

**OPINION 6**  
BANGLADESH ELECTIONS:  
GAME BNP IS PLAYING

**WORLD 8**  
US, ISRAEL DISCUSS WHEN TO  
SCALE BACK GAZA COMBAT

**MONEY 10**  
SENSEX BREACHES 71K MARK;  
NIFTY SURGES TO FRESH RECORD

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DHONI'S NUMBER  
7 JERSEY RETIRED,  
SAYS SHUKLA  
12 SPORTS

# Parliament stalled as BJP, Opp clash over breach

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■  
NEW DELHI

The tiff between the BJP-ruled Centre and Congress-led Opposition parties escalated on Friday, with the latter not allowing the functioning of Parliament, even as the former asserted that the high-level probe on the Parliament security breach is underway. The functioning of the Lok Sabha and THE Rajya Sabha was completely washed out as Opposition MPs continued with their protest, demanding a statement on the issue from Home Minister Amit Shah and a discussion in both Houses.

The treasury bench had low attendance as most of the BJP leaders, including Prime Minister Narendra Modi and his Cabinet members, were in Jaipur to attend the oath ceremony of the new Chief Minister. Sources informed *The Pioneer* that several rounds of high-level meetings at the Secretary and MHA levels were conducted to prepare a comprehensive report on the incident and to strategise ways to prevent similar incidents at key government buildings.

The Opposition members also protested the suspension of their 14 MP colleagues after they raised their demand for a statement from Shah on the security breach and a discussion thereafter on Thursday. The protest was also joined by former Congress president Sonia Gandhi. Amid demands from Opposition leaders for a statement from the Home



Congress MP Sonia Gandhi with suspended MPs during the Winter session of Parliament in New Delhi on Friday

trying to suppress its voice, Joshi said, "No one is trying to suppress anyone's voice; it is their opinion. I want to say, come and debate. Two bills are listed today. On Monday, there are three important bills to replace the IPC, the CrPC, and the Evidence Act. We want a detailed discussion. We have allotted 15 hours."

In a major security breach on the anniversary of the 2001 Parliamentary terror attack on Wednesday, two men jumped into the Lok Sabha chamber from the public gallery during the Zero Hour, released yellow-colored smoke from canisters, and shouted slogans before being overpowered by the MPs. Aam Aadmi Party (AAP) MP Raghav Chadha said the Opposition leaders are ready to wait for the probe report, but the home minister should come to the House and make a statement on the incident.

"I believe not just the opposition, but those on the treasury benches should also urge the home minister to make a statement. On one hand, they say they will get back PoK (Pakistan-occupied Kashmir), Aksai Chin, and they cannot even protect Parliament," Priyanka Chaturvedi of the Shiv Sena (Uddhav Balasaheb Thackeray) said. According to sources, during their floor coordination meeting on Friday morning, leaders of the INDIA parties decided to continue their aggressive stance in Lok Sabha as well as Rajya Sabha.

Minister on the incident, Parliamentary Affairs Minister Prahlad Joshi stated that both Parliament buildings fall under the purview of the Lok Sabha Speaker.

"Both the buildings are under the speaker's purview. We are following the speaker's order. A high-level enquiry is going on. Saying that we will not allow the House to function... They

(opposition) should behave responsibly," he said. Union Minister Anurag Thakur hit out at the Opposition parties, saying they are trying to politicise the Parliament security breach matter and using it as an excuse to halt House proceedings.

"After losing the elections in three States, the Opposition is trying to find an excuse to halt

the proceedings of the House. They are creating obstacles, even as the Speaker of the House spoke to the representatives of the Opposition parties, took their suggestions, and also assured improvement in security. It can be clearly seen that they are trying to do politics," Thakur said.

Asked about the Opposition's allegation that the Centre is

## Police dig for accused political, terror links

RAJESH KUMAR ■ NEW DELHI

After apprehending the prized catch, mastermind Lalit Mohan Jha, in the Parliament security breach case, the Delhi Police, along with other probe agencies, is investigating the political affiliations of all the accused named in the FIR. Additionally, probe sleuths said the accused will be interrogated to ascertain whether they had any association with an enemy country or a terrorist organisation.

The investigation will also focus on determining who assisted them in conducting a reconnaissance of the entire Parliament security system and who guided them in obtaining visitor entry pass recommendations.

The Delhi Police claim Lalit has confessed that the accused met many times to hatch a conspiracy to breach Parliament security. "We need him to confront the accused with each other, to locate the mobile phones, to take him to the hotel where he stayed for 4 days, and to know the financial transactions and funding behind the attack," police sources said. Lalit Mohan Jha was the mastermind of the Parliament security breach case, said police.



Lalit Jha, key accused in the recent Parliament security breach, being produced at the Patiala House Court in New Delhi on Friday

In a remand application, the Delhi Police said Lalit's custodial interrogation was required for in-depth probe to unearth the larger conspiracy behind the attack, involvement of other persons, and to find the actual motive.

After a brief hearing, Special NIA Judge Hardeep Kaur sent Lalit to seven days of police custody. The Delhi Police had sought his 15-day custody.

Continued on Page 2

## No support for Khalistan in US: Indian American Sikh leader

PTI ■ WASHINGTON

A prominent Indian-American Sikh leader has said that there is no support for the Khalistan movement in the US, neither in the government nor in the community. Jassee Singh from the Sikhs of America organisation also urged the Modi Government to provide a comprehensive developmental package for Punjab to address key challenges being faced by the State, including the problem of illicit drugs among the youths.

"Modi Government's relationship with the Sikhs and the things that he has done for this community is unprecedented as compared to the previous governments. There is no doubt about that," Singh told PTI in an interview.

"At the same time, there are several Sikh issues that need to be addressed. This includes the atrocities against the Sikhs in the 1984 riots. No Sikhs would forget this," Singh said.

The Modi Government has tried its best to address the concerns of the Sikhs, but there are a number of issues that he still needs to address, he said adding that the PM needs to establish a direct relationship with the Sikh community in India and the world and not through middlemen like the Akalis and the Badals.

Continued on Page 2



Prime Minister Narendra Modi being greeted by Rajasthan Chief Minister Bhajan Lal Sharma during the latter's swearing-in ceremony in Jaipur on Friday. First-time MLA Sharma was sworn in 12 days after the party ousted the Congress in the Assembly polls. Sharma, a BJP State general secretary, took charge on the day he turned 57. Along with him, Diya Kumari and Prem Chand Bairwa were sworn in as Deputy Chief Ministers by Governor Kalraj Mishra. All three took the oath in Hindi. Ashok Gehlot was the only Congress leader who attended the ceremony held in front of the iconic Albert Hall

## No stay on Mathura mosque survey: SC

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

The Supreme Court on Friday refused to stay the Allahabad High Court's decision allowing a court-monitored survey of the Shahi Idgah adjoining the Krishna Janmabhoomi temple in Mathura on an oral plea by the Muslim side and asked them to challenge the order by way of an appeal.

The high court had on

Thursday allowed a court-monitored survey of the Shahi Idgah and agreed to the appointment of an advocate commissioner to oversee the survey of the mosque premises.

A bench of Justices Sanjiv Khanna and SVN Bhatti deferred until January 9 the hearing on a plea filed by the Committee of Management Trust Shahi Masjid Idgah challenging the May 26 order

of the high court transferring to itself all matters related to the dispute pending before a Mathura court.

"List the special leave petition on January 9. All the contentions and issues will be considered on the said date. In case petitioners have any grievance, it will be open to them to file a challenge in accordance with law," the bench ordered.

Continued on Page 2

## Delhi chill outshines Shimla winter

RAJESH KUMAR ■ NEW DELHI

Delhi was colder than the hill stations Shimla and Mussoorie on Friday, owing to continuous snowfall in the mountains for the past few days. On Friday, Delhi witnessed its coldest morning of the winter so far, with the minimum temperature dropping to 4.9 degrees Celsius, four degrees below normal.

Delhi and its surrounding areas will experience severe cold wave-like conditions around Christmas, with light rain expected in northern

India, leading to a drop in daytime temperatures. According to the latest weather bulletin by the India Meteorological Department (IMD), Delhi's Safdarjung observatory recorded a minimum temperature of 4.9 degrees Celsius. The mercury reached a high of 24.1 degrees Celsius, which is one notch above the season's average, as indicated in the IMD's weather bulletin.

Meteorology and Climate Change vice-president Mahesh Palawat mentioned in a post on X, "Delhi shivers

at 4.9 degrees, the lowest minimum of the season. Delhi is colder than Shimla." On Thursday, Delhi recorded a minimum temperature of 6.2 degrees Celsius, marking the lowest for this season so far. According to IMD data, Delhi was colder than certain mountainous locations in Himachal Pradesh and Uttarakhand.

The minimum temperature in Delhi on Wednesday was recorded at 7.4 degrees Celsius, on Tuesday at 6.8 degrees Celsius, and on Monday at 6.5 degrees

Celsius. The IMD has forecasted that no significant change in minimum temperatures is expected across the country in the next four to five days. In Delhi, the minimum temperature is likely to be around 6 or 7 degrees over the weekend, with shallow fog expected in the morning.

According to the IMD, a western disturbance is anticipated around December 16 and 17, which may lead to snowfall in the hills and rain in the plains.

Continued on Page 2

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# Congress to sound bugle for 2024 in Nagpur on Dec 28

**TN RAGHUNATHA ■ MUMBAI**  
In an effort to enthrone, ready its cadres and sound the bugle for the 2024 Lok Sabha polls, the Congress has organised a massive rally in Nagpur on December 28 on the occasion of its foundation day. Billed as a mega rally to be party president Mallikarjun Kharge, Congress Parliamentary Party President Sonijai Gandhi, party leaders President Rahul Gandhi, Congress General Secretary Priyanka Gandhi, all chief ministers of the party, the Congress expects a turn-out of 10 lakh party workers from across the state. The rally is being seen as a move by the Congress to re-energise its cadres after it fell short of expectations in the recent State Assembly polls in five states where it managed to capture power in Telangana while it lost out in the states of Madhya Pradesh and Rajasthan despite the hype of a possible victory it had built in the run-up to the polls. Giving details of the grand rally planned on December 28, All



India Congress Committee's Organization General Secretary K C Venugopal said in Nagpur that the public support for the Congress was increasing across the country. The Congress had increased its vote shares in the states that went to the Assembly polls. "After Karnataka, we captured power in Telangana with a clear majority," he said. Coming down heavily on the ruling BJP at the Centre, Venugopal charged that Narendra Modi government was ruling the country in a dictatorial manner. Alluding to the recent security breach in Parliament,

lakh people from across the state for the rally in Nagpur," said. He said that the congress leaders, functionaries, workers, Mahila Congress, Youth Congress, NSUI, all cells and departments of the party were working towards making this rally a success. "We are just three to four months away for the 2024 Lok Sabha polls, we expect that this will serve to create great enthusiasm and infuse new energy among the Congress workers. The Nagpur rally will be historic. We expect it to mark the beginning of a change in the country," Patole said. Earlier, Venugopal addressed the senior state party leaders at a meeting held at a five star hotel in Nagpur, where leaders like AICC organisational general secretary Mukul Wasnik, Patole, State Legislature Congress Party Leader Balasaheb Thorat, Opposition Leader Vijay Wadettiwar, former chief ministers Ashok Chavan and Prithviraj Chavan were prominent among those present.

# Supply chain management is new sunrise industry: Experts

**KUMAR CHELLAPPAN ■ KOCHI**  
Millions of jobs are available across the counter for the unemployed while an equal number of more opportunities await entrepreneurs to launch their own ventures in the supply chain management and logistics sectors in the country. More than the manufacturing and services industries, the Supply Chain Management and Logistics fields have emerged as the sunrise sectors of the nation's economy, according to veterans in the business. "This is not our own words. Narendra Modi, the Prime Minister of India, has endorsed this fact in his speeches. It is for the youth and entrepreneurs to make use of the opportunity," says K Ramachandran Nair, vice president, Indian Institute of Materials Management (West Zone). He said that opportunities are galore in the sector and people with educational qualifications as well as skills need only to tap the avenues for well paid jobs in these sectors. While graduates in engineering and management are assured of high paid jobs in the booming supply chain logistics sector, even school dropouts who pos-



sess heavy duty and commercial vehicles driving licenses stand to get jobs as drivers and delivery executives. World trade is increasing by leaps and bounds. The goods imported have to be delivered to the consignees while materials to be exported have to be taken to the ports for trouble free loading into the ships. "The statistics provided by the commerce ministry itself prove that business in this sphere has become vibrant," said Nair. He also pointed out the hi-tech trucks and medium sized commercial vehicles manufactured in India as further proof of the ever-growing supply chain and logistics sector. What we see right now is a flourishing industry similar to the Information Technology revolution in late 1990s and early 2000s," said Nair. Professional managers who know the inside game of the supply chain logistics branch of the industries hold the keys to success. "The professional who has the answer to solutions like where, when and how the materials for the business could be procured is the key player in the business. He has to get the input from the logistics person about how the same could be transported to the work site for a trouble-free operation of the venture," said Nair. Supply Chain Management (SCM for short) is a vital function in any organization

because it is the only function which affects the bottom line of any organization. This contributes directly to the profit of any organization. Main function of the SCM is buying at the right price, right source and right time. It is the SCM department that maintains the vendor management such as life long relationships between companies and suppliers. A robust SCM is a measure of the healthiness of any organization," said Nair. The icing on the cake is the emergence of women in this branch hitherto dominated by men. The recently held award evening at Pune for professionals in the field of supply chain management saw woman walking away with top honors much to the surprise of their men counterparts. Sharmila Kesarkar, head, supply chain, Jehangir Hospital, Pune and Esquire Healthcare and Logistics are names which would be heard frequently in the coming decades. Suhas Gawas, chairman, Indian Institute of Materials Management, Pune, said all that the engineering and management degree holders have to do is to tone up their skills with various training programs held by IIMM.

## Security upped in Bengal House

**PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ KOLKATA**  
Bengal Assembly Speaker Biman Banerjee has directed the security agencies to beef up security inside the State Assembly premises. The decision comes in the wake of the Lok Sabha smoke bomb attack. "No assembly members, staff and journalists will be allowed to enter the premises without their identity cards. The West Gate will be meant for visitors only. They will be allowed to stay inside the assembly premises for two hours only," Banerjee has said. "Police will question if a visitor is found overstaying inside the Assembly premises," he said, adding even the entry and exit of the vehicles

will be strictly monitored. The decision was taken in an emergency meeting where it was also decided to install CCTV cameras at the gates. "Vehicles of members will not be allowed to enter the assembly unless they have designated stickers. No additional police personnel will be allowed inside the lobby of the assembly other than the security personnel for the MLAs," the Speaker said. Incidentally Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee too had on Thursday reviewed the police arrangements at the state secretariat 'Nabanna'. According to sources the Chief Minister found some security guards absent at the gates following which she directed the senior officers concerned to look into the matter.

## Massive crackdown on banned PLFI in 4 States, two arrested

**PTI ■ NEW DELHI**  
The National Investigation Agency Friday arrested two persons in a massive crackdown on proscribed People's Liberation Front of India (PLFI) in Jharkhand, Bihar, Madhya Pradesh and New Delhi, an official said. An Indian Army uniform, along with arms, ammunition, incriminating documents and electronic devices, Rs 3 lakh in cash and jewellery were seized during the raids at 23 locations, mostly in Jharkhand, in a case of extortion and levy collection by the

terror group, a spokesperson of the agency said. The people targeted during the crackdown were all cadres and sympathizers of PLFI, a banned terror organization, the official said, adding they were involved in a conspiracy to carry out violent acts and commit terror activities. Of the locations raided, 19 are in Jharkhand's Gumla, Ranchi, Khunti, Simdega, Palamu and West Singhbhum districts, two in New Delhi and one each in Bihar's Patna and Madhya Pradesh's Siddhi district, the spokesperson said.

## Workshop on cyber security collaboration organised

**PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI**  
The Taipei Economic and Cultural Center (TECC) in India in collaboration with the United States (US) Embassy and the United Service Institution of India organised a workshop on collaboration on Cyber Security under the Global Cooperation and Training Framework (GCTF) on December 11-12, 2023. According to a TECC Press note, it was conducted in a hybrid seminar cum interactive discussion format, covering core aspects of cyber security, information infrastructure and processes need to sustain the increasingly digital base of economic activity and development. The workshop was attended by key policy makers, technical specialists, and the private sector with an international background. The opening remarks by DG BK Sharma of USI highlighted the efforts being made by the USI and about its Cyber Centre of Excellence in collaboration with CyberPeace Foundation. H.E. Baushuan Ger, Taiwan Representative to India stressed on the need for collaborative efforts to counter the growing threat of cyber-related attacks. Especially Taiwan, India and US will have General Elections in 2024, cooperation on cyber threats among democratic and like-minded countries is crucial for our shared prosperity and security.

## No support for Khalistan in US: Indian American Sikh...

**From Page 1**  
Responding to a question he said, "No. The majority of Sikhs don't support the Khalistan movement." Observing that India's growth story makes every overseas Indian proud, Singh said it is time that the Centre gives some "better package" for the State of Punjab, its youth and its people. "More should be done for the youth of Punjab," he said. "There is a need to stop the migration of youth outside India and provide them with employment and business opportunities," he said. Responding to a question on the recent American allegations that an Indian official was involved in a plot to assassinate a separatist Sikh leader, a US national, in the United States, Singh said in the long term this is unlikely to have an impact on the bilateral ties. US federal prosecutors last month charged

Indian national Nikhil Gupta with working with an Indian government employee in the foiled plot to kill Gurpatwant Singh Pannun, a Sikh extremist who is an American and Canadian citizen. An unnamed Indian official also appeared in an indictment along with the Indian national, who the Department of Justice alleges hired someone in the US to assassinate Pannun. "Everybody knows what has been going on in the past few weeks, with the Department of Justice filing a charge sheet against Nikhil Gupta and accusing the government of India. But this should not be seen as a support for a separatist Khalistani movement in the US," Singh said. "This was an action taken by the US government to protect their own citizens. The separatist happens to be a US citizen, so they came in defence of a US citizen for extrajudicial killings," he said.

## ICMR to test SARI samples with focus on children

**PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI**  
Amid reports of a surge in respiratory illnesses in China, the Virus Research and Diagnostic Laboratories (VRDL) network under the Indian Council of Medical Research (ICMR) has been asked to test all samples of severe acute respiratory infection (SARI), with a particular focus on samples from children, the Government told Parliament on Friday. Further, a list of priority viral and bacterial agents (including mycoplasma pneumoniae), for which the samples need to be tested, has been shared with the VRDL network, Minister of State for Health S P Singh Baghel said in a written reply to a question in the Lok Sabha. "While WHO, in the context of



surge in respiratory illness in China, has not recommended any trade/travel restrictions, the health ministry continues to maintain a close watch over the evolving situation in China, as well as globally," Baghel said. He said the World Health Organisation (WHO), in statements issued on November 22 and 23, reported an increase in the incidence of Influenza-like Illness (ILI) in northern China that has been witnessed since October. It has been attributed to a rise in the circulation of known pathogens (including influenza, mycoplasma pneumoniae, respiratory syncytial virus (RSV) and SARS-CoV-2) by Chinese authorities, the minister added.

The WHO has also reported clusters of undiagnosed pneumonia among children in northern China. According to the global body, Chinese authorities have not reported detecting any unusual or novel pathogens or unusual clinical presentations, but a general increase in respiratory illnesses due to multiple known pathogens, Baghel said. The health ministry, in an advisory issued on November 25, requested all states and Union territories to review their public health and hospital preparedness and response capacities, including a review of the requisite human resource, hospital beds, testing capacities, availability of medical countermeasures and adequate provisioning of infection-control practices at health facilities.

## No stay on Mathura mosque survey...

**From Page 1**  
The bench told senior advocate Huzefa Ahmadi, appearing for the mosque committee, who said the high court has been considering interlocutory applications having "far reaching ramifications" in the matter and passing orders, that the order of the high court passed on Thursday has not been formally challenged before it. Ahmadi said the high court is entertaining application after application even as the issue of its jurisdiction to transfer to itself all matters related to the dispute is under challenge before the apex court. Justice Khanna, while refusing to interfere with the high court order passed on Thursday said, "How can we stay the order which is not

before us? You challenge the order, then we will see." Ahmadi said the high court order was uploaded on its website late Thursday evening and hence they could not file an appeal. When Ahmadi pointed out the Supreme Court is going on a winter break from Monday and the high court may pass orders in the matter, Justice Khanna said, "Please tell the high court that this matter is listed on January 9 in the Supreme Court. That will be enough." Justice Khanna said if the petitioners still have any grievances related to the dispute, they can mention them for urgent listing even during the winter break after following the due process. "You know the procedure for mentioning the matter during vacations if any adverse order is passed," Justice Khanna told Ahmadi. The Supreme Court will be on winter break from December 18 to January 1, 2024. On November 10, the top court had refused to stay the proceedings before the high court on suits related to the Sri Krishna Janmabhoomi-Shahi Idgah dispute, saying it will not be appropriate for it to interfere with the high court order without hearing both sides. In Mathura, Bal Krishna through Hindu Sena chief Vishnu Gupta and others had filed a suit in the court of Civil Judge Senior Division (III) for shifting of the Shahi Masjid Idgah, which they claim was constructed on a part of the 13.37 acre land of the Sri Krishna Janmabhoomi Trust.

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## Delhi chill outshines...

**From Page 1**  
On December 23, 24, and 25, heavy snowfall is expected to impact temperatures in Punjab, Haryana, Delhi, Rajasthan, Madhya Pradesh, and Gujarat, bringing drizzle and light rainfall. Thick fog

will likely cover these states, keeping temperatures low during the day. Western disturbances are cyclonic storms that bring winter rains to northern India. Among the locations in the plains of northwest India, the national capital was the

## Police dig for accused political...

**From Page 1**  
Lalit, who had been on the run after the incident on Wednesday, surrendered before a police station in the New Delhi district on Thursday night. Police said Jha's custodial interrogation was required for 'in-depth investigation to unearth the larger conspiracy behind the attack, involvement of other persons, and to find the actual motive behind the attack. Jha disclosed that they wanted to create anarchy in the country to compel the government to meet their demands. He took the phones of other accused to hide them and destroy evidence as part of the larger conspiracy. He disclosed that he threw his phone away on the way from Jaipur to Delhi," police informed the court. Public Prosecutor Akhand Pratap Singh, representing the Delhi Police, submitted that Lalit had disclosed his involvement. He also mentioned that the accused persons in the case belong to different places and,

therefore, need to be taken to various locations. Singh further stated that the mobile phones, allegedly destroyed by the accused, have to be recovered. Special Judge Hardeep Kaur remanded Jha in Delhi Police custody based on an application moved by the prosecution, asserting that he was required for questioning to unearth the entire conspiracy. During the brief hearing, the prosecutor informed the court that Lalit was arrested on Thursday night and underwent a detailed interrogation. "He disclosed how he is the mastermind of the entire conspiracy... He is required to unearth the entire conspiracy and the modus operandi," the public prosecutor told the court while seeking his remand for 15 days. Police also mentioned that he needs to be questioned about a phone he was using, which has not been traced yet. Lalit, accompanied by a man, turned himself in at the Kartavya Path police station in the national capital last

evening, where he was arrested before being handed over to the Special Cell, the specialized counter-terror unit of the city police. Based on the investigation so far, the police stated that the December 13 security breach is a well-planned attack, even though the accused are all from different states. On Thursday night, senior police officials, including two Deputy Commissioners of Police (DCP) and Additional Commissioners of Police, interrogated Lalit Jha, during which he narrated the whole incident to officials. Delhi Police's Special Cell has also detained two more people, including one from Rajasthan. The two have been identified as Mahesh and Kailash, and their detention comes after the arrest of Jha, the fifth accused described as the mastermind behind the plan. In its first information report (FIR) in the Parliament security breach case, Delhi Police mentioned that the two persons who opened smoke canisters in the Lok Sabha

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# Police file FIR in Parliament security breach case

STAFF REPORTER ■ NEW DELHI

The Delhi Police in its first information report (FIR) in the Parliament security breach case has mentioned that the two persons who opened smoke canisters in the Lok Sabha chamber had smuggled them in cavities cut into the left sole of custom-made sports shoes supported by thick rubber layers. The pamphlets that the duo, Manoranjan D and Sagar Sharma, carried into the Lok Sabha had the picture of a fist against the backdrop of a tricolour, a slogan in Hindi and a slogan in English on the Manipur violence issue. According to the FIR, the smoke canisters, which were opened inside and outside Parliament, had warnings and instructions to "wear goggles and gloves" while opening. A cavity was cut into the left sole of the LCR-made grey coloured sports shoes of Sagar Sharma. The thickness of the soles was increased by affixing additional rubber to support the cavity, it stated, adding that Manoranjan D's sports shoes too had a similar cavity in the left sole. Police said the right sole of the shoe was also found partly cut. The used creative color smoke were stated to be burst by Sagar Sharma and



Manoranjan D inside the Lok Sabha well. The FIR stated the pair of sport shoe of Sagar Sharma of LCR make grey colour where in, a cavity was found created by cutting the inside sole of left foot shoe. "The thickness of the sole of shoes is also found increased by affixing additional rubber sole at the bottom to support the cavity. The pair of sport shoe along with a pair of light khakhi colour socks, was kept in a transparent plastic box sealed with the seal of SC. The pair of sport shoe of Manoranjan D of SRY make dark greyish colour where in, a cavity is found created by cutting the inside sole of left foot shoes," it said. The FIR further mentions the inside sole of the right foot shoe was also found partly cut. The

thickness of the sole of shoes was also found increased by affixing additional rubber sole at the bottom to support the cavity. The pair of shoes along with blue socks was kept in another transparent plastic box and was sealed with the seal of SC. Both the boxes were taken into possession as a piece of evidence through a separate seizure memo. The two used wet canisters of creative color smoke type colorsmoke 003 yellow color which were burst by the alleged Sagar Sharma and Manoranjan D inside the Lok Sabha well area were also kept in a plastic box which was sealed with the seal of SC and taken into possession as a piece of evidence through a seizure memo. "I along with inspector Vinay Kumar, officiating SHO PS

Parliament Street, and other staff reached the office of the director of security of the new Parliament House Building where Omkar Singh, Deputy Director(S) Lok Sabha was present. "He handed over the complaint along with aforesaid mentioned persons namely Sagar Sharma and Manoranjan D. He also handed over shoes of both the alleged and their Aadhar cards," the FIR stated. According to FIR, The used canisters were given serial no 1,2,3 & 4 and the unused was given serial number 5. All these canisters are bearing warnings always wears goggles and gloves, never used indoor or enclosed spaces, 18+ uses and sale do not post or take on airplanes" Another instruction was found as "FOR USED IN SUPERVISE ARENAS ONLY" made in China. In a major security breach on the anniversary of the 2001 Parliament terror attack, Sagar and Manoranjan jumped into the Lok Sabha chamber from the public gallery during Zero Hour on Wednesday, released yellow gas from canisters and shouted slogans before being overpowered by the MPs. Around the same time, two others -- Amol Shinde and Neelam Devi -- sprayed coloured gas from canisters

while shouting "tanashahi nahi chalegi" outside Parliament premises. Police have filed terrorism charges under the stringent UAPA against the four people. Police said the other two accused -- Amol Shinde and Neelam -- were nabbed with four used and an unused coloured smoke canister. All these canisters bore a reminder to the users to wear goggles and gloves and never use those in indoor or enclosed spaces, they said. Earlier in the day, Delhi Police's Special Cell has detained two more people, including one from Rajasthan, on Thursday night. The two have been identified as Mahesh and Kailash and their detention comes after the authorities nabbed Lalit Mohan Jha, the fifth accused who is being described as the mastermind behind the plan. They had allegedly helped Lalit Mohan Jha -- thought to be the brain behind the security breach plan -- go into hiding after the incident, a source said. Jha, who had been on the run after the incident on Wednesday, walked to a police station in the New Delhi district on Thursday night and is now being interrogated by a counter-intelligence team, a source said.

## Violent anarchy cannot hijack vibrant democracy, says Naqvi

STAFF REPORTER ■ NEW DELHI

In an apparent reference to the Lok Sabha security breach incident, former Union minister and senior BJP leader Mukhtar Abbas Naqvi on Friday said "violent anarchy" cannot hijack "vibrant democracy". He also said the robustness of constitutional rights and the mantra of fundamental duties have transformed Bharat into an unbeatable democracy. Naqvi made these assertions while addressing a programme organised by Institute of Constitutional and Parliamentary Studies at Law Faculty, North Campus, Delhi University. In a major security breach, two persons on Wednesday jumped into the Lok Sabha chamber from the visitors' gallery, shouted slogans and released yellow smoke from canisters that triggered panic and chaos in the House. The "debacle of dynasty" and "dominance of constitutional sovereignty" has made India a



"powerhouse of democracy" which is enlightening the whole world with its democratic values, Naqvi said. The strength of the Constitution and the commitment of any individual can elevate any ordinary citizen of India to the highest office, he said. "It is a testament to our constitutional and democratic values that Narendra Modi, who belongs to a poor and backward family, has been elected twice as the prime minister of the world's largest democracy and his efficiency in the discharge of duties has made him a global brand of good governance," the BJP leader said. Modi has become a "global hero" through his commit-

ment to "reform, perform and transform", Naqvi said. The "weightage to family background" has been replaced by the "balance sheet of hard work, honesty and performance" as a criteria of success, he said. Naqvi further said technology and connectivity revolution has made the world smaller and the competition bigger. Most democratic countries of the world are assessing their constitutional rights, duties and parliamentary activities by keeping in mind India's democratic, economic, constitutional and political activities, he said. Noting that India has the highest number of elections in the world, he said every two months some part of the country remains in election mode. Despite this, the increasing passion and enthusiasm of people towards the festival of democracy in every election makes India's democracy dynamic and vibrant, Naqvi added.

# Local area development fund for each Delhi MLA raised to ₹7 crore



STAFF REPORTER ■ NEW DELHI

The MLA Local Area Development (MLALAD) fund for each Delhi legislator has been raised from Rs 4 crore to Rs 7 crore. Delhi Urban Development Minister Saurabh Bharadwaj informed this in the House during the winter session of the Delhi Assembly on Friday. Giving reply to a question on MLALAD funds asked by a member of the House, Bharadwaj said that an amount of Rs 110 crore has been provisioned in the revised estimates of budget 2023-24. The remaining 100 crore will be allocated in the budget for the next financial year, he said. The minister further said that each MLA of the Delhi Assembly was provided Rs 10 crore under the MLALAD funds during 2018-19 and 2019-20. Due to COVID, no fund was allocated to any MLA during 2020-21. After COVID, each MLA was provided Rs 4 crore as MLAL-

AD fund in 2021-22, 2022-23 and 2023-24. Recently, the government enhanced it to Rs 7 crore from the existing Rs 4 crore, he stated. The MLALAD fund was provided to the Delhi MLAs from 2017-18 to undertake development works in their constituencies. An amount of Rs 4 crore was provided to the MLAs in 2017-18 which was later raised to Rs 10 crore in 2018-19 as per decision by the Delhi government. The unspent amount of MLALAD fund of an MLA does not lapse and is added to the allocation for the next financial year, the minister replied. As per Delhi government data, Rs 280 crore were allocated under the MLALAD fund, in the 2021-22 financial year out of which Rs 223 crore were spent. In 2022-23, Rs 300 crore was allocated out of which Rs 222 crore were spent. In 2013-24, out of Rs 300 crore, Rs 103 crore was spent and Rs 197 crore were in balance.

## AAP MLAs raise slogans against BJP over regularisation of MCD workers

STAFF REPORTER ■ NEW DELHI

The Delhi Assembly was adjourned on Friday after AAP MLAs trooped down to the well of the House raising slogans against the BJP for allegedly obstructing the regularisation of Municipal Corporation of Delhi (MCD) workers. After the House resumed post lunch, there was a short-duration discussion under rule 55 of the Delhi Assembly on the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) allegedly obstructing the regularisation of the workers of the Municipal Corporation of Delhi (MCD). Earlier, BJP MLAs were marshalled out of the Delhi Assembly on Friday, after they alleged that 203 homeless people have died in the city during the winter season so far and demanded that Chief Minister Arvind Kejriwal speak on the issue in the House. Later, BJP MLAs protested at the premises of the Assembly, raising slogans against the Kejriwal. Speaking in the House, Aam Aadmi Party (AAP) MLA and MCD in-charge Durgesh Pathak said, "What the BJP could not do when it was in power in the MCD for 15 years was accomplished by Chief Minister Arvind Kejriwal in just six months." Pathak highlighted the achieve-



ments of the AAP-led MCD, including regularisation of the civic body's workers and disbursement of salaries on the first day of the month. "The MCD workers used to earlier protest at the Civic Centre, Jantar Mantar, Mayor House. They did not get their salaries for eight months. It was in August, within six months of the AAP coming to power, that the workers got their salaries on time. This happened after 13 years," he said while alleging that the BJP is opposed to MCD workers' regularisation and has even approached the court over the issue. Earlier, responding to a query by an MLA about the number of trees planted and the decrease in pollution levels in the last five years, Delhi Environment Minister Gopal Rai said the national capital has the largest green belt at 23.6 per cent among big metro cities,

and asserted that pollution levels in the city have reduced since 2014 through sustained efforts. On the issue of pollution, Rai shared the data on PM10 and PM2.5 levels, saying on average there has been a 31 per cent reduction in pollution levels since the formation of the AAP government. Consequent to recent Parliament breach, the Delhi Assembly was placed under a heavy layer of security on Friday with curbs on movement and a thorough checking of vehicles and passes. The passes were issued after proper authorisation and verification through the Directorate of Information and Publicity. "Adequate number of Delhi Police and para military personnel were deployed. They were monitoring movement of people and vehicles outside the Vidhan Sabha.

## BJP urges Kejriwal to speak in House on issue of death of 203 homeless people

STAFF REPORTER ■ NEW DELHI

The BJP and the AAP Government indulged in a war of words on Friday after the saffron party alleged that 203 homeless people have died in the city this winter so far and demanded that Chief Minister Arvind Kejriwal speak on the issue in the House. The issue resonated inside the Delhi Assembly and even outside it. The BJP cited a report from Delhi Police, which said during the past month, 203 homeless people have died on the streets of the national capital. Hitting back, Delhi Urban Development minister Saurabh Bharadwaj said the photos (of the deceased) are from November when winter was yet to begin here. "Also, these photos clearly show marks of serious injuries, which proves that they were either killed in accidents or were murdered," Bharadwaj said after the House proceedings were adjourned for the day. After the Delhi Assembly resumed post-lunch, a short-duration discussion under Rule 55 commenced during which it was alleged that the BJP was obstructing the regularisation of the sanitation workers of the Municipal Corporation of Delhi (MCD). Leader of Opposition in the Assembly Ramvir Singh

Bidhuri gave a notice for a calling-attention motion on the alleged death of 203 homeless people in Delhi during the ongoing winter season. "We demand that Chief Minister Arvind Kejriwal provide answers on the issue in the House," Bidhuri said. Speaker Ram Nivas Goel rejected the calling-attention motion given by Bidhuri and said he would look into the Delhi Police report and then take a decision. He directed that the BJP MLAs be marshalled out after they refused to back down in their demand. Bidhuri also alleged that 12 notices were given by BJP MLAs on issues faced by the people of Delhi but not one was accepted for discussion. Later in a statement, Bidhuri said the police report covers the data from November 13 to December 13. "The Delhi government is unwilling to discuss any issue concerning the public, and it is not holding itself accountable for the deaths of 203 people in Delhi," he said. Bidhuri demanded that the Delhi chief minister be summoned to the assembly to give a statement on this matter. Addressing a press conference, Delhi BJP president Virendra Sachdeva, said due to the "callous" attitude and "neglect" of the Delhi government and its DUSIB depart-

ment, hundreds of homeless people die every year in Delhi due to cold. "Every year, despite repeated rebuke from the court and reports in the newspapers, the Delhi government is not providing adequate funds for food to the night shelters here," Sachdeva said. Sachdeva said the Delhi government's Winter Action Plan requires the authorities to provide the homeless with a safe place so that they do not get sick in the cold. However, due to the negligence of the Kejriwal government, it is already December 15 and 90 per cent of the permanent and temporary night shelters here are in bad condition. Responding to the allegations, Bharadwaj accused the BJP of misleading the country by speaking lies. "Whoever lives in Delhi, knows that our sweaters have come out just a week ago. I have been saying for the past year that the BJP, through organizations like DDA, Railways, and ASI, renders thousands homeless in Delhi. Recently the Central government's Archaeological Survey of India (ASI) near Tughlaqabad Fort displaced thousands of poor people without considering what would happen to them in the harsh winter," he told reporters.

# Students against JNU new manual on holding protest inside campus

STAFF REPORTER ■ NEW DELHI

Cutting across party lines, the JNU students' outfits on Friday registered their protest against the varsity's revised manual prohibiting and penalising protests on campus within 100 metres of the academic buildings, among other restrictions, and demanded its withdrawal. The ABVP's Jawaharlal Nehru University (JNU) unit burnt an effigy of the varsity administration while protesting against the manual calling it "dictatorial" and "anti-student". "The JNU is an open and liberal university, where the students have the right to freely express their opinions. However, the administration is attempting to strip away this right," said Akhil Bharatiya Vidyarthi Parishad (ABVP) Unit Secretary Vikas Patel. "The ABVP calls on the administration to retract the Code of Conduct and collaborate with the students to create a new one that respects the democratic values and safeguards the students' rights," he added. Earlier in the day, several stu-



dents' outfits of the JNU submitted a memorandum to Vice Chancellor Santishree Pandit to cease all ongoing inquiries against the students related to protests alleging that they have been served notices despite her assurance to revoke the issue. The JNUSU, supported by 11 members of the different students' outfits and hostel presidents, in the letter to the vice chancellor demanded that all disciplinary actions against the students ordered by the Chief Proctor Office (CPO) should be rescinded and the new varsity manual be withdrawn. The students' outfits have also demanded an announcement

to start the Jawaharlal Nehru University Students' Union (JNUSU) elections. "We, the students of Jawaharlal Nehru University, are writing to you to register our strong protest and indignation at the series of vindictive actions initiated by the JNU administration against various elected representatives and activists," the letter read. The letter added that the revised CPO manual, which penalises 280 types of misconduct at the JNU, "militates" the students' democratic right to protest for their rights. Responding to the students' allegations, the V-C said the inquiries are underway for the

students who were involved in rule violation as per the High Court's orders, while fines imposed on several other students during the 2019 fee hike protests were waived by her. "The show cause notices have been issued to those students, who were found involved in rule violation as per the High Court order. We can't do contempt of the court by not abiding to the rules. I have waived the fines imposed on many students for protesting over fee hike in 2019. But if they continue to break the rules then necessary action as per the rules and regulations will be taken," she said. The vice-chancellor's office also clarified that the new rules in the varsity manual released in November after the executive council's approval will not apply to old cases of rule violation by the students. "Any act of rule break after the revised manual came into force will be penalised as per the regulations outlined in the manual. The old and ongoing cases will not be examined based on the new rules," a senior official clarified.

## LG refuses Atishi proposal to review his decision on Bannoli land acquisition

STAFF REPORTER ■ NEW DELHI

Delhi Lieutenant Governor (LG) Vinai Kumar Saxena has turned down Vigilance Minister Atishi's proposal for reviewing his earlier stand with regards to charges made by her in a 'Preliminary Report' (on 14.11.2023), against Chief Secretary Naresh Kumar and Divisional Commissioner Ashwani Kumar in Bannoli land acquisition matter. Giving details here on Friday, officials said Saxena noted that the resubmitted file was nothing but re-spinning of theories by the Minister and there were no new facts presented to buttress her illogical arguments. It appears that the entire exercise/intention for re-submission of the file was only an attempt to mislead the general public and the Courts from the core issue for reasons best known to the Minister, the LG said. The LG, disposing the earlier file on 19.11.2023, containing the preliminary report submitted by Atishi and forwarded to him by Chief Minister Arvind

Kejriwal had in a reasoned order held that the report submitted by her was half baked, incorrect, based on preconceived assumptions and presumptions, malafide and, therefore, held the role of the Chief Secretary and the Divisional Commissioner above board in the aforesaid matter. He had accordingly turned down the proposal to remove them from their posts and order any further inquiry, saying that an inquiry was already underway by the CBI and any such step as suggested by the Minister and the Chief Minister would hamper the ongoing investigation instead of facilitating it. Subsequently on 22.11.2023, Atishi had resent the proposal to "review his position on the preliminary report". The LG, considering the fact that the matter of allegations made by the AAP Government and its Ministers were under consideration by the Delhi High Court in a plea of defamation made by the Chief Secretary, waited for the verdict and thereafter disposed the file on 13.12.2023.

## Patel Chest to be converted into multi speciality hospital

STAFF REPORTER ■ NEW DELHI

The Delhi University Executive Council on Friday decided to convert the north campus landmark Patel Chest Hospital into a multi-speciality hospital on a 12.76 acre land in Dhaka village near Kingsway Camp in north Delhi area. The 1268th meeting of the Executive Council (EC), under the chairmanship of DU Vice-Chancellor Prof. Yogesh Singh approved allotment of 12.76 acres of land for a multi-speciality hospital. Prof. Yogesh said that there is a strong need to expand and upgrade VPCI so that treatment for serious diseases, including pulmonary diseases, can be provided under one roof. He said that the expansion and upgradation of VPCI will go a long way in providing quality diagnostic and research facilities for pulmonary diseases. The Vice Chancellor said that the matter has been discussed in great detail and several meetings were also held in this regard to obtain the views of the faculty members of VPCI and suggestions of external experts. Along with this, allotment of

land for the construction of University College of Medical Sciences building and hospital was also considered. The members were informed that the need for construction of the college building and hospital has been felt in view of the fact that despite more than five decades of existence, it has still not been able to get its land and building. Not only this, the limited space in the GTB Hospital campus is hindering the ambitious expansion of the college, thereby hindering it from taking the college to the next level of excellence. A request has been received from the college to allot 40-50 acres of land for construction of college and hospital building with facilities and infrastructure. Another significant aspect noted was the Delhi Government's letter to the Central Government regarding 12 colleges funded by the Delhi Government. The formation of an EC Committee on this issue was suggested by the Vice Chancellor which was passed unanimously. The Vice Chancellor said that this is a very important issue and hence the matter needs to be looked at seriously.







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PAPER WITH PASSION

## Handle with care

A touchy legal journey looms ahead with Allahabad HC allowing a survey to settle Shahi Idgah dispute

In the Shri Krishna Janmabhoomi case, the Allahabad High Court has granted permission for the appointment of an advocate commissioner to survey the Shahi Idgah in Mathura. It is in response to the petitioners' assertion that the mosque, in close vicinity of Krishna Janmabhoomi, contains artefacts indicating its past as a Hindu temple. The High Court's decision to allow the Gyanvapi-style survey of Shahi Idgah arises from a protracted dispute between the Hindu and Muslim communities regarding the ownership and origin of the site and has the potential to reignite passions. The objective of the court is to arrive at an informed and impartial decision based on historical records and archaeological findings. The Shahi Idgah, located near the Krishna Janmabhoomi has been a focal point of dispute for decades. Both Hindu and Muslim communities have presented historical evidence supporting their respective claims, and the survey aims to unravel the historical background of Shahi Idgah. While legal proceedings are crucial for amicably resolving disputes, the politicisation of religious issues carries severe consequences for communal harmony.

The larger issue at the moment is not who is right and will win the case but its implications on the social fabric of our nation. Given the fact that general elections are round the corner and the Ram temple is likely to be inaugurated in January, the chances of overwhelming religious sentiment polarising the electorate are rather high. The court may have the duty and right to dispense legal recourse but we all know that it does pose a risk of inflaming communal tension and chaos. It was indeed a decision of the same court that resulted

in the opening of the Ram temple in Ayodhya. The Gyanvapi mosque in Varanasi is still a bone of contention; Mathura only adds to the charged sentiment. The dangers associated with communal politics are many. It heightens religious sensitivities, creating an environment where communities feel threatened or marginalised. This heightened tension can lead to protests, violence and an overall disruption of the social fabric. Communal politics fosters polarisation and division among communities. This division undermines the rich cultural and social diversity that has been a defining feature of India's pluralistic society. Then there is a high chance of political interference in legal matters which can complicate the resolution process. It may influence public opinion and put undue pressure on the judiciary, potentially compromising the impartiality of legal decisions. We are already going through challenging times where society is getting polarised. It is crucial for all stakeholders, including political leaders, to approach this issue with sensitivity and responsibility. Prioritising dialogue, understanding and respect for diversity is essential to ensure lasting communal harmony. In the pursuit of justice, it is imperative to avoid actions that may inadvertently exacerbate religious tensions and sow the seeds of discord among citizens of our great nation.

### PICTALK



Devotees gather on the flag hoisting ceremony of the Beemappally Dargah, on Uroos festival, in Thiruvananthapuram. PTI

# Bangladesh elections: Game BNP is playing



HIRANMAY KARLEKAR

BNP insist on a caretaker government conducting the elections expecting that it would not be able to squash violence before and during the polling

Elections to Bangladesh's Jatiya Sangsad (National Parliament), scheduled to be held on January 7, have attracted global attention. The Bangladesh Nationalist Party (BNP), the principal political opponent of the ruling Awami League led by Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina, has announced that it will boycott the elections because these are not being held under an independent caretaker government. In a despatch, Reuter's Ruma Paul has quoted the BNP's Senior Joint Secretary-General, Ruhul Kabir Rizvi, as saying, "We reject with utter disgust the schedule announced by the spineless Election Commission to take away democracy and the voting rights of the people through another farce (sic) election like in the past at the behest of Sheikh Hasina." According to the BNP, its boycott will deprive the elections of legitimacy. The fact is that the decision not to contest has been the BNP's: the Awami League government did not prevent it from participating. These elections will, therefore, lack legitimacy only if the grounds for the BNP's boycott are justified. Hence, a further question: are there genuine reasons for believing that the elections will not be free and fair unless conducted by a caretaker government?

Consider the results of the last three general elections. The parliamentary elections of 2014 and 2019 were held under Awami League governments. The BNP contested in the former but not in the latter. In 2014, the Awami League and its allies won 245 out of the 300 directly elected seats in the parliament, with the Awami League winning 234. In 2019, the Awami League-led alliance won 288 of the 300 seats, with the Awami League winning 259. The BNP and its allies have alleged that both elections were rigged, with many arguing that Sheikh Hasina's party and its allies could not otherwise have won such massive majorities. The argument falls flat if one considers the results of the 2008 parliamentary elections held under a caretaker government. The Awami League and its allies had



won 263 out of the 300 seats at stake, with the Awami League victorious in 230. One may argue that things have changed since then and that the Awami League government, which has lost popularity, has unleashed a wave of repression, arresting a huge number of BNP workers, and even some top leaders, to cripple the party's campaign machinery. These arrests, however, have to be seen in their context. For over two decades, Bangladesh has been in the throes of large-scale violence unleashed by the BNP and its fundamentalist Islamist allies--including first the Jamaat-e-Islami Bangladesh, and then its reincarnation, the Bangladesh Jamaat-e-Islami. Simultaneously, there was a surge in fundamentalist Islamist terrorist strikes. The Harkat-ul-Jihad-al-Islami-Bangladesh (HUJIB), Jamaat-ul-Mujahideen Bangladesh (JMB) and Jagrata Muslim Janata Bangladesh (JMJB), terrorist organisations all, had grown very strong when the BNP-Jamaat coalition government was in power from 2001 to 2006. Their suppression following intense international pressure, has been followed by the rise of two other terrorist organisations-- Ansar-al-Islam, earlier known as Ansarullah Bangla Team, affiliated to Al Qaeda in the Indian



IN THE ABSENCE OF STRONG ACTION, THOSE RESPONSIBLE FOR THE VIOLENCE WHO REMAIN ACTIVE, CAN CREATE WIDESPREAD DISORDER ON JANUARY 7 TO INTIMIDATE PEOPLE, PARTICULARLY HINDUS, INTO NOT VOTING

Subcontinent (AQIS), and Daesh, affiliated to the parent Islamic State in Iraq and Syria (ISIS). They have played a major role in the murder of bloggers, which began with the killing of Ahmed Rajib Haider in Dhaka on February 15, 2013. Other killings followed. Those murdered included not only bloggers but LGBT activists, Shias, Hindus and academics -- indeed, all opposed to religious bigotry and supportive of humanism, secularism and rationalism. The fundamentalist Islamist terrorist groups are bitterly opposed to Sheikh Hasina and the Awami League for acting resolutely against terrorism, particularly after the dastardly attack on the Holey Artisan Bakery in Dhaka on July 1, 2016, in which 20 persons, including 18 foreigners and women, were savagely killed along with five terrorists killed by Bangladeshi Army commandos. There is reason to believe that these elements have been active in the violence the BNP has unleashed, demanding that the forthcoming elections be held under a caretaker government. In the absence of strong action, those responsible for the violence who remain active can create widespread disorder on January 7 to intimidate people, particularly Hindus, into not voting. The resultant poor

percentage of voting can then be cited to claim that people have boycotted the elections, which, therefore, have been farcical. The success of their efforts would depend on how strongly Bangladesh's Election Commission, which will conduct the elections, deals with their violence. Firm action would doubtless trigger loud allegations of democracy being slaughtered. These have to be ignored if elections are to be free and fair. Finally, did the BNP insist on a caretaker government conducting the elections expecting that the latter would not be able to squash violence before and during the polling? It might have thought that the caretaker government, under pressure to show that it was independent and not favouring the Awami League, would hesitate to take strong action. It might also have believed that the United States' announcement that it will impose visa restrictions on Bangladeshis responsible for, or complicit in, undermining the democratic election process in Bangladesh, may inhibit it from acting with the necessary firmness. All this is doubtless speculation. But speculations sometimes lead to facts. (The writer is a consultant editor with the Pioneer, views are personal)

### LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

#### PEN IS MIGHTIER THAN SWORD

Sir — Using pen and paper for note-taking helps boost memory and the ability to understand, more so than laptops and PCs. Pens don't win battles. And swords don't write poems. Mightily is the hand that knows when to pick the pen and when to pick the sword. A writer is perfecting the art of putting the right words in his style of writing and thereby making out an excellent article. The reader will have to create a taste of word power, as the last word of Shashi Tharoor shapes and provides a platform for youngsters to use the best vocabulary and learn the art of putting out the best in a planned and prescribed way as we all consider that the pen is mightier than a sword. Writing is intimidating to many people, particularly those who don't write for a living or regularly. The good news is that writing doesn't have to be agonizing, and almost anybody can improve their writing skills with a little discipline and a willingness to learn. Jayanthy Ramani | Mumbai

#### SECURITY LAPSE IN PARLIAMENT

Sir — The unprecedented security breach in the Parliament has left the entire nation in a state of shock and disbelief. Can entering a highly protected building be that simple? The infraction cannot be seen as a singular event, but a stark reminder of the vulnerabilities that exist even in the most guarded locations of the country. It is all the more disturbing that the incident took place on a day marked by solemn tributes to the victims of the 2001 Parliament attack, adding a layer of grim irony to the sacred institution. The fact that one of the intruders almost reached the Speaker's Chair underscores the severity of the breach. The Parliament security breach is a wake-up call to the nation, and it highlights the need for constant vigil, robust security frameworks, and swift action to prevent any compromises to the nation's security. As investigations continue, it is crucial to learn

#### COP28 ends on a positive note



COP28, which was going on in Dubai since November 30, ended on December 12. Given the impending crisis of global warming, it has become necessary for the world to limit the temperature rise to the target of 1.5 degrees. The like-minded developing countries (LMDCs) and least developed countries (LDCs) at the conference would be happier with the attitude of the OPEC countries. Even if a draft is made, it will not be clear, universally accepted

and will not achieve the goal. Rich countries need to understand some basic things. It is true that according to the IEA, methane contributes 30% to the greenhouse gas problem. Farming is responsible for 25% of its emissions. But it would be wrong to give it priority among all the causes of global warming because the economy of poor countries depends on weak agriculture. Carbon dioxide indeed remains in the environment for centuries after emission, while methane only 12 years. But methane affects the ozone layer a lot and it has immense power to absorb energy, hence the danger from it is greater. Rice farming, food and biomass, as well as livestock release a lot of methane into the air. But India or many such countries can neither give up dependence on rice cultivation nor change the method of farming. In view of this problem of agricultural-based countries, industrialised countries will have to focus on reducing other reasons for increasing temperature. Ignoring this will make consensus difficult and once again the conference will appear to be intellectually ruminating on making a vague proposal. N Mateeni | Mumbai

from this incident and beef up our defences against any such future threats. Meanwhile, if the ruling BJP is serious about the incident, in a nonpartisan manner it must take proper action against the party's MP from Mysuru Pratap Simha, who is said to have issued visitor passes to the intruders. Raganathan Sivakumar | Chennai

#### RISING INFLATION

Sir — India's retail inflation, based on the Consumer Price Index, rose to a three-month high of 5.55 per cent in November from 4.87 per cent in October. To check the inflation, the government has recently taken a host of steps to boost the supply of food items like wheat, sugar onion etc. The RBI in the December monetary policy statement has anticipated an

increase in the prices of key vegetables which may push inflation higher in the near-term. To check further inflation, if the prices of petroleum products are reduced, the prices of other essential commodities will automatically fall, as this will reduce transportation costs and provide nationwide relief from inflation. Besides crude oil prices which are at a 3-month low, with prices down 4% this week, the excise duty was Rs. 9.20 on every litre of petrol and Rs. 3.46 on every litre of diesel in May 2014 while the excise duty right now is Rs. 19.90 on petrol and Rs. 15.80 on diesel which need to be slashed. SK Khosla | Chandigarh

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## Social barriers in shifting towards sustainable mobility

India must incorporate the needs of excluded communities to ensure all have access to affordable transportation

Tackling transportation-related greenhouse gas emissions is an urgent priority in India's ambition to achieve net zero. Globally, passenger road vehicles are the largest contributor to mobility emissions. In India, about 14% of the total emissions are mobility-linked, however, this may change as car ownership is expected to increase by 9-14-fold by 2050. To curtail the projected increase in emissions, it is essential that we not only adopt electrified modes of transport but also consider reduced private vehicle usage by switching to alternative modes, such as public transportation. In recent years, there has been a renewed interest in building high-quality public transportation infrastructure in the country, especially metro rail systems (Metro). Decoding social barriers



Apart from systemic barriers, such as poor infrastructure for persons with disabilities, senior citizens and caregivers, several social barriers prevent people from using the Metro. By decoding these through a behavioural science approach, i.e. understanding the heuristics (mental shortcuts individuals use to make decisions) and using behavioural nudges (subtle cues designed to influence people's behaviour), we can impact urban mobility choices. Firstly, people think that first and last-mile connectivity is a 'high effort' and an 'unpleasant experience' due to long distances, poorly lit routes, and encroached walking paths. However, it is worth noting that memories of such unpleasant experiences may be recalled more easily and are often stressed by other people's descriptions. Secondly, non-Metro users prefer personal vehicles due to factors like connectivity, security queues, waiting time, and navigation challenges. Two behavioural biases play a role here: (a) people often choose personal cars over

public transportation due to the 'illusion of control' over the route and the time taken to reach the destination, and (b) they often use hyperbolic discounting - prioritising short-term benefits like the comfort and convenience of private vehicles over long-term collective benefits like reducing emissions. Thirdly, personal vehicles are seen as status symbols, whereas the Metro is not aspirational. Enabling equitable access for excluded communities

Beyond enabling a shift from private vehicles, improving the quality and service of sustainable mobility modes, like public transportation, has wider societal benefits. According to the 2011 Census, only 16% of Indians use private vehicles as their primary mode of commute; 54% of the population uses public transit or non-motorised modes such as walking or cycling. However, investments in road infrastructure have generally been accorded primacy over investments in public transportation, walking and cycling infrastructure. This has resulted in limited provision of

public transportation infrastructure, poor access for many communities and concerns about quality, comfort and safety. New investments in public transport services, like e-buses and metro rail, must address concerns of the urban poor to improve their access to opportunities. Beyond a technological approach

Currently, Indian policy strongly promotes the advancement of public transportation in cities such as the National Urban Transportation Policy and the Metro Rail Policy, outlining the pathways for financing, building, operating and maintaining accessible public transportation services. However, social planning, especially the promotion of behavioural and normative shifts, is lacking. Social planning for transportation can improve user demand by understanding values, attitudes and beliefs that frame people's modal choices. (Ashali is Senior Urban Planner and Ronika Postaria is, Research Associate at, Ashoka University; views expressed are personal)



ASHALI BHANDARI

RONIKA POSTARIA



## FIRST COLUMN

## MINDFULNESS IS NOT MEDITATION

Mindfulness is practised to overcome ill-will, restlessness, laziness, and procrastination



BHANTE SIVALI

Mindfulness means seeing, not seeking. We live a life dominated by our passions of hatred and greed. Due to this, we cling to objects, places, people, and memories, creating a distorted perspective of the world we inhabit. Because of our distorted perception, we perceive worldly things as "I, me, mine," fostering an authoritative personality or a domineering attitude over others. This is responsible for delusional thoughts like "he or she must listen to me," making it difficult for us to accept contradictory situations. The maturity of a "let it go" behaviour is unable to develop because of this. There is a beautiful discourse that the Buddha gave to an ascetic named Bahiya Daruchariya, who was from present-day Nallasopara. He sought guidance from Buddha to attain enlightenment. However, since Buddha was on alms rounds, he promised to share his teachings upon his return. Daruchariya, feeling a sense of urgency, expressed that life is uncertain, and the timing of death is unpredictable. He fervently requested the Buddha to provide guidance. Even a brief teaching, he insisted, would be something he could meditate upon. Hence, the Buddha advised Daruchariya to train himself to see things as he is seeing them, hear as he is hearing and think as he is thinking. To perceive things without adding defilements and to understand them as they truly are. However, as we all can observe, seeing often involves experiencing pleasure or displeasure and craving for it, thus burdening oneself. To truly see is to see without attachment, avoiding the creation of any greed or hatred towards any object, place, person, or memory. Even if a sensation arises, you should be aware of the associated greed or hatred and the object toward which it is directed so that you can remove that thought or abandon that subject.



However, if you are not watching your thoughts with their rooted emotions, i.e., greed or hatred or delusion, then it is "Michha Sati," i.e., wrong mindfulness. Nowadays, this misunderstanding is widespread. Most people understand mindfulness as watching their anxiety and stress, considering it a stress reduction therapy, especially in Western society. However, it is a misinterpretation.

While you may experience benefits for a particular time, the anxiety and stress will resurface because the root cause remains. Anyone who is not using mindfulness to remove rooted emotions such as greed and hate are practising wrong mindfulness. A practitioner of meditation once asked Bhikkhu Ananda, one of Buddha's closest disciples, whether the Buddha considered every type of technique helpful for meditation. Bhikkhu Ananda replied, "No, the Buddha does not consider every meditation technique but only those techniques or practices that help eradicate greed, hatred, and delusion." These emotions are the root cause of conflicts, distress, anxiety, and suffering according to the Buddha's teaching.

The observations of the famous psychoanalytic therapist Mark Epstein conclude that "people practicing mindfulness are not benefiting as they should because they misunderstand it." The second most misunderstood concept of mindfulness is that people consider it a meditation, but it is not. It is just a base for developing concentration and meditation, i.e., Jhana States. Mindfulness is practised to overcome ill-will, restlessness, laziness, and procrastination, aiding in more effective meditation.

(The writer is a Buddhist monk; views are personal)

## The battle that forged British dominion in India

The Battle of Plassey in 1757 resulted in the establishment of British colonial dominance in the Indian subcontinent, writes SAUNAK MOOKERJEE



The year 1757 is significant in the history of Bengal because of the emergence of British rule in this region and the beginning of the anticipated decline of the Mughal Empire in the East. Although a lot has been written about Nawab of Murshidabad Siraj ud Daula's defeat by the British representative Robert Clive of the British East India Company by Western historians such as Vincent Smith, very little is known about the historical accounts by Bengali regional historians, who detail the positive attributes, intelligence and skills of a regional king called Raja Krishnachandra of Nadia, a district in the state of West Bengal with a highly influential cultural history. It is located about a hundred kilometres from Kolkata and over ninety kilometres from Murshidabad. Vincent Smith in his famous work *The Oxford History of India* (first published in 1919 by Oxford Clarendon Press) mentions characters such as Siraj ud Daula, Clive, Amin Chand, and Mir Jafar as principal figures while Kumudnath Mullick, a Bengali regional historian, through his work makes it clear that without having King Krishnachandra as the chief of the conspiracy assembly, chosen by Murshidabad elites, to negotiate with the English, it would have been a difficult task to defeat Nawab in the battle of Plassey. The Bengali historian Kumudnath Mullick informs: Siraj ud Daula ascended the throne in 1756 after the death of the famous Nawab of Bengal Alivardi Khan. Unlike his grandfather, Alivardi, Siraj was rude to his well-wishers, ministers or officials at prominent positions in his kingdom. As a result, they became his enemy and decided to hatch a conspiracy by taking sides with the British. Meanwhile, Siraj had given shelter to the ruler of Dhaka Rajballab. Rajballab's family was also given shelter in Murshidabad by the Nawab. Rajballab rose against the East India Company and this was appreciated by Nawab. The information of Rajballab's shelter reached British East India. The intention of spreading the information was to overthrow Siraj ud Daula and appoint Siraj's uncle Mir Jafar as the Nawab of



BOTH THE FORCES MET EACH OTHER AT PLASSEY. AMID THE HEAVY FIRING OF CANNONS, NEIGHING OF HORSES AND BRUTAL KILLING, IT SEEMED FOR A WHILE THAT MIR JAFAR DID NOT KEEP UP THE TRUST OF THE BRITISH

Murshidabad. It is said that the conspiracy was hatched at Jagat Seth's house. The plan to replace Siraj with Mir Jafar was supported by rich merchants and significant people of Murshidabad such as Jagat Seth, Raja Mahendra (Durlabhram), Raja Ramnarayan and Raja Krishnadas. Since the decision to overthrow Nawab resulted in debate, they took advice from Raja Krishnachandra, the ruler of Nadia. A letter was sent to King Krishnachandra. King Krishnachandra immediately called upon suggestions from the distinguished ministers in his court such as Kaliprasad Singha. The information in the letter read: "The cruelty inflicted by Nawab of Murshidabad has resulted in people leaving their house and property in fear of Nawab. Nawab does not take suggestions from anyone. As the situation at Murshidabad is worrisome we thus approach you for a solution. We hope that you will be able to offer us a solution but this will be possible if your Majesty can meet us at Murshidabad." Kaliprasad was nominated to attend the meeting. Krishnachandra decided to travel to Murshidabad only after the return of Kaliprasad. He was invited at Jagat Seth's house in Murshidabad where prominent people of the assembly gathered and Raja Krishnachandra was made the chief. Initially, some Muslim elites of the assembly offered him several suggestions but the farsighted and able ruler Krishnachandra arrived at a decision: "In my opinion, we need to unite our armies and they must be led by capable generals. We must also unite with the English as they are powerful and their support will help us to overthrow the present Nawab and thus accomplish our mission. Moreover, I maintain a cordial relationship with the English,

hence I can attempt to persuade them to accept our proposal." This information has not been mentioned in any historical account or texts but it has been known through word of mouth among the people living in Nadia that Krishnachandra, after discussions at Murshidabad, arrived at Kalighat in Kolkata to worship Goddess Kali and also met the British. This meeting was the first step towards the freedom of the people living in oppression under Siraj at Murshidabad. The meeting resulted in the establishment of trust between the English and Mir Jafar. Jafar was provided three thousand soldiers for the Battle of Plassey against Nawab. These soldiers were sent to Nadia where they were stationed for a while and later were joined by Krishnachandra's soldiers. The name of this regiment came to be known as Lal Paltan. On 22nd June 1757, the soldiers reached Murshidabad after crossing the river Bhagirathi and jungle Lakshabag near the river. The Bengali term for Plassey is 'Polashi' since the adjoining region where the battle was fought had several 'Polash' trees. Nawab reached with thirty-five thousand soldiers, fifty thousand horsemen and forty cannons. However, the number did not matter to the enemy soldiers as most of them were led by Nawab's generals, Mir Jafar and Durlabhram. On Thursday 23rd June 1757 both the forces met each other at Plassey. Amid the heavy firing of cannons, neighing of horses and brutal killing it seemed for a while that Mir Jafar did not keep up the trust of the British. They anticipated that if Jafar did not keep up the promise then they either win over Bengal or leave it having been badly defeated and crushed. However, the anticipated outcomes of the battle are much different from

what Smith provides. A gist of his account: Clive has been praised as a soldier turned statesman. His real claim to fame is neither as a statesman nor soldier but as a dynamic leader of men. He had, says Roberts, 'a certain rough-hewn, almost elemental force and tireless energy which made him a true pioneer of empire'. He had the gift of inspiring others, the ability to improvise and the strength to persevere in all the circumstances. Mir Jafar became a party to the Seths and Hindu officers and Clive took action. There followed the treaty by which Mir Jafar promised to confirm the Company's privileges, to pay a million pounds as compensation for the loss of Calcutta and half a million pounds to its European inhabitants. By private agreement, in addition, there were to be large consolations for the Chief Company officers. Clive left Calcutta on 22nd June: his army of eight hundred Europeans and two thousand two hundred Indians faced the Nawab's motley and disaffected fifty thousand. Despite previous South Indian experience Clive was doubtful of the issue and showed on the eve of the battle almost the only sign of the irresolution in his life. The battle was little more than a cannonade and was settled first by Kilpatrick's unauthorized advance and then by Siraj's headlong flight. Mir Jafar, like Stanley of Bosworth, looked on from a distance, appearing cautiously the next day to reap the expensive fruits of his circumspect treachery. On the 28th Clive installed him on the mansard at Murshidabad and four days later Siraj, captured by the new Nawab (Mir Jafar) son Miran, was executed. A new era had begun. (The author is a freelance writer, views are personal)

## E-waste management: A multidimensional, strategic perspective

Managing e-waste is a global challenge that requires collaborative efforts from governments, businesses, and individuals

The escalating volumes of e-waste globally and in India, stand as a testament to the rapid advancements in the electronics industry. However, this surge in e-waste, a byproduct of our digital age, necessitates a concerted effort towards responsible disposal and management. However, while addressing the e-waste challenge primarily seems like an environmental concern, it presents a significant economic opportunity.



RADHIKA KALIA

**Collaborative Effort** Managing e-waste poses major challenges for governments, businesses, and individuals across the globe, yet sincere and concerted efforts from key stakeholders in this realm, including governments, manufacturers, recycling companies, consumers, and non-

governmental organizations (NGOs), and a strategic approach could help resolve the issue effectively. Governments are crucial to setting regulatory frameworks, enforcing e-waste management laws, and providing incentives for sustainable practices. Consumers could make conscious efforts to raise their awareness levels, make informed purchasing decisions, practice responsible disposal of e-waste, and participate in recycling programs. NGOs and Environmental Groups could play a key role in advocacy, education, and raising awareness about the impacts of e-waste. They could also persuade corporations and governments to adopt more sustainable practices and

policies. **Technological Innovation** Technological innovation must be accepted as indispensable in the efforts to address e-waste challenges. Designing products that can be easily disassembled at the end of their useful lives would be a fundamental step, and could involve using standardized parts, reducing the use of hazardous materials, and creating products that are readily repairable and upgradable. Sourcing materials sustainably, including using recycled materials, can significantly reduce environmental impact. Innovation also extends to designing energy-efficient products, minimizing the environmental footprint of production processes and electronic gadget usage. **Sustainable manufacturing**

**strategies** E-waste often contains a mix of precious materials and hazardous chemicals and presents a challenge in manufacturing. Sustainable manufacturing strategies, such as using recyclable materials and adopting circular economy principles, could help reduce e-waste. Further, proper e-waste disposal and recycling require specialised infrastructure, including recycling plants. However, such infrastructure is not universally available. Setting up this infrastructure is a collaborative effort that involves governments and private sector players. **Economic & Industrial Policy** E-waste management, along with being an environmental concern, is also an economic and industrial policy issue.

Establishing a formal e-waste management infrastructure is vital for developing a circular economy. Initiatives like the Right to Repair framework, championed by the Ministry of Consumer Affairs (MCA) in India, offer consumers cost-effective repair options instead of purchasing new products. Supporting producers, brand owners, and importers in their EPR is another critical aspect. **Strategic Growth** The e-waste management sector is witnessing a significant increase in awareness regarding rising e-waste volumes and the need for responsible disposal. Large brand owners now have substantial e-waste collection targets. Strategic growth, however, would necessitate considering the environmental impact of products

throughout their life cycle, and strategic planning would have to include end-of-life disposal and recycling options. **Grassroots Empowerment** Engaging with local communities, especially marginalized ones, is essential to understanding their needs and concerns. Again, providing equal access to e-waste management services, regardless of socio-economic status, is crucial. This includes setting up collection points and recycling facilities in all neighbourhoods and offering health and safety education. Generating employment opportunities in the e-waste management sector for marginalised and informal communities can promote equity. **Quality Assurance** Ensuring the quality of e-

waste management processes is vital for success. Certifications, rigorous training, and building competent teams are essential components. Overcoming attrition challenges and maintaining consistency are key to achieving quality assurance. **Thought Leadership** In the realm of e-waste management, visionary outlooks are needed to address challenges and envision a sustainable future. Industry knowledge is essential, as facts and figures drive informed decisions. Coherence and integration are essential to convey a comprehensive message, and strategic insights help in overcoming hurdles. (The writer is Managing Director, RLG Systems India Pvt Ltd. Views are personal)









# MOURINHO GETS AWAY WITHOUT TOUCHLINE BAN

AP ■ ROME  
Roma coach Jose Mourinho escaped a touchline ban after cooperating with the Italian soccer federation's disciplinary prosecutor and was instead only fined 20,000 euros (USD 22,000) on Friday for labelling a referee unstable. Before a recent match with Sassuolo, Mourinho questioned the abilities of referee Matteo Marcanaro. "We had him three times as a fourth official and I don't think he has the emotional stability for games of this level," Mourinho said. During the same news conference, Mourinho attacked Sassuolo forward Domenico Berardi, saying the player "exaggerates fouls to draw yellow cards." Mourinho later said his Italian wasn't proficient enough to explain certain concepts. Roma was also ordered to pay a fine of 20,000 euros (USD 22,000), with the money from both the club and Mourinho going toward medical research. Mourinho was suspended for two matches at the start of this campaign for comments about a referee at the end of last season. He was also banned for four matches by UEFA in June for verbally abusing the Europa League final referee in a stadium garage after Roma lost to Sevilla.



## Manavjit, Moudgil to make national return

PTI ■ NEW DELHI  
Ace shooters Manavjit Singh Sandhu and Anjum Moudgil will make their national comeback during next month's Asian Olympic qualifiers in Jakarta and Kuwait City respectively. While the qualifiers for rifle and pistol events will be held in Jakarta, Indonesia, from January 5 to 18, the shotgun qualifiers will take place in Kuwait City from January 12 to 23. India have fielded a 20-member rifle and pistol squad, while a 12 shooters will represent the country in the shotgun qualifiers. A total of 16 quotas for next year's Olympics at Paris are up for grabs in Jakarta for rifle and pistol events, while eight spots are available in the shotgun competition. The Indian shooters have already won 13 quota spots for Paris Games and will be looking to add to that tally in these tournaments. According to a National Rifle Association of India (NRAI) release, the squads have been selected on the basis of current domestic rankings and those who already have been qualified are left out. In the Jakarta event, India will be looking to add to their pistol quotas in particular, given five more spots are still to be won. All the eight quota places in rifle events have already been secured. In Kuwait, India have six quota places to aim for — four in skeet and two in trap shooting. Pistol shooter Gurpreet Singh will also be seen in action in Jakarta. Sri Karthik Sabari Raj (men's 10m air rifle), Ujjawal Malik (men's 10m air pistol) and Bhavya Tripathi (women's trap) will make their senior team debuts. Three shooters — Tilottama Sen (women's 10m air rifle, ranked seventh), Shriyanka Sadangi (women's 50m rifle 3 positions, ranked seventh) and Bhowneesh Mendiratta (men's trap, ranked sixth), who are quota holders and not among the top three, have also been included in the squad to shoot in the RPO (ranking points only) category and will not be competing for medals. Four other quota holders expressed their inability to participate in these competitions.



## Ahlawat top Indian at T-22nd in Riyadh

PTI ■ RIYADH (SAUDI ARABIA)  
Veer Ahlawat opened with a 1-under 70 to be the best placed Indian golfer at T-22 after the first round of the USD 1 million Saudi Open here. S Chikkarangappa and Yuvraj Sandhu, who has gained his card through the Asian Development Tour for 2024, are lying T-32 with rounds of even par 71 each at the season-ending event on the Asian Tour. Thailand's Chapchai Nirat rolled back the years shooting a seven-under-par 64 to take the lead. His young amateur compatriot Ratchanon "TK" Chantanuwat is tied second following a 66. TK is tied with Mexico's Luis Carrera, while American Kevin Na, Korean Jung Chanmin and Australia's Todd Sinnott shot 67s on an unexpectedly windy day at the Par-71 Riyadh Golf Club. Ajeetesh Sandhu, who needs a good finish to get his 2024 playing rights, shot 2-over 73 and was T-60th as were Honey Baisoya and Karandeep Kochhar. Rashid Khan and Gaganjeet Bhullar had disappointing starts with both carding 5-over 76 each. They were T-94 and in danger of missing the cut. Five-time PGA Tour winner Na came into this week feeling his game is in a good place and backed that up with a strong start. However, a missed six-footer for birdie on the last hole cost him outright second place. Sweden's Henrik Stenson, one of the event's marquee players, came in with a 70.

# India need to pull up their socks against Spain

PTI ■ KUALA LUMPUR  
A profligate India will have to raise their game by leaps and bounds if they want to overcome a mighty Spain in the bronze medal play-off match of the junior men's hockey World Cup here on Saturday. India wasted as many as 12 penalty corners to lose 1-4 against a clinical Germany in the semifinal on Thursday. The Indians would be morally down but come Saturday, they can't afford to be wasteful against Spain, who defeated them 4-1 in the pool stages. On the other hand, Spain too would be hurting from 1-3 loss against France in the semifinal and would be looking to finish their campaign with at least a bronze medal.

The Indians would also be eyeing their fourth podium finish in the history of the tournament, having won gold twice (in 2001 Hobart and 2016 Lucknow), and a silver way back in 1997 in Milton Keynes, England. But for that the Uttam Singh-led side needs to do some soul-searching and produce its 'A' game. The tournament turned out to be a mixed bag for India as they showed great determination to stun world no.4 Netherlands 4-3 in the quarterfinal. But they failed to carry on the momentum against six-time champions Germany, failing to utilise numerous scoring chances that came their way. India captain Uttam conceded that they wasted chances galore but said they are still in with a



HOCKEY JUNIOR WC  
chance of finishing on the podium and will prepare towards that goal. "We got a lot of opportunities inside the circle (against Germany) but we missed a lot. We couldn't convert our chances. We tried to score from the set pieces but we couldn't convert," he said. "We need to be more aware and not lose ball possession. We are

not out of the tournament yet. Bronze medal match is still there. Whatever has happened we can't change. Our entire focus will be on the next game." India's chief coach CR Kumar would be highly disappointed with the performance of his dragflickers and would be hoping that the likes of vice-captain Arajjeet Singh Hundal, Sharanand Tiwari and Sudeep Chirmako deliver the goods on Saturday. "We really would've loved to have been playing the final but now we just have to focus on what lies ahead of us. Finishing third in a World Cup also commands a lot of respect so we'll play the best hockey we can," Kumar said. Uttam and Bobby Singh Dharmi too would look to lift their

game upfront. Spain, on the other hand, have never reached the final of the tournament. Their best result was a bronze medal in the 2005 edition in Rotterdam, beating India 6-5 on penalties after the match was tied at 1-1 at the end of regulation time. Going by head-to-head record in the tournament, Spain hold an edge over India. India and Spain have played eight times against each other in men's junior World Cup history with Spain winning five of those battles, the most recent result also going in the European nation's favour. Meanwhile, Germany, who finished runner-up in the last edition in 2021 in Bhubaneswar, will play reigning bronze medalist France in the summit clash.



## Avani to lead 12 Indians in the Final stage of Q School

PTI ■ MARRAKECH (MOROCCO)  
India's most talented amateur Avani Prashanth will be hoping to move into professional golf, when she tees up at the gruelling five-round 90-hole Lalla Aicha Ladies European Tour Qualifying School tournament, starting here on Saturday. A total of 12 Indians are playing in the 151-player field, which has golfers from 41 countries. Avani, who as an amateur won a professional title on the Ladies European Tour Access Series, was also the winner of Queen Sirikit Cup individual and was fourth at the World Amateur Team Championships individual section. She also strung together a series of Top-10 finishes on the LET events while playing on special invitations. Another young Indian star looking to get to on the Tour full time is Pranavi Urs, who had a status on the Epson Tour (second rung Tour in the United States). The other leading Indian players will include Tvesa Malik, Amandeep Drall, Vani Kapoor, Ridhima Dilawari and Neha Tripathi. The growth of Indian women on the Hero Women's Pro Golf Tour has also thrown up talents like Sneha Singh, who topped the domestic Hero Order of Merit, Seher Atwal, Durga Nittur, Ananya Datar and Jasmine Shekar.

## Priyanka proposal to train in Australia approved

PTI ■ NEW DELHI  
Sports Ministry's Mission Olympic Cell (MOC) has approved racewalker Priyanka Goswami's proposal to train in Australia under coach Brent Vallance. Priyanka, who has qualified for the Paris Olympics, will be training in a high-altitude training centre near Canberra, Australia and will also compete in a few local competitions to prepare for next year's continental showpiece. The financial assistance will cover Priyanka's airfare, boarding/lodging costs, expenditure for sports science support, coaching fee and out-of-pocket allowance among other expenditures. Besides Priyanka, the MOC also approved proposals of Target Olympic Podium Scheme (TOPS) development group Greco Roman wrestlers Ashu (67kg), Suraj (55kg) and Ronit Sharma (48kg) for an international training camp in Almaty,

## Novak, Aryna win ITF World Champion awards for 2023



Kazakhstan. The government will cover the costs of the three wrestlers, their coach, physiotherapist and sparring partners' airfare and boarding/lodging costs along with out-of-pocket allowance for the three grapplers among other expenditures. Shooter Bhowneesh Mendiratta's proposal for financial assistance towards a week-long training camp with foreign coach Daniele Di Spigno has also been approved.

AP ■ LONDON  
Novak Djokovic and Aryna Sabalenka were honored as the International Tennis Federation's 2023 ITF World Champions after being the only singles players to reach at least the semifinals at all four Grand Slam tournaments this season. Djokovic, who finished at No. 1 in the ATP rankings for a record-extending eighth time, won the Australian Open, French Open and U.S. Open to

raise his major trophy total to a men's-leading 24 and was the runner-up at Wimbledon. He went 56-7 and led the men's tour with seven titles. This is his eighth ITF World Champion award, also a record. Sabalenka received the honor for the first time after winning the Australian Open for her first Grand Slam title, finishing as the runner-up at the U.S. Open and making it to the semifinals at the French Open and Wimbledon.

## Set of 6 Messi World Cup shirts sells for \$7.8 million



AP ■ NEW YORK  
Six jerseys worn by soccer superstar Lionel Messi during Argentina's winning run at last year's World Cup sold for USD 7.8 million, the auction house Sotheby's announced. The final price for the shirts, each worn during the first half of one of Argentina's games at the 2022 FIFA World Cup in Qatar, is the highest price for an item of sports memorabilia this year, Sotheby's said. Argentina defeated France in a penalty shootout after a 3-3 draw in the World Cup

final, winning its third World Cup. The victory, in which Messi scored two of Argentina's three goals, represented a crowning moment for one of the sport's greatest-ever players. "These historic shirts are not only a tangible reminder of one of the most important moments in the history of sports, but are principally connected to the pinnacle moment in the career of the most decorated football player in history," Brahm Wichter, Sotheby's head of modern collectibles, said in a statement. The shirts were on display at Sotheby's New York headquarters during the two-week online auction that ended Thursday. No information on the winning bidder was released.

## Dakar Rally winner Austin has extensive resume after just five years of racing

AP ■ CONGRESS (US)  
The hands are in constant motion, yo-yoing the wheel left, right, left in small corrections and full turns. The feet dance in the cramped space above the floorboard, stabbing between clutch, gas and brake. The eyes dart back and forth across the desert landscape, detecting rocks, dips and humps, variations in sand color flashing into view like a real-life scene from "Mad Max." The brain deciphers the signals and takes action in milliseconds — a process completed every second or so for 12 or more hours a day. A professional rally racer by trade, Austin Jones looks more like a conductor while driving his car, tuning in to fluctuations in terrain so rugged a miscalculation could end in disaster. "That's the thing with racing, especially rally racing: you lose focus for one second and that could be the difference of you

## Premier League to have its first female referee

AP ■ LONDON  
Rebecca Welch will become the first female referee in the Premier League when she takes charge of the match between Fulham and Burnley on Dec. 23, the competition said Thursday. Welch has already worked as the fourth official in the Premier League, for the match between Fulham and Manchester United on Nov. 4, and she was the first woman to referee matches in the second-tier Championship and FA Cup. Welch has been a referee since 2010, initially balancing the role with her job in the National Health Service before becoming a full-time match official. Other countries have been



ending up on your roof in a ditch or making that turn and going on to the next one," said Jones, who goes by "AJ" to friends and family. "You can't let up for one second. You have to be 100% focused and that's probably the hardest part." The Dakar Rally is arguably the most diabolical race on earth. Originally a circuit from Paris to Dakar, Senegal, the race has been run across Saudi Arabia since 2020. It's as much an endurance test as a race, drivers and their navigators covering roughly 8,000 miles through the unforgiving landscape of the Arabian Desert over 10 to 15 days. Jones has won it twice. The 27-year-old claimed the

SCORE championship and rallies in Andalusia, Kazakhstan and Abu Dhabi. All in five years of racing. "The hardest part is the mental part, being able to stay focused all the time and listen to the calls to the co-driver," said Jones' father, Jesse. "At the same time you're reading the terrain, looking for things that are going to end your day, if you will." Though a relative newcomer to the racing, Jones has been around it all his life. Jesse is an accomplished driver, with wins in the Baja 500, San Felipe, the Primm 300, the Vegas to Reno race and a SCORE trophy truck championship.

AJ had little interest in his father's profession when he was younger, attending a handful of races. His focus was more on soccer, baseball, football and lacrosse, a sport that earned him a scholarship at San Diego State. Once he finished college, AJ wasn't sure what he wanted to do. The family trade was a natural fit, though he didn't get directly behind the wheel. He went under the hood. Working in his father's shop, AJ learned the inner workings of the car, how every part worked, to fix anything that broke. He came to understand the thresholds for everything in the car; which parts could be pushed to the limit, which couldn't. The skill set has been a crucial component to AJ's success in rally races. Driving for the Red Bull Can-Am Factory Team, AJ has a team of engineers and mechanics who finely tune the car to his personal specifications.

using female referees for years. In Germany, Bibiana Steinhaus was the first woman to referee a Bundesliga game, in 2017. Steinhaus is married to Howard Webb, who is the current chief refereeing officer of the top refereeing body in England. French referee Stéphanie Frappart became the first woman to take charge of a men's World Cup game when she handled Germany vs. Costa Rica in November last year, having previously done games in the Champions League and in the French league since 2019. The Premier League also said Sam Allison will become the first Black official to take charge of a match for 15 years when he referees Sheffield United vs. Luton on Dec. 26.

