," Healy said.  
"I actually always thought I was a couch potato, but spending three weeks on the couch, not even being able to sweat, was a real struggle for me. It wasn't much fun.  
"But it gave me a little bit of time at home to just recoup, refresh and watch a lot of WBBL and the World Cup on Fox, then just get myself right to go," the 33-year-old stumper added.

## England beat India by four wickets in second T20I, win series

**PTI ■ MUMBAI**  
England defeated India by four wickets in the second T20I to take an unassailable 2-0 lead in three-game series here on Saturday.  
Opting to bowl, Charlotte Dean (2/16), Lauren Bell (2/18), Sarah Glenn (2/13) and Sophie Ecclestone (2/13) took two wickets each as England produced a disciplined bowling effort to bundle out India for 80 runs in 16.2 overs.  
In reply, England overhauled the target, scoring 82 for six in 11.2 overs.  
Defending the total, Renuka Singh (2/26) struck twice in the same over to leave England at 19 for 2 in 3 overs but Alice Capsey (25) and Nat Sciver-Brunt (16) kept them in the

hunt. Spinner Deepti Sharma removed Amy Jones (5) and Freya Kemp (0) in successive deliveries but it was too late in the end.  
Apart from Renuka, Deepti (2/4), Saika Ishaque (1/21) and Pooja vastrakar (1/7) were the other wicket-takers for India.  
For India, Jemimah Rodrigues (30) was the top-scorer, while Smriti Mandhana (10) was the only other batter to reach double figures.  
**Brief Scores:**  
India: 80 all out in 16.2 overs (Jemimah Rodrigues 30; Sarah Glenn 2/13, Charlotte Dean 2/16, Lauren Bell 2/18, Sophie Ecclestone 2/13).  
England: 82 for 6 in 11.2 overs (Alice Capsey 25, Nat Sciver-Brunt 16; Renuka Singh 2/26, Dee.



"I don't have any regrets. When I quit college and moved to Los Angeles to become an actress, it was so that I would not look back and have any regrets"  
— Amy Weber



# THE BICYCLE DIARIES

Wanderlust takes over **KANISHKA PODDAR** as he pedals through Thailand with a group of friends

The holiday season was around the corner and my itchy feet again brought me back to Thailand with my bicycle. Only this time I wasn't alone but with a bunch of my favourite cycling buddies from Ranchi. Bikepacking with a group of other cyclists has never been my thing but I was definitely up for this adventure with riders I enjoy riding within my city. If you had gone through my earlier blog post, the original route for my first bikepacking trip in 2016 was from Hua Hin on the east coast of Thailand to Phuket, an island on the west coast of South Thailand. However I never really went on this route for some or other reason. So when we started planning this year-end bikepacking trip, everyone unanimously selected this route for our expedition and I was excited. It took me close to 2 months to plan this trip, ensuring minute details like riding is not more than 100 km every day, we have ample rest days in between, we stayed on smaller roads and trails for the majority of the ride and avoid highways as much as possible and also ensured that every day is an entirely new experience in a totally new place. Someone who knows me, also knows how much I love mountains and climbs. Therefore I always had one simple underline principle in mind while planning the route - "Follow the mountains". We flew into Bangkok with two bikes and went straight to Hua Hin wherein we rented 6 other bikes from Hua Hin Bike Tours Co. They have some of the best bikes to rent at reasonable rates if you plan bikepacking Thailand. Once we were sorted with our bikes and a support vehicle which carried the luggage of my friends, we were all set to start our ride to Prachuap Khiri Khan. Hua Hin to Prachuap Khiri Khan. On the very first day, we had to cover a distance of 125 km and I was quite sceptical about my own ability to do it. I haven't done a long ride in ages and riding in the group only added more anxiety and performance pressure on me. However, we woke up early and rode 8

km off route to the office of the Tourism Authority of Thailand, Hua Hin wherein the Director officially flagged off our journey. We were thankful to the Tourism Authority of Thailand for arranging the flag-off in Hua Hin and also ensuring that we get to experience #AmazingThailand at its best during our journey. By 6 AM, we were back on our planned route and immediately moved away from Route 4 which is a National Highway and started cycling on Route 4020 wherein we were either on a dedicated cycling trail or on much smaller roads with almost no traffic. I was surprisingly pleased by the refreshing feel that went through each one of us while riding on these smaller trails, we felt euphoric, confident and full of energy. The rising sun only added more joy to our ride. One of our friends had a speaker on his bike and music from the 80s and 90s started playing. We sang, chatted and kept riding. It felt magical. Sometime around 8 AM, we had our first encounter with the ocean and the beach and we couldn't stop ourselves. That smell of salty water and nip in the air will be remembered by each one of us forever. Some went to get photographed, while some just stayed there feeling the sea and its music. We also used this moment to have our packed breakfast from the hotel we stayed at in Hua Hin (The Peri Hotel, Hua Hin). A few moments later we were back on our saddle heading towards Phraya Nakhon Cave and Sam Roi Yot National Park, our two planned detours for the day. We reached the cave around 10:30 AM only to realise that there is no road ahead and we have to go back a few kms and change our route. However, few of us chose to trek all the way to the cave while others stayed on the beach getting photographed and hydrating themselves with fresh juices and fruits. The trek to the cave wasn't easy and it seemed never-ending. It took us close to 3 hours to reach the cave and get back, but believe me, the entire experience was surreal. I have never seen or experienced a place like this ever and every effort by us was worthy of it. It was past 1 PM, I was completely

exhausted due to the trek and the blazing sun only added to my woes, while we still had 60 Km to ride before we reach our destination. We all pushed ourselves back on the saddle and started riding. I was literally dragging myself and perhaps the next couple of hours was the most unpleasant experience for me. Around 3:30 PM, we had covered close to 40 km and stopped at a restaurant for some food and rest. I immediately hydrated myself with some ice-cold water and decided to take a power nap while others ordered food and rested. We stayed here for over an hour and it was a much-needed break to rejuvenate ourselves with fresh energy to ride further. I felt better and stronger as we started the last leg of our ride. We were back on smaller roads and music was on again. The sun was also setting down and we all felt good. We reached Prachuap Khiri Khan around 6 PM only to realise the hotel we booked had released our rooms for some other guests and we had no place to stay. However, we managed to find another hotel, checked in, had a shower, rested a bit, had food, discussed today's ride and decided to make certain changes, and called it a day to start again early tomorrow morning. Prachuap Khiri Khan to Bang Saphan We woke up early to the noise of gushing wind only to realise that there was a heavy storm brewing up in the region. The wind speed was something I had never experienced before and in plain simple words, it felt scary. We chose to get ready and leave before the storm gets worsened. We were back on our saddle by 5:20 AM and started riding through the smaller trails to our next destination Bang Saphan, approximately 105 kms away. We didn't take any detours but stayed on smaller trails and avoided highways for the majority of the journey. It was still dark when we had our first encounter with the dogs of Thailand. We were cycling through the farms when a dozen of dogs started chasing us, they were furious and loud. It was scary. We slowed down till the dogs moved away and then decided to ride slowly till the sun rises. Every farm would have 5-6 dogs to guard their farm and they would instantly charge up on every passerby. We eventually had this encounter with dogs for the next couple of days which was always a scary moment for all of us. However, the sun was up and we were riding through one of my favourite stretches with coconut plantations on both sides of the road, lots of strong tailwinds to push us through and a cloudy sky which kept the blazing sun at bay. The storm actually works in our favour with good weather and tailwinds. If you look through the road map of southern Thailand you will



stayed (Apple Bungalows) was recommended by another cyclist and we were equally delighted with our experience. We also met a french couple who have been cycling through Thailand for several years and stay in this very place every year. The vegetarians in the group also had their moment as they had a feast of banana pancakes and rotis. Bang Saphan to Chumphon Following the routine, we woke up early, started the ride at around 5 AM, and stayed slow till sunrise to avoid dogs. Our destination for the day - Thung Wua Laen Beach, Chumphon was approximately 100 km away from where we started and the route today took us through rubber and palm plantation which was a sheer delight to see. We stayed away from the ocean today for most of our ride and were welcomed by plenty of wavy roads. You would go steep up, come down, go steep up again, come down and repeat. It definitely wasn't an easy ride but the terrains, views and plantation kept us mesmerized. We stopped around 11 AM at a roadside village cafe for breakfast and were quite happy today as besides bananas, croissants, eggs and salt, we also had fresh-cut tomatoes and onion with freshly brewed coffee for breakfast. The ride ahead was through a designated scenic route with a blue ocean on one side and national parks and temples on the other. We were enjoying the ride but the climbs and the blazing sun had started draining us down. We were just 15 km away from our destination when we stopped at Wat Thung Wua Laen Beach, a beautiful temple with one of the biggest sleeping buddha statues I had ever seen. I am not sure if we stopped here for the temple or because we were tired, but it was definitely a much-needed break. The temple was indeed gorgeous and the huge sleeping buddha with Khao Dinsor (mountain) on the backdrop was mesmerizing. A few moments later, we started cycling the last stretch of our ride today. We were reenergized after the break at the temple and were able to complete the ride as planned. For the last couple of kms, we were riding parallel to Thung Wua Laen Beach, with a white sand beach on one side and cute little cafes and restaurants on the other side. The town has a beautiful hippy vibe and I instantly knew that I will come back here to spend some more time in future. We were staying at Chumphon Cabana Resort and Diving centre, which is at the end of the beach. The place was beautiful with its own private beach and the moment we entered, we had instantly forgotten our tiredness and started clicking thousands of photos with each other, our bikes and more. I was already in love with the vibe of this place. We rested for the remaining part of the day, hopped some cafes and settled at a cute little Italian cafe (Malibues Bed & Dinner) for some food and drinks to end our day.

The author is, Bicycle Mayor of Ranchi Jharkhand, India

# RESTART THE BEAT

The much-needed nationwide launch of Cardiopulmonary resuscitation (CPR) — a lifesaving technique which is useful at times when someone's breathing or heartbeat has stopped— by the Government has been triggered by a spate of deaths due to cardiac arrest in the last few months. On an average every minute, over 100 persons are getting cardiac arrest in the country. Majority of them can be saved if given timely CPR. **ARCHANA JYOTI** reports

**K**ick-starting the country-wide CPR campaign in which more than 20 lakh people participated on December 6, 2023, **Dr Mansukh Mandaviya**, Union Health Minister said that "It is imperative that patient is administered treatment immediately on suffering a cardiac arrest hence awareness and adequate training for CPR is paramount."



**DR MANSUKH MANDAVIYA**

Dr Abhijat Sheth from the National Board of Examinations which has been roped to train people across the country on giving CPR added, "There has been increase in the number of cases of sudden deaths and knowing CPR can save a lot of these lives till the ambulance arrives or the person reaches the hospital."

However, health experts felt that public awareness campaigns and ongoing training programs should become a regular and integral part of public health initiatives rather than a one-time event to equip the public with the knowledge and skills necessary to perform CPR when the need arises.

"This initiative could involve collaboration with educational institutions, workplaces, and community organizations to reach a broad audience," they said.

"Widely accessible CPR training ensures that individuals can confidently administer aid, transforming ordinary citizens into potential lifesavers. In essence, the 150 seconds it takes to read this highlights the time sensitivity of CPR, underlining its pivotal role in the chain of survival and its enduring importance in emergency medical care," said **Dr Imtiaz Gani Reshi**, Head of Emergency Medicine and Trauma Services Department, Fortis Hospital, Greater Noida.



**DR IMTIYAZ GANI RESHI**

He described the CPR as a crucial intervention to maintain oxygen delivery to vital organs, acting as a stopgap measure until professional medical help arrives.

Infact, CPR's impact extends beyond mere survival; it minimizes the risk of long-term complications by preserving organ function during the critical moments following cardiac arrest, said Dr Reshi. Additionally, the health experts have also sought to ensure access to automated external defibrillators (AEDs) in public spaces that can further enhance the

**CPR STANDS FOR CARDIOPULMONARY RESUSCITATION. IT IS AN EMERGENCY LIFE-SAVING PROCEDURE THAT IS DONE WHEN SOMEONE'S BREATHING OR HEARTBEAT (PULSE) HAS STOPPED. IF BOTH STOP, THEY WOULD DIE. THIS MAY HAPPEN AFTER A MEDICAL EMERGENCY, SUCH AS AN ELECTRIC SHOCK, HEART ATTACK, OR DROWNING. CPR COMBINES RESCUE BREATHING AND CHEST COMPRESSIONS.**

effectiveness of CPR interventions. A coordinated effort involving healthcare professionals, first responders, and the general public can create a network of support that significantly improves the chances of survival in cardiac arrest cases, they said.

**Dr KK Talwar**, Chairman, PSRI Heart Institute, Delhi said that, in case of emergency, if one is unsure about giving CPR correctly or how to give it, it must be noted that it's always better to try than do nothing which on



**DR KK TALWAR**

many occasions could be the difference between life and death. Once this training is imparted it is seen that the number of peo-

ple ready to impart CPR increases manifold, and this readiness, when put to practical use ends up saving many lives.

In fact in an event in 2019, **Venkaiah Naidu**, the then Vice President gave a clarion call that every body should be trained in CPR.

He also exhorted the organized sector to impart CPR training to their employees as he pointed out that in western countries the students of High Schools are trained in the life-saving technique.



**VENKAI AH NAIDU**

Naidu also insisted on the pressing need to bring out legislation in order to make CPR mandatory in school education. However, in India just two percent are aware how to do CPR "CPR is an issue in India because we have never trained the public. We do not have a robust emergency medical system and ambulances can't reach in the first three minutes, when CPR can be life-saving. Remember former President APJ Abdul Kalam who suddenly collapsed at a function. But nobody could do the CPR," **Dr SSC Chakra Rao**, chairperson, Indian Resuscitation Council (IRC)



**DR SSC CHAKRA RAO**

echoed Naidu's views. "If we talk about data then almost 80 to 82 per cent cardiac arrest happens outside hospital. With each minute the chances of survival decreases by 7 to 10 minutes," added **Dr Rakesh Garg**, Additional Professor of anesthesiology, intensive care and palliative medicine at AIIMS, Delhi and scientific director, Indian Resuscitation Council. "If we don't immediately give CPR, the patient will have a brain injury. In some countries, with increasing practice of CPR it has been found that 40-60 per cent people could be saved. Since time is important, any layman can manually start a heart with a skill which can be learned with a practice of 5-10 minutes and can save a life," The IRC has also formulated the CPR guidelines for the laypersons known as COLS-- Compression Only Life Support.

This simplified form of CPR is recommended for individuals who are not trained in conventional CPR with rescue breaths or for situations where the rescuer is uncomfortable giving mouth-to-mouth ventilation. Besides CPR, it's also important to know how to use an AED. "You just turn it on and the device actually tells you exactly what to do, which is basically placing pads onto the person's chest," said Delhi-based cardiologist **Dr PK Rana**. "The device will identify whether the rhythm the patient has is one where an electrical shock is one that can actually revive them or make them responsive again. And if that's really indeed the case, all you have to do is press a specific button on the device to do so."

However, though Delhi metro has installed these devices at

some of its stations, very few passengers are aware about their existence and importance. In fact, these were installed only after the DMRC got a nudge from the Delhi High Court following a petition by the late prominent cardiologist **Dr KK Aggarwal**, who had been raring the need for CPR training at various platforms.

The Kochi Metro has decided to be cardio-emergency responsive with the installa-



**DR RAKESH GARG**

tion of Automated External Defibrillator (AED) machines at all of its stations.

The AED requires minimal training for operating and is essential in improving outcomes from sudden cardiac arrests. They should be available in most places where large public gatherings occur." However, in India much needs to be done.

A study published in a recent edition of Indian Heart Journal, says that "India lacks a formal sudden cardiac arrest (SCA) registry and the infrastructure for a robust emergency medical services (EMS) response system."

The study "Outcomes of out of hospital sudden cardiac arrest in India: A review and proposed reforms" also underlines that "tireless efforts for bystander CPR training at different levels of communities, institutions and throughout the nation will help build a nation of lifesavers."

The authors of the study included cardiologists **Dr Rakesh Yadav** and **Dr Nitish Naik** from Department of Cardiology, Cardiothoracic Center, AIIMS, Delhi among others.

The writer is Associate Editor, The Pioneer

## World-first trial offers new hope for type 1 diabetes

Researchers at St Vincent's Institute of Medical Research (SVI) in Melbourne have shown that a commonly prescribed rheumatoid arthritis drug can suppress the progression of type 1 diabetes. **THE HEALTH PIONEER** shares the details

The world-first human trial led by SVI's Professor Thomas Kay, has shown that a drug called baricitinib can safely and effectively preserve the body's own insulin production and suppress the progression of type 1 diabetes in people who initiated treatment within 100 days of diagnosis.

"When type 1 diabetes is first diagnosed there is a substantial number of insulin-producing cells still present. We wanted to see whether we could protect further destruction of these cells by the immune system. We showed that baricitinib is safe and effective at slowing the progression of type 1 diabetes in people who have been recently diagnosed," said Professor Kay.

This ground-breaking research shows promise as the first disease-modifying treatment of its kind for type 1 diabetes that can be delivered as a tablet.

"It is tremendously exciting for us to be the first group anywhere in the world to test the efficacy of baricitinib as a potential type 1 diabetes treatment," said Professor Kay.

"Up until now, people with type 1 diabetes have been reliant on insulin delivered via injection or infusion pump. Our trial showed that, if started early enough after diagnosis, and while the participants remained on the medication, their production of insulin was maintained.



People with type 1 diabetes in the trial who were given the drug required significantly less insulin for treatment."

Management of the lifelong autoimmune disease is incredibly burdensome on those diagnosed and their families, requiring meticulous glucose monitoring and insulin administration day and night to stay alive.

Up until insulin's discovery more than 100 years ago, type 1 diabetes was a fatal condition. Despite insulin's life-saving role, the therapy itself is potentially dangerous if too much or too little is administered, and the condition still comes with long-term complications, including heart attack and stroke, vision impairment, kidney disease and nerve damage.

"We are very optimistic that this treatment will become clinically available. This would be a huge step-change in how type 1 diabetes is managed and we believe it shows promise as a fundamental improvement in the ability to control type 1 diabetes," said Professor Helen Thomas.

The clinical trial was funded by JDRE, advocacy and community programs organisations and research organisations including The Royal Melbourne Hospital, St Vincent's Hospital Melbourne, The Royal Children's Hospital and The Women's and Children's Hospital in Adelaide.

### STATUS IN INDIA

There is a registry maintained by the Indian Council of Medical Research called as the Young Diabetes Registry (YDR) since year 2006. The YDR registry recruits patients with young onset diabetes, diagnosed on or before 25 years of age. The registry operates at 205 centres from 10 cities across India. According to the YDR registry data, out of 20351 young diabetes patients recruited, 13368 (65.6%)

were type 1 diabetes. According to the 10th International Diabetes Federation Atlas 2021, the number of children with type 1 diabetes in India is 22,94,000 in the age group of 0 - 19 years. A sub study from the ICMR-YDR registry say that the average annual incidence of type 1 diabetes (below 20 years) is 4.9 cases/1,00,000 populations.

## HEALTH NEWS

### DRUG SAFETY ALERT ISSUED ON PAINKILLER MEFTAL

The Indian Pharmacopoeia Commission (IPC) has issued a drug safety alert advising healthcare professionals and patients to monitor adverse reactions of painkiller Mefthal, commonly used for menstrual cramps and rheumatoid arthritis. The mefenamic acid painkiller is prescribed in the treatment of rheumatoid arthritis, osteoarthritis, dysmenorrhoea, mild to moderate pain, inflammation, fever and dental pain. The alert stated that a preliminary analysis of adverse drug reactions from the Pharmacovigilance Programme of India (PvPI) database revealed drug reactions with eosinophilia and systemic symptoms (DRESS) syndrome.

If such reaction is encountered, the alert advised, people should report the matter to the national coordination centre of the PvPI under the commission by filing a form on the website - www.lpc.gov.in - or through android mobile app ADR PvPI and PvPI Helpline No. 1800-180-3024, it said.

### AOMSI'S 47TH ANNUAL CONFERENCE HELD

The 47th Annual Conference of the Association of Oral and Maxillofacial Surgeons of India (AOMSI) was held here based on the theme "Teaming Experience with Evidence." The delegates explored current and innovative solutions in oral and maxillofacial surgery, discussed important topics like jaw surgery, oral cancer, fractures, craniofacial anomalies, orofacial pathology etc. Conference Secretary **Dr.**

Manjunath Rai, Organizing Chairman **Dr. Ashish Gupta**, Organizing Secretary **Dr. Atul Sharma**, Joint Organizing Secretary **Dr. Imran Khan** and Scientific Chairman **Dr. Rohit Chandra**, provided a serious platform for discussion of groundbreaking ideas and progress in the field. Chief guest was **Dr. Rajiv Bahl**, Director General of the Indian Council of Medical Research, according to a statement here.

### VIBCARE HEALTHCARE'S MANUFACTURING FACILITY IN HARYANA

Vibcare Healthcare, a pharma firm has opened its state-of-the-art manufacturing facility for general tablets, liquids, capsules, and ointments in Panchkula, Haryana. Spread over 5 acres land, the Rs 40-crore worth facility adheres to the highest international standards, including EU GMP, PIC/S, and UKMHRA GMP, reinforcing Vibcare Healthcare's commitment to global quality benchmarks and healthcare accessibility worldwide, said **Siddharth Singhal**, CEO of Vibcare Healthcare.

### SURYA HOSPITALS HEARTWARMING WALKATHON FOR KIDS

On World Premature Day and International Day of Persons with Disabilities on December 3, Surya Hospitals, Santacruz, brought smiles to over 250 children aged 11 months to 14 years with a special walkathon. **Dr. Bhupendra Avasthi**, Managing Director, Surya Hospitals urged families to prioritize outdoor play for children. "Put away screens and play," he said, emphasizing the hospital's approach to

overall child health. **Dr. Bhuvan D.**, Facility Director, Surya Hospital, stressed the importance of embracing differences and being inclusive in every part of life. "Our commitment to including everyone goes beyond medical care. Every child, no matter their abilities, deserves a chance to grow and succeed," he shared while **Dr. Nandkishor Kabra**, NICU Director, said, "Premature births bring unique challenges, and our NICU team works hard to give these infants the best care. Today, we celebrate not just their survival but their growth and development."

### USFDA NOD FOR METHYLENE BLUE INJECTION

Zydus Lifesciences Limited has announced that it has received the final approval from the United States Food and Drug Administration (USFDA) to manufacture and market Methylene Blue Injection, 10mg/2ml and 50mg/5ml. Zydus Methylene Blue Injection, 10mg/2ml and 50mg/5ml, generic version of the Reference Listed Drug (RLD) ProvaryBlue Injection. The majority of current market usage is still on the ampoule presentation whereas Zydus is offering a generic version of Methylene Blue injection in vial presentation. From a hospital perspective, vial presentation is an affordable option with significant benefit and advantage. Vial presentation has no risk of Glass particulate contamination like in ampoules and provides various benefits like ease of use, handlings and flexible option with reduced dose waste.

# Feasibility and challenges of a bipolar world

Is a Bipolar World Order (BWO) with the US and China possible? If so, will it be able to balance the geopolitical power in the world, especially in the Asia-Pacific region? The big question is whether the US is ready to cede space for China, as this seems to be the most intractable problem of the global governance system today.

It is a fact that the current Sino-US rivalry does not resemble the Cold War power contestation between the US and the USSR. However, the Washington-Beijing power contest has led to a definite and misplaced ideological hostility in some significant pockets of global power dynamics. Further, their rivalry has also made building alliance systems increasingly difficult among nations.

China has sharpened its anti-American rhetoric in recent years. It is all but Xi's desperate attempt to divert his countrymen from domestic issues and to highlight how the US-led West has continued its effort to stop China's growth. The current discourse in China's elite power circle is that the US is solely responsible for anything that does not go Beijing's way. As the Chinese economy is fast faltering, Xi has consistently targeted the US in his speeches. He said earlier this year that the western countries led by the US 'implemented all-round containment, encirclement, and suppression against us'. More than what Xi does, his young colleagues and diplomats in global organisations are hysterically targeting the US and blaming it for the ills of China. Is it true? Or is it so that China acts in such a manner that it creates its own enemies in the international system?

To be fair, it is partially true that Washington has been marshalling a significant portion of its energy against Beijing for a



long time. Though sometime in April 2021, Biden told the joint session of Congress that 'I told President Xi that we will maintain a strong military presence in the Indo-Pacific just as we do NATO in Europe not to start conflict but to prevent conflict'. What does that indicate? On the other hand, a month earlier, Xi had told the People's Liberation Army (PLA): 'We should persist in using combat to guide our work; step up preparations for war'. It is also apparent that the way Beijing acts is irksome for the West, especially for Washington. Because, the US has not learned to cede space for China in the post-Cold War international system.

But then, anti-American rhetoric is the mainstay of China's political dialogue since

the birth of the People's Republic of China (PRC) in October 1949 under the leadership of its founder Mao Zedong. It has been so evident that even during the conciliatory years between the 1990s and 2000s, the US had remained a major target that China referred to in its official media as 'a certain country'. Some experts and scholars like Francis Fukuyama argue that American power is fast declining. To him, American hegemony survived for less than two decades since the fall of the historic Berlin Wall in 1989 until the economic crisis of 2007-09. During these years, the US fast expanded its dominance in the lines of economic, military, political, and cultural. It was the height of American hegemony. And with these, the superiority

of American power was equally displayed in the quick occupation of two sovereign nations-Afghanistan and Iraq simply in the name of fighting global terrorism and preventing the lethal weapons of mass destruction. But these nations fought back against the occupied American and allied forces with massive counter-insurgency waves leading to the birth of hundreds of dreaded Islamic jihadist forces like the monstrous Islamic State (IS). It directly impacted the fighting morale of the US and allied forces over the years. Finally, Washington had to withdraw from the battlefields in both countries. Sadly, the American withdrawal from Afghanistan in August 2021 and handing over power to the same old

Taliban radicals with whom the US forces fought and threw them out of Kabul in 2001 really demonstrated the superpower's inability to manage the whole crisis. It has led to the failure of America's one of the costliest war machines abroad in decades. Frankly, Washington overestimates the effectiveness of military and technological superiority in heralding political change in Iraq and Afghanistan in particular and West Asia in general. From then, America's shifting to the Asia-Pacific to contain China's massive expansion and aggression entirely indicates a new challenge for the superpower. Now, it is aligning with other nations like Australia, Japan, the UK, and India to prevent China's long and ambi-

tious expansion plans in the region. Again with the rise of Russia, India, China, and Europe reclaiming their lost spaces in global power systems sharply cutting across America's zone of influence all over the world. And these powers are going to grow. But with a new reality that they are either converging with America or at times contesting with Washington's old and emerging comfort zones of influence. Among them, China has been fast emerging as the strongest contender of the US. And finally, it has challenged the US hegemony in many fronts by now. With Xi at the helm of affairs for now, this power struggle will be on the rise. America's ability to handle external actors like China,

Russia, and West Asia largely depends on its apt handling of growing internal problems. Clearly, autocratic and illiberal regimes like that of Xi and Putin are putting up huge challenges to the international liberal order, particularly the US. The US pre-eminence of the 1990s would be difficult now or in the days to come unless and until China falters.

But many say America's empire is undying. The decline of American power has been greatly exaggerated. The shadow the American power casts over the rest of the world is an undeniable fact. China has a long way to go. It has not experienced major global upheavals the way the US did and survived. It has its own and serious limitations within and outside.

Succinctly, alignment and power balance in the international system have become a myth now. Today the US and China are the two greatest rivals in the world. And their only aim is to win over more allies and areas in the 21st century for influencing the global governance system. In case a war breaks out between the two, the consequences would be unbearable not only for them but also for the rest of the world.

Therefore, bipolarity of the US and Chinese power systems seems incomprehensible. Though there is no way out for now. Both countries are seriously fighting their way forward. But they should understand their own limits. They can fight only at their own risks. Now their competition is not for safeguarding their treasured ideologies like in the Cold War years but for capturing and controlling more and more wealth. Let's see how this new BWO survives and leads us to a new global governance system.

(The author is an expert in International Relations)

**America is shifting to the Asia-Pacific to contain China's massive expansion and aggression entirely indicates a new challenge for the superpower. Now, it is aligning with other nations like Australia, Japan, the UK, and India to prevent China's long and ambitious expansion plans in the region. China has been fast emerging as the strongest contender of the US**



MAKHAN SAIKIA

## PERSPECTIVE

# Enhancing the healthcare landscape in India

**Online profiles, ratings, reviews empower patients to make well-informed decisions, allowing them to identify specialised doctors in their vicinity and receive timely treatment. Undoubtedly, online ratings and reviews have the potential to revolutionise the way patients approach critical healthcare decisions**

The National Medical Commission (NMC) indeed deserves praise for its recently announced guidelines, currently on hold, aiming to ensure high professional conduct and ethical standards within the medical fraternity. These guidelines represent a critical step towards enhancing the healthcare landscape in India. Nevertheless, there are notable concerns regarding the proposed restrictions on medical professionals and institutions when it comes to participating in online review and rating platforms.

In a nation as vast and diverse as India, where equitable access to medical facilities remains an ongoing challenge, online information related to medical professionals and institutions has proven invaluable for patients who are often forced to make decisions in a hurry, particularly when they face urgent healthcare needs. The convenience of online profiles, ratings, and reviews empowers patients to make well-informed decisions. It allows them to identify specialised doctors in their vicinity and receive timely and accurate treatment. Undoubtedly, online ratings and reviews have the potential to revolutionise the way patients and their families approach critical healthcare decisions.

**Understanding the criticality of online ratings and curing patients' anxiety**

Ailments bring both physical and mental pain, leaving patients uncertain about the next steps primarily due to a lack of information. Online reviews provide relief to patients and their families by allowing access to others' experiences with specific doctors and hospitals.

Today, patients can access information about the experiences of other patients who have received care from a spe-

cific doctor or visited a particular hospital. They can read about the experiences of patients with similar medical conditions and make the right decision. This information is particularly valuable for individuals facing complex or serious medical issues and needing immediate care. Earlier, patients used to rely on word-of-mouth recommendations from friends and family that were based on personal experiences. Nowadays, such recommendations are also based on online searches.

Moreover, it allows patients to gauge the level of care provided by doctors and hospitals. Positive reviews often highlight the competence, compassion, and communication skills of healthcare providers, while negative reviews may signal areas where improvements are needed. This information guides patients towards healthcare providers who consistently deliver high-quality care. Most critically, hospitals and doctors who receive feedback through online ratings and reviews have an opportunity to identify areas for improvement. Constructive criticism helps healthcare facilities and providers make necessary changes to enhance the patient experience and the quality of care they deliver. Consequently, patients benefit from a continuous cycle of improvement within the healthcare industry.

**Response to daunting challenges**

Unquestionably, NMC did not make this decision in a hurry. It's to combat threats posed by the digital world. It's a fact that, despite their benefits, online ratings and reviews also present some potential disadvantages for patients as well as medical professionals.

One significant drawback is the possibility of encountering biased or misleading information. Personal biases, grudges, or conflicts of interest may



influence reviews, leading to inaccurate portrayals of healthcare providers or facilities. Furthermore, not all patients leave reviews, and those who do may not represent the full spectrum of experiences. This can result in an incomplete or skewed view of a doctor's or hospital's performance. Additionally, overreliance on online reviews can sometimes lead to self-diagnosis and self-treatment, which can be risky and counterproductive. Most importantly, NMC also attempted to protect patients' privacy.

Similarly, it affects medical professionals and institutions as well. For instance, negative or unfair reviews can damage a healthcare provider's reputation, even if they are unfounded or exaggerated. Most critically, the anonymity of online reviews sometimes leads to a lack of accountability, as reviewers may not always provide accurate or constructive feedback, making it challenging for healthcare profession-

als to address concerns or respond to criticism effectively.

**Possible courses of action**

In any case, imposing restrictions is not the optimal solution, as it not only stifles the potential benefits but can also create an atmosphere of distrust. Instead of strict limitations, the focus should be on developing clear, transparent guidelines that outline how healthcare professionals can effectively engage with patients online while upholding ethical standards.

These guidelines should extend to encompass ethical practices and professional codes of conduct specific to online interactions. The paramount concern here should be patient privacy, ensuring that their sensitive health information remains secure. Such guidelines not only protect the rights of patients but also foster a sense of responsibility and professionalism among healthcare providers. They serve as a framework for

constructive engagement with patients and online platforms, striking a balance between transparencies and safeguarding sensitive information. Moreover, implementing rigorous moderation and verification processes is essential to guarantee the authenticity of reviews. By verifying the identities of reviewers and closely monitoring the content they post, online platforms can significantly reduce the risk of false or malicious reviews. Collaborative efforts between healthcare organisations, regulatory bodies, and online review platforms are pivotal in this endeavour. They can work together to verify the authenticity of reviews and validate the qualifications of healthcare professionals, thereby enhancing transparency and trust. Furthermore, these platforms should offer healthcare providers the means to respond to reviews, facilitating open and constructive communication. This process encourages dia-

logue and dispute resolution when necessary, ensuring that concerns and criticisms are addressed effectively. Such a comprehensive approach not only safeguards the integrity of online ratings and reviews but also enhances the overall healthcare experience for patients and professionals alike. It is an indispensable step towards harnessing the potential benefits while mitigating the drawbacks associated with online healthcare information.

**Prevailing global practices**

Nations across the globe have recognised the efficacy of having online ratings and reviews of doctors and hospitals and are nurturing this culture. For instance, many countries, including the United States, the UK, Germany, the Netherlands, and Australia, have a variety of review and rating platforms. In the UK, the National Health Services (NHS) operates a Reviews & Ratings microsite for reviews and ratings.

In the US, the Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services runs its Five-star quality rating service that provides information on the quality of care. Many other countries, including Australia, Canada, Italy, Spain, the Netherlands, and most Nordic countries, systematically report 'Quality of Care' as part of overall health system performance reports. These practices can offer insights on how to navigate challenges and benefit from online ratings and reviews.

In this digitally-connected world, the transformative power of online ratings and reviews is unmistakable. These platforms have revolutionised decision-making across various aspects of our lives. It is, therefore, disheartening to contemplate the possibility of the medical community and patients being denied the benefits of this invaluable resource. The government's vision of "Digital India" emphasises the

role of digital platforms in fostering a robust healthcare ecosystem.

The NMC is encouraged to engage in a constructive dialogue with all stakeholders to re-evaluate its guidelines. Rather than imposing stringent restrictions, the development of clear and ethical engagement guidelines for healthcare professionals in the online sphere can serve the interests of all parties involved. These guidelines should encompass critical aspects such as patient privacy and professionalism.

Additionally, the implementation of robust moderation and verification processes can ensure the authenticity of reviews, minimising the risks associated with false or malicious content. Collaborative efforts between healthcare organisations, regulatory bodies, and online review platforms to validate reviews and qualifications can enhance transparency. Furthermore, the provision of channels for healthcare providers to respond to reviews encourages open communication and effective dispute resolution.

As a global practice, countries worldwide have recognised the significance of online ratings and reviews for doctors and hospitals, nurturing a culture that promotes transparency and accountability. By drawing insights from these practices, India can overcome the challenges and maximise the benefits of online ratings and reviews in its healthcare sector. It is imperative that the NMC re-evaluates its stance to harness the potential of digital mediums in building a robust healthcare ecosystem for the nation.

(The writer, a retired Medical Commissioner of the Employees State Insurance Corporation, played a key role in establishing ESI Medical Colleges and Post Graduate Institutes nationwide)



PROFESSOR SL VIG



**YOUR WEEK AHEAD**

MADHU KOTIYA



**ARIES** March 21-April 19

This week brings financial prosperity, especially noticeable at its start with significant gains. Your professional achievements lead to celebratory moments, spreading joy among your social and family circles. The atmosphere at home is particularly harmonious, with women playing a pivotal role. Their vitality, creativity, and health significantly contribute to the family's happiness, enhancing their roles in daily life. Expect heartwarming family events, symbolizing new beginnings and shared accomplishments, further strengthening familial ties. As the week concludes, a notable shift in your perspective emerges. This evolution in your thoughts or beliefs opens up new understandings of life, promising to enrich your future experiences in meaningful ways. This week is a blend of material success, familial joy, and personal growth.

**Lucky number** 15 | **Lucky colour** White  
**Lucky day** Thursday



**LEO** July 23-Aug 22

This week calls for patience and moderation, as overexcitement and aggression might lead you astray. While favorable opportunities arise that could positively transform your life, your response to them is crucial. Avoid letting ego or indifference turn these chances against you. Balancing self-respect with humility is key. Be aware that your successes may stir envy in others, potentially making you a target of negative intentions. Stay vigilant and understand the psychology of those around you to navigate these situations wisely. Also, pay extra attention to your valuables; ensure they are securely stored. Be cautious with those in your service, whether domestic help or employees, as there might be challenges in these areas. This week is about being alert and thoughtful in your interactions and decisions, safeguarding both your personal and professional spheres.

**Lucky number** 18 | **Lucky colour** Charcoal Grey  
**Lucky day** Friday



**SAGITTARIUS** Nov 22-Dec 21

This week, you'll radiate strength and confidence. Your endeavors will be illuminated with success as if guided by a celestial light. Your energy is finely tuned and directed towards areas of your life where it can have the greatest impact. Armed with vision and determination, you're ready to face the world's challenges and achieve your loftiest goals. A joyous family event may also be on the horizon, fulfilling a deeply held desire. This could relate to the joy of parenthood or the significant achievements of your children, like academic success or pursuing their chosen paths. Your belief in your abilities and faith in a higher power are strong. This conviction not only fosters a positive environment around you but also propels you towards making remarkable achievements.

**Lucky number** 9 | **Lucky colour** Coral  
**Lucky day** Monday



**TAURUS** April 20-May 20

This week, you'll find yourself deeply influenced by your emotions and feelings. Your natural inclination towards empathy and care will be heightened, leading you to act beneficially towards those close to you. Your ability to offer healing and wise counsel will draw others to seek your guidance. However, there's a caution to maintain a balance. While tending to others, you might find yourself overlooking your own professional responsibilities. It's important to stay aware of your surroundings, as there's a risk of others misinterpreting or exploiting your kind-heartedness. To ensure stability and financial security, it's crucial to strategize and act rather than getting lost in daydreams. Setting clear goals and managing your emotions effectively are key.

**Lucky number** 7 | **Lucky colour** Blush Pink  
**Lucky day** Sunday



**VIRGO** Aug 23-Sep 22

This week, you may experience a sense of solitude and disconnection from everyday life. This could stem from challenges in your personal relationships, such as difficulties in love or separation from a partner, impacting your mental state. Professionally, you might face obstacles, with your efforts seemingly yielding no immediate results. Patience is essential during this period. Stay prepared and alert for any opposition, recognizing and harnessing your inner strength for defense. This phase could be the final challenge before achieving your goals. Amidst these trials, you might undergo a significant inner spiritual transformation. Help may arrive in the form of a supportive individual, whose guidance could be pivotal in navigating your current circumstances.

**Lucky number** 13 | **Lucky colour** Cherry Blossom  
**Lucky day** Tuesday



**CAPRICORN** Dec 22-Jan 19

This week, you'll navigate a sea of emotions and detachment in personal relationships, with couples facing various challenges. Minor issues may escalate into arguments, but ultimately, you'll find common ground. At work, your kindness and generosity shine through. Unexpected financial gains will bolster your sense of security. You possess the ability to handle both your personal and material affairs with competence and efficiency. Your generosity extends to patiently dedicating your time and resources. Your reliability, stemming from a strong sense of duty and trustworthiness, makes you a dependable figure. Your eagerness to learn new things will fuel your drive for success, potentially making you a role model for others. During this period, you maintain strong ethical standards, standing firm in your beliefs and defending your principles.

**Lucky number** 17 | **Lucky colour** Emerald Green  
**Lucky day** Thursday



**GEMINI** May 21-June 20

This week, your strength lies in your leadership and determination. Your influence isn't about physical might, but rather the authority and inspiration you hold. Your charisma, along with a strict and disciplined approach, motivates others to follow your lead. However, this period sees a diminishing role for emotional considerations in your decisions, which might lead to challenges in personal relationships, potentially causing strains or separations. Family dynamics could become tense, especially regarding personal choices in relationships. You might face opposition from maternal figures, leading to conflicts and arguments. Midweek, you'll find yourself under significant pressure, struggling to make independent decisions in these matters. As the week concludes, you'll experience a turn in fortunes. Support from a senior family member, possibly a paternal figure, will bring both financial and emotional richness.

**Lucky number** 10 | **Lucky colour** Bronze  
**Lucky day** Tuesday



**LIBRA** Sep 23-Oct 22

This week may bring the challenge of a fractured relationship, which could be deeply painful. Amidst this, you might confront fears of failure. However, by facing these fears and using them to your advantage, you'll emerge stronger and more prepared for future hurdles. Remember, courage is often born from fear. Should an opportunity arise, embrace it with confidence and boldness. Now is the time to pursue your dreams with determination, casting aside any hesitations. If you're doubting your achievements or feel overwhelmed by your accomplishments, take a moment to reassess your strategies and consider new approaches. You're on the path to finding the right direction. As the week progresses, anticipate positive financial developments. The end of the week holds promising prospects for your financial growth.

**Lucky number** 6 | **Lucky colour** Orange  
**Lucky day** Wednesday



**AQUARIUS** Jan 20-Feb 18

You'll find yourself confidently engaging with influential individuals, enjoying a period of heightened status and power. Your energy levels are high, fueled by a rush of adrenaline, and your connections with people from all walks of life are strong and positive. You'll emerge as a role model, offering guidance, setting directions, and providing a sense of security to those around you. There's a harmonious balance between your physical, mental, and spiritual well-being, accompanied by a resilient heart that aids in making significant life decisions. Your presence commands attention, and you're known for your fair judgment, honesty, and unwavering adherence to your principles. This week, your ability to lead is pronounced; you see the bigger picture and allow your intellect, rather than emotions, to guide your decisions.

**Lucky number** 22 | **Lucky colour** Beige  
**Lucky day** Saturday



**CANCER** June 21-July 22

This week, prioritize rest and rejuvenation amidst your hectic schedule. Focus on healing both physically and mentally. Engage in activities like yoga, meditation, and leisurely walks to refresh yourself. Embrace the tranquility of nature and ensure adequate sleep to prepare for upcoming challenges. Your professional life is bustling with creativity, travel, and significant developments, possibly including a promotion or salary increase. Family responsibilities will also demand your attention, especially involving children, leading to both time and financial commitments. Consider planning a family getaway, adding a touch of romance and bonding. For those who are single, the possibility of marriage proposals looms, hinting at new beginnings in personal life. Married couples can look forward to a harmonious and closer connection as the week winds down, celebrating their togetherness.

**Lucky number** 12 | **Lucky colour** Yellow  
**Lucky day** Sunday



**SCORPIO** Oct 23-Nov 21

This week, you possess remarkable strength, enhanced by sharp perception and insight, allowing you to understand the core of any situation with ease. Your mental acuity is at its peak, simplifying the achievement of your objectives. Now is an opportune moment to dispel any confusion that has obscured your inner truth and to release the restraints of the past that have limited your progress. Focus on your ambitions during this period of heightened spiritual awareness. Dedicate time to harmonize with nature through activities like morning or evening walks, yoga, meditation, or even engaging in sports at a professional level. Embrace the natural flow of events instead of resisting; let it guide your journey forward. This approach will not only align with your goals but also bring a sense of peace and fulfillment.

**Lucky number** 2 | **Lucky colour** Chestnut Brown  
**Lucky day** Friday



**PISCES** Feb 19-March 20

You possess boundless potential, enabling you to reshape and manifest your desires. While it's not feasible for everyone to grasp all mysteries and secrets, you stand as a beacon, guiding those eager to explore and unlock their hidden capabilities. Your spiritual focus and inner strength have the power to profoundly transform lives. Your belief in justice is strong, understanding that every action has its consequences, aligning with the principles of karma. This belief underscores the importance of making choices that lead to positive outcomes. Your clear mindset is key to realizing your goals and resolving many of life's challenges. Additionally, the prospect of travel or a significant journey is likely, offering new experiences and opportunities for growth. This period is about harnessing your inner power, guiding others, and embarking on new paths.

**Lucky number** 14 | **Lucky colour** Fuchsia  
**Lucky day** Sunday

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# Mindful living helps redefine destiny

What wrong I did in my previous life that my personal life has been in turmoil, faced with court cases and with no end in sight. Pundits have fleeced me enough for conducting puja to mitigate my suffering. But in vain. What is in store of my destiny here onwards. Suggest me how to come out of this impasse? Someone came asking in a state of desperation.

For answer, first beware of the premise on which destiny stands. All species but for human beings are bound by their predetermined nature driven design parameters, with no scope for making any exception. Human beings on the contrary enjoy the exclusive privilege to make choices in life. But whenever choice option comes into play, the probability of its use and misuse remains equal. And there is no free lunch in this life. The quality and intent of the actions following choices made defines what we

become due for in the emerging times. So, owning up the consequences thereof becomes imperative. That's what binds you into a cause-effect chain, which runs in succession, stretching even to the next life. In common man's language it implies that what you give to others – pain or pleasure – will haunt you later. Purposely to make you evolve. It needs to be remembered that we don't have a reality independent of the whole. We, therefore, need to learn how to relate well with all and sundry forming the living world. The irony, however, is that every individual is born unique, each manifesting varying mental trait, more often in conflict with others. So, we can't have easy go in life the way we wish. That makes it imperative upon us to care for other's sensibilities and concerns as much as your own, overriding individual limitations. That's the way forward to a smooth run of life. Evidently, you would



have hurt your partner in the previous life. So does Saturn tenanted in the 7th house, placed adverse to Mercury identified with common sensical judgment and emotion signifying Venus indicate. "Is there any scope to modify our

destiny indications?" The man questioned. The answer is 'no' and 'yes'. Should you unmindfully just flow by the usual run of life, destiny indications won't change. If, however, you consciously exercise your exclusive empowerment tool – the faculty of discriminate intelligence – you can make amends. It is pertinent to note here that the choice option also enjoins upon you with the capacity to self-reflect, identify and acknowledge unworthy tendencies, and make conscientious choice to take corrective initiatives. You may then discriminate between 'tempting influences induced by destiny indicators' and 'what is right'. That will help you redefine the course of destiny. "But no puja helped me so far." The man quipped. For the answer, you need to first understand how karmic carryover stretches on to next life. The choices you make and the actions thereto, as well as unfulfilled desires if any, get imprinted in

your mind in the form of thought seeds. That gets carried over to the next life. As and when congenial ground is available, they come into play. Invariably, our ego identifies itself with the inherent desire and mind-trends and is tempted to pursue it as end game. If that would not be enough, our habit tendencies further play spoil sport. We, thus, create the necessary ground ourselves. So, the genesis of all problems lies in the mind. Therefore, corrections if any needs to be made at the thought plane. Pundits performing belief driven puja can't invade your mind space to make necessary amends. If, you conduct mindfully, look withing to identify the inherent fault lines and unworthy desire trends, you can make amends through fresh educative inputs. "Now, tell me about habit tendencies playing contrary to my interest." Asked the man. The Sun placed adverse to Saturn points to inherent sense of fear

and insecurity, which makes you habitually suspicious of others. Mars ill-disposed off to mischievous Neptune makes you unmindfully and impulsively jump into action without applying proper forethought, which may prove self-destructive. Mercury placed adverse to Saturn speaks of your fixated one-track mind, not open to look beyond for reality check. If that would not be enough, Saturn ill-disposed to Uranus accounts for your illogical reasoning. You rushed through your marriage, when you were not matured enough to handle the subtleties of a relationship. It needs to be remembered that once a choice is made, particularly in matters having lifelong bearing, the consequences thereof will stretch on for long. The result is there to see. The writer is an astrologer, vastu consultant and spiritual counsellor. Connect with him at Tel: 91-11-9818037273/9871037272 Email: bharatbhushanpadmadeo@gmail.com

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