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# PM Modi declares Parliament breach serious

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

Prime Minister Narendra Modi has termed the security breach in Parliament as "very serious" and called for no squabbling over the issue amid the Opposition's protest in Parliament. Making this observation in an interview with a Hindi daily, he also said probe agencies are investigating the incident and taking stringent measures, noting that it is equally necessary to go to the root of the people behind it and their motives. The newspaper reported that he described the breach as 'painful' and a matter of concern. "Efforts should also be made to find a solution with a collective spirit. Everyone should avoid squabbling over such an issue," he said. "The gravity of the incident that happened in Parliament should not be underestimated," said the Prime Minister, adding that the Speaker has also been taking necessary steps with all seriousness. Two persons jumped from the visitors' gallery into the Lok Sabha chamber on December 13, with Opposition parties demanding a statement from Home Minister Amit Shah. The Government has insisted that the security in the Parliament complex is the responsibility of the Lok



Sabha secretariat and that it has been following the Speaker's directives. It has also cited numerous such violations in the past, accusing the Opposition of politicising the issue. A total of six people have been arrested in connection with the case so far. The Delhi Police has invoked the stringent anti-terror law, the Unlawful Activities (Prevention) Act, against the trespassers. In his first remarks on Parliament security breach last week, Modi said the

incident was 'very serious.' He stated that there is 'no need to debate' this and that a 'detailed investigation' should be carried out. "The seriousness of this incident should not be downplayed. The (Lok Sabha) Speaker is taking all the necessary steps. Probe agencies are investigating the matter. It is important to find out which elements are behind this and what their objectives are. There is no need to debate this; there should be a detailed investigation into this," he

told the newspaper. Regarding the BJP picking relatively new and little-known leaders as Chief Ministers in Madhya Pradesh, Chhattisgarh, and Rajasthan, Modi said the leaders have lots of experience and hard work behind them. Taking a jibe at those questioning the BJP's choices, he said it has been the country's misfortune that a big section of people who influence society are bound to a trite and narrow mindset. "This is not confined to only the political field. This nature

troubles us in every field. If in any field, some name becomes big with some branding, then others do not get attention irrespective of their talent and hard work. A similar thing happens in politics," he said. The media's focus for some decades has unfortunately been mostly on a few families, and due to this, talent and the usefulness of new people are not being discussed, he said. "That is why you often see some people as new. But the truth is that they are not new. They have done the hard work and have their own experience," he added. The BJP leadership has picked Vishnu Deo Sai, Mohan Yadav, and Bhajan Lal Sharma as Chief Ministers of Chhattisgarh, Madhya Pradesh, and Rajasthan, respectively, looking over the claims of former CMs Raman Singh, Shivraj Singh Chouhan, and Vasundhara Raje. On the Supreme Court verdict on Article 370, Modi said the top court has put its stamp on the abrogation of Article 370, and added that 'no power in the universe can bring it back.' Citing the BJP's stupendous show in the recent Assembly polls, he said it has shown that the party is set to score a historic win again in the 2024 Lok Sabha elections. He said Opposition parties should introspect as to why people do not accept their claims.

## Delhi Police finds evidence strewn across Rajasthan

STAFF REPORTER ■ NEW DELHI

As investigations into Parliament security breach on December 13 continue, the Delhi Police has recovered fragments of broken and burnt mobile phones from Rajasthan's Nagaur, an official said on Sunday. Police have added IPC sections related to the destruction of evidence to the FIR against the accused. An officer privy to the investigations said a few pieces of mobile phones were recovered on Saturday on the instance of Lalit Jha, who was among six arrested by the police in connection to the case. A team from Delhi Police's Special Cell took Jha to Rajasthan's Nagaur on Saturday, where he stayed with the help of accused Mahesh Kumawat, officials said. Sources said the Delhi Police has decided to add more IPC sections, including Section 201 (destruction of evidence/disappearance of evidence) in the FIR



registered on December 13. Police have filed terrorism charges under the stringent UAPA against the accused. Police officials said Jha and Kumawat intentionally destroyed the mobile phones to hide technical evidence related to the case. The Delhi Police have arrested six persons so far — Sagar Sharma, Manoranjan D, Amol Shinde, Neelam Devi, Lalit Jha, and Mahesh Kumawat for their alleged involvement in the Parliament security breach case. Two men, Sagar Sharma and Manoranjan D, had jumped into the Lok Sabha chamber from the public gallery during Zero Hour, released yellow smoke

from canisters, and shouted slogans before being overpowered by the MPs. Around the same time, two others, Amol Shinde and Neelam Devi, released colored smoke from canisters while shouting 'tanashahi nahi chalegi' outside the Parliament premises. Jha, who was present outside the gate, had recorded the act on his mobile phone. After uploading it on social media and sharing it with his friends, he went to Nagaur in Rajasthan. Kumawat and accused Kailash, who are cousins, allegedly arranged his stay there. Later, Jha and Kumawat came to Delhi and surrendered to the police.

## BSF to man Bangladesh border along Sundarbans

SAUGAR SENGUPTA ■ KOLKATA

In view of continued smuggling and infiltration along the Indo-Bangladesh frontier, the Border Security Force has decided to set up a marine battalion to man the strategic, yet hostile terrains of the Sundarbans mangrove forests. The conceived battalion will consist of 1,100 personnel, along with a squadron of about 40 drones and all-terrain vehicles or ATVs, as per officials. The blueprint of the plan has been prepared by the BSF's Eastern Command and sent to the Union Home Ministry for approval. "The Sundarbans is a strategic and vital area along the India-Bangladesh international border. Its effective domination and security are the need of the hour, given inputs suggesting that this tricky forest and riverine area could be used for cross-border infiltration of terrorists and criminals," said a senior BSF officer. In addition to seeking approval from the Home Ministry, the BSF has written to the Bengal Government, seeking permission to station a small team of its



patrol parties (personnel on foot patrol) inside Forest Department 'chowkis' located inside the Sundarbans, often approached by motorboats. One of the most treacherous forests in the world, thanks to its complex network of tidal backwaters several kilometers wide, narrow tidal creeks, and channels, the Sundarbans lies on the delta of the Ganges, Brahmaputra, and Meghna rivers at the mouth of the Bay of Bengal. A cluster of low-lying islands, the Sundarbans spans about 10,000 sq km across India and Bangladesh, with 40 per cent of it lying in this part of the border. Last December, the BSF set up a floating border outpost or BOP deep inside the Sundarbans, named BOP Ganga, which is an all-women border outpost comprising an 11-member

patrol team. It was the first time in the history of the paramilitary forces that a platoon of Mahila Praharis (women constables) was deployed for border patrolling and operation of a floating BOP in difficult terrain like the Sundarbans, according to a former DIG, BSF. He said the difficult zone, infested with a hostile climate, muddy tidal land, Royal Bengal Tigers, crocodiles, and poisonous snakes, made the task of the security forces even more challenging. "We had started a border outpost at Shamsheganj quite a few years ago, but with the rising activities of smuggling and infiltration through snorkeling and many other ways, it has become most imperative to devise newer ideas to keep things under control. The special battalion will precisely meet the requirements," he said.

# Modi heralds Mission 2024

DEEPAK KUMAR JHA ■ VARANASI/SURAT

At the backdrop of electoral success in the just-concluded Assembly polls in the Hindi heartland, Prime Minister Narendra Modi was given a rousing welcome in his Parliamentary constituency Varanasi on Sunday, with the city decked with posters captioned 'Mahavijay ke Mahanayak'. This was Modi's first visit to the holy city after winning the Assembly elections in Madhya Pradesh, Rajasthan, and Chhattisgarh, a few months ahead of the Lok Sabha polls scheduled in 2024. Sounding the poll bugle at his two-term constituency, Modi mocked the Congress' slogan of 'garibi hatao' (remove poverty) and said the poor feel empowered and confident when they get a pucca house and gas cylinders for their homes. Modi reached Varanasi after his Gujarat visit, where he inaugurated the Surat Diamond Bourse (SDB) building, the world's largest office complex with more than 67 lakh square feet of floor area, near Surat city and claimed to be bigger than the Pentagon in the United States. Modi also exuded confidence that in his third term as the

PM, India will become the third-largest economy in the world. The PM said, "Modi's guarantee" is being talked about a lot these days and more due to the recent Assembly polls. The PM, who is on a two-day visit to Varanasi, on Sunday launched the second edition of Kashi Tamil Sangamam at Namoo Ghat. He is scheduled to launch 37 projects worth over ₹19,000 crore for the development of the region. Union Education Minister Dharmendra Pradhan, Uttar Pradesh Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath, and top dignitaries from Central and State Government were present on the occasion. "In our country, many Government schemes have been made; based on the experience of all of them, I felt that the most important thing for the country to pay attention to is that the schemes of the Government should reach people at the right time without any problems. If there is a Pradhan Mantri Awas Yojana, then the houses should be built with the help of the Government. There is no need to run after the Government. The Government should work from the front, and since you have given me this work, about four crore families have



Prime Minister Narendra Modi being welcomed by Uttar Pradesh Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath on his arrival, in Varanasi, on Sunday

got permanent houses," Modi said in his addresses at Viksit Bharat Sankalp Yatra at Varanasi. While being showered with flowers along the road from the airport, Modi's benevolence became the talk of Kashi soon when his cavalcade gave way to an ambulance in Varanasi. The ambulance was allowed to overtake the PM's cavalcade. Modi also flagged off a Kashi Tamil Sangamam Express, which is to ply between Kanyakumari and Varanasi. The Kashi Tamil Sangamam, which will be held from

December 17-31, will witness the participation of 1,400 dignitaries from Tamil Nadu and Puducherry and are scheduled to visit Varanasi, Prayagraj, and Ayodhya, according to an official statement. The first batch of the Tamil delegation comprising a group of students from various parts of Tamil Nadu named 'Ganga' reached Varanasi on Sunday. The group visited the Kashi Vishwanath Temple and is also scheduled to visit Prayagraj and Ayodhya during their stay. Six more groups comprising

teachers (Yamuna), professionals (Godavari), spiritual leaders (Saraswati), farmers and artisans (Narmada), writers (Sindhu), and traders and businessmen (Kaveri) will be reaching the city to participate in the event. The programme will further feature cultural events that highlight the unique traditions of Kashi and Tamil Nadu with the aim to strengthen ties between the people of these two regions, the statement said. On Monday, Modi will participate in the Viksit Bharat Sankalp Yatra programme at Barki Gram Sabha of the Sewapuri development block. Earlier in the day in Surat, Modi reiterated India will be among the top three economies in the world in his third term. Inaugurating the sprawling Surat Diamond Bourse, the PM said it will be the "symbol of strength and determination of new India." Modi said the Surat diamond industry is giving jobs to 8 lakh people, and another 1.5 lakh jobs will be added due to the new bourse, the world's largest and most modern center for the international diamond and jewelry business. Continued on Page 2

# India's heritage sites finally see a ray of hope

ARCHANA JYOTI ■ NEW DELHI

Fixed timelines for effective action to check intrusion at protected monuments, punitive action against officials in cases of gross negligence, empowerment of local panchayats to provide security at unprotected sites, and usage of satellite imagery to check intrusions — these are some of the provisions that a Parliamentary panel has sought in the upcoming amendment of the AMASR Act to safeguard the country's cultural heritage. The panel's concern arises amidst growing encroachment in the Centrally protected monuments (CPMs). In 2019, the Government informed the Rajya Sabha that there were 321 protected monuments whose sites had been infringed. The number has now

increased to 356 as per the Government. The panel, led by Rajya Sabha MP V Vijayasai Reddy, has recommended to the Centre that in the upcoming amendment of the AMASR Act, "strong provisions" may be incorporated to fix the accountability of Government officials, ensuring necessary steps are taken timely to tackle encroachment of Centrally protected monuments. "The committee takes note of the existing framework and recommends that in the upcoming amendment of the AMASR Act being worked upon by the Ministry, strong provisions may be incorporated to fix the accountability of concerned Government officials to ensure that necessary steps are taken

timely for tackling encroachment of Centrally Protected Monuments," it said. The department-related Parliamentary Standing Committee on Transport, Tourism and Culture, in its report, further states that the concerned officials should be liable to be prosecuted in case of gross negligence of their duties with regard to tackling encroachment of CPMs. The panel also recommends that the Ministry may examine the powers given to District Forest Officers (DFOs) under The Wildlife (Protection) Act, 1972, and consider granting similar powers to ASI officials to effectively curb the issue of encroachment of CPMs. The committee notes that no proposal exists at present with ASI

for empowering local bodies to provide security guards to the unprotected monuments. "The Committee feels that given their proximity and cultural ties with local monuments, local bodies are best suited to look after the protection of historical monuments, especially those

which are not under the list of CPMs." Empowering local bodies to provide security guards at such monuments for their protection can go a long way in ensuring that these monuments are preserved in their present state for generations to come. "The committee, therefore, recommends that ASI may

strongly recommends that provisions to empower the local bodies for the protection of historical monuments and to make them accountable may be incorporated in the amendment of the AMASR Act that is being worked upon by the Ministry," said the report. The committee feels that there is a scope for using satellite imagery to monitor the CPMs across the country for encroachment and any illegal construction activities in the prohibited and regulated areas of the same. Satellite imagery should also be used to try and trace the monuments which are untraceable at present and to ensure that no existing CPMs become untraceable in the future. The committee, therefore, recommends that ASI may

approach ISRO and, if feasible, sign a Memorandum of Understanding with ISRO to utilise ISRO satellite imagery for these purposes. "Three hundred sixty-third report on the action taken by the Government on the recommendations/ observations of the committee contained in its three hundred twenty-fourth report" on 'Issues relating to Untraceable Monuments and Protection of Monuments in India', was presented in both Houses last week. The sites under the ASI are maintained under the ambit of the AMASR (Ancient Monuments and Archaeological Sites and Remains) Act. At present, over 3,690 monuments are under the ASI. Continued on Page 2





# Mamata to continue till 2036 as CM: TMC

SAUGAR SENGUPTA ■ KOLKATA

The Trinamool Congress has reiterated that the party will remain in power for many years to come and that Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee will continue to hold her post till at least 2036 and thereafter she would be replaced by her nephew Abhishek Banerjee. Amid the ongoing cold war of sorts between the old guards -- of Mamata Banerjee days and new generation leaders infused and led by Abhishek -- party official spokesperson Kunal Ghosh on Sunday made a significant statement apparently to bury the controversy over leadership once and for all. "Irrespective of questions raised ... irrespective of dreams being dreamt by political vultures to grab the State TMC and its leader Mamata Banerjee will continue to remain the Chief Minister till 2036 and thereafter Abhishek Banerjee will take over ... there should be no doubt about that," Ghosh said, adding "there are people and parties who are trying to grab power but that will remain a pipedream."



"The TMC will remain and run on ... it will continue year after year and bring in new faces according to the changing situations and requirements," he said. While a set of experts interpreted Ghosh's statement as one directed at the younger generation leaders getting restless to grab power a parallel group said it was a message to the aspiring Opposition parties like the BJP and the CPI(M) who were eyeing the Bengal masnad. A third group of experts said by making the statement before Banerjee's visit to Delhi the TMC tended to give up its leader's claim to Prime Ministership. "This means that

before meeting Modi our Chief Minister is making it clear that she is giving up her claim to the top post." The BJP immediately reacted to the ruling party's views saying, "it is the TMC which is day-dreaming about continuing in power beyond 2036. State leader Sajal Ghosh said, "wait till 2024 and you will see how the TMC falls ... they will crumble down like a house of cards ... after 2026 Assembly elections no one will remember Mamata Banerjee ... she will go into oblivion and their leaders will be brought down to the streets and die as beggars ... we don't attach any importance to what TMC says now." CPI(M) central committee member Sujan Chakrabarty said "they are breaking laws, using bombs and bullets to remain in power as they did in the panchayat and other elections in the past ... the BJP is helping them by all means ... some people are saying that the BJP is planning to make Maharashtra in Bihar ... in whatever circumstances neither party will be able to return to power in Bengal."

# India demonstrates capability of Akash missile system

PTI ■ NEW DELHI



India demonstrated the capability of the Akash missile system to engage four aerial targets simultaneously at a range of 25 kilometres, the Defence Research and Development Organisation (DRDO) said on Sunday. It said India became the first country to have such a capability using a single firing unit. "India became first country to demonstrate the capability of engagement of 04 aerial targets simultaneously at 25Km ranges by command guidance using single firing unit. The test was conducted by @IAF\_MCC using Akash Weapon System," the DRDO said in a post on 'X'. It is learnt that the capability of the home-grown missile system

was displayed at the 'Astrashakti' military exercise on December 12. The exercise was held by the Indian Air Force. The Akash, with a range of up to 25 km, is a short-range surface to air missile primarily used for protecting vulnerable areas and points from air attacks. The missile system is among the key platforms that India is exporting to friendly foreign countries. The other key platforms that India has been exporting are Dornier-228 aircraft, 155 mm Advanced Towed Artillery Guns (ATAGs), Brahmos missiles, mine protected vehicles, armoured vehicles, ammunition, thermal imagers and various components of avionics and small arms.

# Political temperature in J&K set to go up

MOHIT KANDHARI ■ JAMMU

In the wake of the Apex court verdict on Article 370, the political temperature in Jammu and Kashmir is set to go up as several regional political parties get ready to pull up their socks and prepare their poll strategy for the forthcoming Assembly polls in the Union Territory. The five-judge constitution bench headed by the Chief Justice of India DY Chandrachud Singh last week directed the Election Commission of India to conduct the Assembly polls by September 30, 2024. The ruling party at the centre, Bharatiya Janta Party is already in election mode and focusing on effective booth management to defeat their arch-rivals in the poll arena while other significant players are gearing up to finalize their campaign strategies to corner the BJP. The election campaign of most of these political parties is most likely to revolve around the demand for the restoration of 'statehood' and holding local body polls and Panchayat elections as soon as possible. The Congress party has already



set the tone of their election campaign strategy. On Saturday All India Congress Committee general secretary and in charge of party affairs in Jammu and Kashmir, Rajni Patil (MP) demanded the restoration of Statehood to Jammu and Kashmir before holding Assembly elections here. The Congress MP said the party will accordingly formulate the policy according to them. "Supreme Court has kept the deadline of September 30, 2024 for holding Assembly elections in Jammu and Kashmir. We want restoration of Statehood. We want guarantees for jobs for the locals.

We want an early Assembly election so that we have a Council of Ministers and MLAs here," she said. The leadership of the Jammu and Kashmir National Conference is also galvanising their voter base in both the regions of Jammu and Kashmir in the run-up to the Assembly polls. The National Conference is mostly likely to chalk its course without forging any alliance with another regional political party. The Peoples Democratic Party is desperately trying to rake up the issue of statehood as well and is yet to formally announce whether it is going to contest in alliance with any other regional political party.

# SFI, CPIM declare Guv as persona non grata

KUMAR CHELLAPPAN ■ KOCHI

While the SFI activists led by its Kerala chief P M Arsho (who is declared as the new guerrilla leader by CPI-M workers) are laying siege to the Calicut University campus on Saturday evening to prevent Governor Arif Mohammed Khan from entering the Guest House, Congress workers at Alappuzha are fighting pitched battle with police as well as the private army of CPI-M to protest against the Kerala Government sponsored Nava Kerala Sadass (election campaign 2024) in the district. "Arif Mohammed Khan does not know what the SFI is because he is a Sanghi and we will teach him what it is to be a member of the SFI. He is sponsoring the RSS in the campuses across the State and we will not allow him in any of the university campuses in the State," Arsho told media persons before laying siege to the University in the company of his friends which included many girls. The police deployed to maintain peace and ensure trouble-free visit of the Governor, cajoled, pleaded and persuaded the young comrades to disperse. When the student leaders, most of them above the age of 35, refused to budge, cops (both men and women) moved in and slowly carried them on their shoulders to the waiting buses to be taken away to the nearest police station. The SFI activists who were annoyed and upset over the Governor's alleged camaraderie with the Sanghis were heard abusing

him for his efforts to saffronize the campuses. Governor Arif Mohammed Khan, who has emerged as the de facto leader of the Opposition for his resistance to the efforts by the CPI-M led Government, has two programmes scheduled for Sunday and Monday and he will be in the University Guest House for the next two days. Meanwhile, police and the CPI-M activists accompanying Chief Minister Pinarayi Vijayan and his council of ministers who are touring across the State in the custom built Cabinet Bus, were seen physically assaulting and attacking Congress activists who waved black flags at the cavalcade in Alappuzha. Vijayan and his ministers are touring the State as part of the 2024 Lok Sabha election campaign masquerading as taking the government to the door steps of the people to take spot decisions. "Our policemen did not attack anybody. What they have done is to gently remove the activists who rushed towards the Cabinet Bus. Had it not been for the policemen, the demonstrators would have met with accidents," said Vijayan while interacting with reporters. Saji Cherian, Minister for Culture, asked the reporters what was the big deal even of the policemen had beaten up the workers. "It is good that they were assaulted by the cops because they would emerge as leaders only if they get good thrashing by the police," said the minister whose speech insulting the Indian Constitution had landed him in trouble.

# HCs should list bail matters expeditiously: SC

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

The Supreme Court has asked all High Courts to ensure listing and disposal of bail and anticipatory bail applications expeditiously, saying they concern the liberty of individuals. While dealing with a cheating and forgery case, a bench of justices CT Ravi Kumar and Sanjay Kumar said in a recent order, "This court has held and reiterated that decisions on anticipatory bail applications/bail applications are concerned with the liberty and therefore, shall be taken up and disposed of, expeditiously." It said that in 2022, the top court had again reiterated the same view and deprecated the practice of admitting the bail applications and thereafter deferring decisions on them unduly. "In view of the recurrence of the said situation in different courts, the Registry shall send a copy of this order to the registrar general and all concerned of all high courts so as to ensure listing of bail applications/ anticipatory bail applications at the earliest," the bench said, in its order dated December 11. Dealing with a cheating and forgery case, which arose from an order of Chhattisgarh High Court, the bench said the case in hand reveals recurrence of such a situation despite the repeated pronouncements of this Court on the very issue. The bench said that on

December 6, 2023, the matter was taken up for consideration by a bench of the high court and after hearing the petitioner, it was admitted and the case diary was called for. "At the same time, it's discernible from the order that the case was not specifically posted to any date. What was ordered was to list the matter in its chronological order. When the matter would be placed before the Court for further consideration, in such circumstances, is nothing but a matter of guess," it said. The bench said, "We have no hesitation to hold that such an order sans definiteness in the matter relating to anticipatory bail/regular bail, that too after admitting the matter, would definitely delay due consideration of the application and such an eventuality will be detrimental to the liberty of a person." The top court further said it is taking into account such aspects that this Court had held that matters pertaining to personal liberty shall be taken up and decided at the earliest. "It is a matter of concern that despite repeated orders, the same situation continues," the bench said. It requested the single judge bench of the high court to dispose of the pending anticipatory bail application in accordance with law, expeditiously and preferably within a period of four weeks from the receipt/ production of the SC order.

# Heavy rain pounds southern Tamil Nadu

PTI ■ CHENNAI

Heavy rains under the influence of a cyclonic circulation lashed southern Tamil Nadu on Sunday inundating several areas in districts including Kanyakumari. Since the Thamirabarani river is in spate, Chief Minister M K Stalin directed authorities to release surplus water into the Kannadian channel, marking a dry run under a river-linking project in southern Tamil Nadu. A Regional Meteorological Centre (RMC) bulletin said a cyclonic circulation is now seen over the Comorin area and its neighbourhood, extending up to mid tropospheric levels. On Sunday, heavy rains lashed Kanyakumari, Tirunelveli, Thoothukudi and Tenkasi districts. Some regions recorded very heavy rainfall. Since Saturday, light to moderate rainfall was recorded at most places of southern Tamil Nadu. Water entered houses in low-lying areas. As reservoirs are filling up fast surplus water is being released. Several regions in such southern districts witnessed inundation which was heavy in a string of areas and authorities declared a holiday for schools and colleges. Disaster Response Force teams have been deployed. Local authorities and police made arrangements for evacuating people from flooded

and vulnerable areas to relief centres. An official release here said Stalin has ordered release of surplus water into the Kannadian channel which will carry flood water to arid regions in Tirunelveli and Thoothukudi districts, benefiting farmers. The release of surplus water is a preparatory exercise under the Thamirabarani, Karumeniyaru and Nambiyaru (in Tirunelveli and Thoothukudi districts of Tamil Nadu) river-linking project, which is nearing completion. On December 16, the cyclonic circulation was in the lower tropospheric levels over equatorial Indian Ocean and adjoining southwest Bay of Bengal off the south Sri Lanka coast. From 16 December morning to 17 December morning, isolated, heavy to very heavy rain was recorded in Tirunelveli district. Also, isolated heavy rain was witnessed in Kanyakumari, R a m a n a t h a p u r a m, Pudukottai, Thanjavur, Tiruvarur and Nagapattinam districts. Nalumukku area in Tirunelveli district reported the highest rainfall of 19 cm during this period. For Monday, the RMC has forecast heavy to very heavy rain at one or two places in Kanyakumari, Tirunelveli, Thoothukudi and Tenkasi districts and light to moderate rain at many places in south Tamil Nadu.

# Citizens must remain healthy for India to become 3rd largest economy: Dhankhar

PTI ■ LUCKNOW

India will become the world's third largest economy in the next four-five years leaving behind Germany and Japan, but to achieve that the citizens of the country must remain healthy, Vice President Jagdeep Dhankhar said on Sunday. Addressing the inaugural function of the two-day 'Atal Swasthya Mela' here, Dhankhar also fondly remembered former prime minister Atal Bihari Vajpayee, saying he remained firm on principles and handled sensitive issues with care. Talking about the country's progress, Dhankhar said India's economy has overtaken those of Canada, France and the UK. "Today, we are the fifth superpower in the world in terms of economy. In the coming four-five years, Japan and Germany will also be behind us, and India is going to be the third largest (economic) superpower in the world!" he said. "For all this, it is necessary that we remain healthy. No matter how much talent, ability and skill you have, if you are not healthy you will not be able to do anything," he said. He said former prime minister Vajpayee would have been very proud seeing where India has reached today. Dhankhar, who also served as a Union minister of state for parliamentary affairs in the Chandra Shekhar ministry from 1990 to 1991, remembered his association with the former prime minister during that time. "In 1990, I was a minister at the Centre. Our government had the support of the Bharatiya Janata Party. I had the privilege of visiting the European Parliament as a minister. I got the company of honourable Atal ji for 15 days in Europe. I miss Atal ji a lot and I definitely miss him today," he said. A lot of attention has been given to health in our Vedas and Shastras, the vice president said. Praising Prime Minister Narendra Modi's Ayushman Bharat scheme and cleanliness campaign, he said that "establishing such a system in a country with a population of 140 crores is very praiseworthy." Dhankhar said, "Had Atal ji been alive today, he would have felt very happy. His dream is being fulfilled. Quoting Syama Prasad Mookerjee, Atal ji used to say that two symbols, two legislations will not work in the country, and today this is the ground reality." Referring to changes in the system due to technology, he said, "Earlier if Rs 100 was sent from the Centre, not even Rs 10 would reach the beneficiaries, but today 100 per cent of the amount reach them. Being a farmer's son, I know the farmers' problems and my chest swells when I see how strong the health of the farmers is."



Dhankhar said the biggest attack on health is done by corruption. Due to corruption, the work of a common man stops and if he is unable to tackle the corrupt person, he becomes restless, the vice president said. "Today, corrupt persons get scared when the clutches of the law reach them. Earlier people used to feel pain that why are some citizens above the law. Now everybody is equal before the law," he said. Showering praises on Prime Minister Modi, the vice president said that today India is not dependent on the vision of any country. "India's own conscience about the world is important. Today India is showing direction to the world. Modi ji has taken the G20 event to such heights that hardly any country can reach there," he said. He said, "It is the good fortune of this country that our government adopted the old medical system by forming the Ministry of AYUSH and the old method has been effective." He also claimed that today "India's data consumption is more than that of China and America and what I mean to say is that today India is in strong hands and in active hands." He also emphasized on the use of coarse grains. Giving a piece of advice, the vice president said, "Put your country first in every situation. We should be proud that we are citizens of this great country. We cannot allow anti-national forces to progress in any way in this country. (We) cannot allow anti-national ideas to grow. We have to attack those ideas which hinder our progress." He expressed the possibility that in 2047, when India celebrates its centenary of Independence, it will be on the top of the world. Crediting Prime Minister Modi for enacting a law to provide one-third reservation for women in the Lok Sabha and state assemblies, Dhankhar said he "created a system that is moving towards a healthy country." "This is a very revolutionary step, the whole world is surprised. This reservation is horizontal and vertical, (and) a symbol of social justice," Dhankhar said. In her address, UP Governor Anandiben Patel emphasised on cleanliness and advised people to stay healthy. Earlier, Deputy Chief Minister Brajesh Pathak, former deputy CM Dinesh Sharma, MP Sudhanshu Trivedi and organiser Neeraj Singh welcomed Dhankhar.

THE PIONEER CLASSIFIEDS  
CHANGE OF NAME

I, Nazakat Ali Son of Sharafat Ali Resident of 1154, Gali Jamun Wali, Punjabi Phatak Haveli Hissamuddin Haider, Ballimaran, Delhi, affirm that in School Certificate of my son Saim Ali, my name has been written as Nazakat Ali Siddiqui. That Nazakat Ali and Nazakat Ali Siddiqui belong to the same person and my correct name is Nazakat Ali.

PD(220)A  
I, Aazram Jahan wife of Nazakat Ali son of Sharafat Ali Resident of 1154, Gali Jamun Wali, Punjabi Phatak Haveli Hissamuddin Haider, Ballimaran, Delhi, affirm that in the School Certificate of my son Saim Ali, my name has been written as Aazram Siddiqui. Aazram Jahan and Aazram Siddiqui belong to the same person and my correct name is Aazram Jahan.

Public Notice  
This is to inform that M/s Sanya Hospitality Pvt. Ltd. having its Registered office at D-13, Defence Colony, New Delhi-110024 has applied for Transfer of Licences from M/s Unilever Developers and Hotels Pvt. Ltd. in favour of M/s Sanya Hospitality Pvt. Ltd. in respect of licence no. 151 of 2005 dated 09.09.2005 & 462 of 2006 dated 18.02.2006 granted for setting up of Commercial Colony over and area measuring 1.9903 acre in Sector-27, District- Gurugram from office of Directorate of Town and Country Planning, Haryana vide memo no. LC-445/JE/KAQ/2023/151 Dated 02.11.2023. In case any allottee / shareholder have any objection or have any adverse effect on their rights in this regard can file their objection before the Senior Town Planner, Gurugram by or before 30 days from the above said date.

MOULIN COMMERCIAL LIMITED  
1, Anand Gram, Aya Nagar Mehrauli, Gurgaon Road, New Delhi-110047  
CIN: L74899DL1962PLC067811, Email: info@vinylgroup.com  
NOTICE TO MEMBERS  
Notice is hereby given to the Members that the Company has completed the dispatch of postal ballot notice under Section 110 of the Companies Act, 2013 read with Rule 22 of the Companies (Management and Administration) Rules, 2014, along with postal ballot form and self-addressed pre-paid postage envelope on 15th December, 2023 through courier to the members whose names appear in the Register of Members as on Friday, 8th December, 2023 ("Cut-off date") in relation to resolution for seeking approval of the shareholders for the proposed voluntary delisting of the equity shares of the company from the Calcutta Stock Exchange Limited in accordance with the provisions of the Securities and Exchange Board of India (Delisting of Equity Shares) Regulations, 2021 and applicable law ("the proposed resolution") by postal ballot including e-voting by electronic means. As required by Regulation 44 of SEBI (LODR) Regulations, 2015, the Company has engaged the services of National Securities Depository Limited to provide e-voting facility to the members of the Company. The voting through Postal Ballot, including E-voting, would commence on 19th December, 2023. The Notice and Postal Ballot Form is also available on the website of the company viz., www.moulin.co.in or on the website of NSDL viz., www.evoting.nsdl.com. The Board of Directors of the Company has appointed Mr. Vivek Gupta, Practising Chartered Accountant, as "SCRTUNIZER" for conducting the Postal Ballot in a fair and transparent manner. The members are requested to note that the physical Postal Ballot form duly completed and signed should be reached to the Scrutinizer on or before Wednesday, 17th January, 2024 by 5:00 P.M. The voting facility shall be available from Tuesday, 19th December, 2023 from 9:00 A.M. to Wednesday, 17th January, 2024 till 05:00 P.M. All Postal Ballot Forms/ electronic votes received after the said date will be treated as reply from such member has not been received. In case a member votes through E-Voting facility as well as send his vote through physical vote, the vote cast through E-voting shall only be considered by the Scrutinizer. The result of the Postal Ballot shall be announced on Friday, 19th January, 2024 at the registered office of the company. The results disclosed along with the Company's Report will be available on the Company's website viz., www.moulin.co.in and shall also be communicated to Calcutta Stock Exchange Limited where the shares of the company are listed. For and query regarding the voting by Postal Ballot including E-voting, please send an e-mail at info@vinylgroup.com.  
By Order of the Board  
For Moulin Commercial Limited  
Sd/-  
Ashish Gupta  
Managing Director  
DIN: 00115090

PUBLIC NOTICE  
This is to notify the public at large that our client, Smt. Sunita Dita Late Sh. Pate, R/o. House No. 28, Dispensary Gali WCD, Village, Rithala, Delhi-110085, through this public notice discloses and renounces all her relations with her daughter namely, Geetika, D/o Sh. Anil, W/o Sh. Ram, Gurgaon, Haryana, House No. 289, Block-5-S, Rohini Sector-5, Delhi-110085 and my other relatives. It is further notified that she and my other relatives shall have no legal right, title, interest, right of inheritance etc. on any of the movable and immovable properties of our client. Our client also serves all social ties with her and other relatives. She shall not be responsible for any act and/or omission of any nature, whatsoever, committed by her and my other relatives and further our client shall have no personal, social or moral relation with her and my other relatives in future. Any person dealing with my daughter and other relatives shall be doing so at their own risks, to which our client shall not be responsible in any manner. Any other person related to my daughter and other relatives also, shall stand to be disowned by our client from her all movable and immovable assets.  
Rohit Yadav (Advocate) Ch. No. 402, Civil Wing, T-5, Hazrat Nizamuddin, Delhi-110042. Mob. No: 9268193622, 9385002226

# India's heritage sites finally see a ray of...

From Page 1  
According to reports, Uttar Pradesh, at 743, tops the list of CPMS that have been illegally encroached, followed by Tamil Nadu (412), Karnataka and Maharashtra with 48 and 46 such monuments, respectively. Gujarat has the fifth-highest number of illegally encroached ASI-covered monuments.

# Modi heralds...

From Page 1  
One more diamond is added to Surat's grandeur. The diamond is not small but the world's best. Even the biggest buildings of the world pale before the glint of this diamond. Whenever one talks about this diamond bourse in the world, Surat and India will be mentioned," the PM said. The Surat Diamond Bourse shows the capability of Indian design, designers, material, and concept. "This building is the symbol of new strength and determination of new India," he said. "You all know India has risen to become the fifth biggest economic power in the world

from 10th in the last 10 years. Now, Modi has given his guarantee that in his third innings, India will be among the world's top three economies," he said. Surat is part of the bullet train network, and work is progressing on the Western Dedicated Freight Corridor, which will also strengthen the area's connectivity with northern and eastern India, he said. The Delhi-Mumbai Expressway will provide new opportunities to Surat businesses, he said, adding that "it is, in a way, the only city with such modern connectivity." Addressing the Viksit Bharat

Sankalp Yatra late evening, the PM termed the yatra his own "examination" and a feedback mechanism to learn directly from people if welfare schemes meant for them are reaching them. "The Viksit Bharat Sankalp Yatra is, in a way, my 'kasauti' (test) also," Modi said. "It is my examination... Whether whatever I had said and whatever I am doing, I want to hear from you and from the entire country whether it has happened in the right proportion. Whether it has been done for the person for whom it was intended, and whether the work which was to be done has happened or not.



# LG gives nod to prosecute 11 involved in false passport cases

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

Delhi Lt Governor V K Saxena has sanctioned the prosecution of 11 people allegedly involved in cases of obtaining passports by furnishing false and forged documents, Raj Niwas officials said on Sunday.



With this, the LG has granted prosecution sanction against 69 people whose names have figured in 46 FIRs under the Passports Act, 1967 that have been sent to him since April this year, they added.

innocent people for a ride yet remain untraced, the official said. The LG was informed that eight agents involved in six cases of forged documents have not been traced as yet, the official said.

The sanction for prosecution was sought by the home department under Section 15 of the Passports Act for the offences enlisted in Section 12 of the act for obtaining passports and travel documents like visa etc. On the basis of false, fabricated and forged documents, an official said.

Between April and November, 40 more FIRs have previously come to the LG for which prosecution sanction were granted by the LG.

The LG expressed concern that the agents who are co-accused and more often than not kingpins of rackets take

out that in one case there was a lapse of more than 16 years, the official said.

"He underlined that to avoid undue delays in processing such cases, instructions had been issued earlier which were not being followed by the Delhi Police as well as the home department, and there had been inordinate delay in processing and submission of cases for seeking prosecution sanction," the official said.

Saxena directed the Delhi government's home department and Delhi Police to

strictly adhere to the instructions and also examine the delay in the matter and fix responsibility of erring officers.

He called on the Delhi Police to intensify its efforts to identify and trace the agents involved in these cases to examine their culpability and expeditiously process the matters under the Passports Act.

Giving his approval for prosecuting the 11 accused, Saxena noted that all the cases are 'fit' for granting prosecution sanction under Section 15 of the Act, saying materials placed on record and facts of each case prima facie makes out a case against the accused.

The LG in one such case also ordered the Delhi Police to examine the culpability of staff of RPO, Mumbai as well as officials concerned in Maharashtra Police who facilitated the issuance of two passports to the accused in Mumbai, he added.

# City minimum temperature at 6.5 degrees Celsius



STAFF REPORTER ■ NEW DELHI

Delhi recorded a minimum temperature of 6.5 degrees Celsius on Sunday, two notches below the season's average, according to the weather department.

The weatherman has predicted shallow fog for the day. The Air Quality Index (AQI) on Sunday morning was recorded to be 311 which comes under the 'very poor' category.

An AQI between zero and 50 is considered 'good', 51 and 100 'satisfactory', 101 and 200 'moderate', 201 and 300 'poor', 301 and 400 'very poor', and 401 and 500 'severe'.

The relative humidity was recorded at 100 percent at 8:30 am, as per the IMD.



A delegation of BJP leaders, led by BJP president Virendra Sachdeva and Leader of Opposition in the Assembly Ramveer Singh Bidhuri, protested near the residence of Delhi Chief Minister Arvind Kejriwal in New Delhi on Sunday. The leaders submitted a memorandum, demanding an agricultural land compensation scheme for farmers in rural areas of Delhi and development in rural areas. Bidhuri said they will raise the demand of compensation policy of Ochandhi farmers in the Assembly on Monday. The BJP said the police prevented it from submitting memorandum to Kejriwal. Ranjan Dimri

# Fake medicine factory busted, owner held

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

Delhi Police Crime Branch has busted a fake medicine factory in Delhi's Ghulabi Bagh area and arrested its owner, officials said on Sunday.



The fake factory was involved in the production of an anti-itching gel, Betnovate-N, police said, adding the illegal unit was being run in Ghulabi Bagh's industrial area.

tubes) were recovered from the spot, the officials said.

According to a senior police officer, a team of the crime branch received inputs that many duplicate cosmetics and medicines products are being manufactured by some entities in Ghulabi Bagh. A raid was conducted at plot number 99, Gulabi Bagh Industrial Area, where the illegal production was going on, the officer said.

Four cartons of filled tubes filled with the cream wherein each carton was found containing 550 tubes (approx. 2,200 filled tubes) and other raw materials and heavy machines for manufacturing of tubes were also seized, they said.

At least 57 cartons containing empty tubes of Betnovate-N cream wherein each carton was found containing 1,200 tubes (approx. 68,000 empty

manufacture unbranded products with his brother. Later, he set up his own factory and started making duplicate products of different companies. He was running this factory for the last year, an official said.

Police said the owner had spread this business in the area of Outer Delhi.

To unearth the whole chain, efforts are being made, the officer said.

# 7 held for duping on pretext of increasing credit card limit

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

Seven people were arrested for allegedly duping people on the pretext of increasing their credit card limit, Delhi Police said on Sunday.



Nitin Kumar, Akhil Tanwar, Shivam Suryan, Kapil Gupta, Suresh, Sumit Sharma and Sunny Kumar were arrested near Ramphal Chowk in Dwarka on Saturday, they said.

The DCP said the accused used to get e-data containing the names, addresses, card numbers and mobile numbers of victims from Alex, after that they used to call victims luring them to increase their credit card limit.

The accused, aged between 18 and 30 years, were running a call centre in the guise of a cloth manufacturing centre, police said.

According to an official, 218 SIM cards, 20 mobile phones and seven ATM cards used in the crime were recovered from them.

Deputy Commissioner of Police Chandan Chowdhary, Nitin disclosed that he and his partners Shivam and Akhil were working as milk delivery

boys in a dairy firm but after the COVID-19-induced lockdown, they all lost their jobs.

So, to earn easy money, they started doing cyber frauds, he said.

"They further told that they arranged fake SIM cards and bank accounts from Alex whom they met on Telegram. Alex used to send bank documents and SIM cards using online delivery services like Porter," Chowdhary said.

# Central Secretariat team dominates in All India Civil Services Championship

STAFF REPORTER ■ NEW DELHI



and haryana winning bronze. The championship, a platform that brings together the best from civil services, witnessed the Central Secretariat Team's outstanding performance.

The Central Secretariat Team has emerged victorious, clinching the prestigious Overall Team Championship at the 'All India Civil Services Swimming Championship'. This remarkable achievement underscores the team's unwavering dedication and exceptional aquatic prowess.

Central Secretariat team also won silver in the water polo event with kerala winning gold

The collective efforts, commitment, and synchronized performance of the Central Secretariat Team not only solidify their position as formidable contenders but also reflect the values of discipline and excellence upheld by the civil services community.

# Literarium '23 a huge hit



STAFF REPORTER ■ NEW DELHI

Literarium'23, the Literary Festival of DPS Vasant Vihar, achieved resounding success by seamlessly blending the richness of both English and Hindi languages.

The event featured a vibrant array of activities, including skits, games, and hands-on concepts, presenting linguistic nuances in a captivating and educational manner. It entertained and educated participants and the audience alike.

The event was inaugurated by the principal, Delhi Public School R K Puram, Ms. Padma Srinivasan who partook in the celebratory literary event. The event witnessed the enthusiastic participation of eighteen schools in two categories each for Hindi and English inter-school competitions. The valedictory ceremony marked the culmination, and participating schools explored the school greens to engage in various activities. The participative spirit of the students was evident throughout the event. The interactive sessions along with fostering a love for language also provided a platform for students to showcase their linguistic prowess. Through their active involvement, they demonstrated the effectiveness of incorporating a variety of activities to cater to diverse learning styles.

# 2020 DELHI RIOTS

## Court dismisses Tahir plea seeking stay on PMLA case proceedings

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

A court here has dismissed former AAP councillor Tahir Hussain's plea seeking a stay on proceedings in a money laundering case against him till charges are framed in another case related to alleged conspiracy behind the 2020 Northeast Delhi riots.



Twenty people, including Hussain and activists Sharjeel Imam, Umar Khalid and Khalid Saifi, have been arraigned as accused in the case related to the larger conspiracy to incite the riots.

The money laundering case, registered by the Enforcement Directorate (ED), emanates from the larger conspiracy matter. The agency has alleged that Hussain laundered several crore rupees using shell or dummy companies to fuel protests against the Citizenship Amendment Act (CAA) and the communal riots.

Underlining that charges in the ED case were framed in January this year and Hussain's appeals against the order on charges were dismissed by the Delhi High Court and the Supreme Court, Additional Sessions Judge Amitabh Rawat rejected the former councillor's contention that there were no proceeds of crime or money laundering in the case.

The judge said a case under the Prevention of Money Laundering Act (PMLA) can only be registered if there exists a predicate offence (larger conspiracy to incite riots) and that both cases were investigated by separate agencies -- ED and Delhi Police.

"Once the investigation into the PMLA has been initiated, it is tried as a separate case as well. Thus, predicate offence triggers initiation of a case under PMLA but is not independently investigated but also independently and separately tried," the court said in its order passed on December 14.

"It is also clear that if there is an order of discharge or acquittal in the predicate offence, then the proceedings in the PMLA case shall come to a stop. That does not mean that if there is an order on charge or conviction, there would also be an automatic conviction in the PMLA case," it added.

The court said Hussain's contention to stay the proceedings was not mandated by law and a stay would result in public witnesses being lost. Staying the recording of evidence in the ED case would "put an embargo" on the matter itself despite the availability of witnesses, it said. "There is no judgement of the Supreme Court or the Delhi High Court to buttress the contention that the PMLA matter needs to be stayed till the time order on charge/conviction or acquittal is passed," the court noted.

# Doctors perform high risk bone marrow transplant

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

Doctors at a leading Army hospital here have successfully conducted a life-saving bone marrow transplant (commonly known as BMT) for a child diagnosed with a rare primary immunodeficiency disorder, giving a new lease of life to a seven-year-old child diagnosed with a "rare disorder".

The procedure was recently performed at Army Hospital (Research & Referral), the Ministry of Defence said in a statement on Sunday, and termed it an "extraordinary medical achievement".

The hospital authorities have claimed that this procedure was the "first such transplant for this immunodeficiency in India".

Doctors in the department of hematology and stem cell transplantation at the hospital have successfully conducted a life-saving bone marrow transplant (commonly known as BMT) for a child diagnosed with a rare primary immunodeficiency disorder, it said.

The "groundbreaking procedure", performed on Sushant Paudel, has opened new doors of hope for children and families facing similar challenges, it said.

Paudel, son of Sepoy Pradip Paudel, was "diagnosed with ARPC1b, a very rare form of immunodeficiency at age one, a condition that severely compromised his immune system making him prone to repeated life-threatening infections and other complications," the statement said.

The patient was referred to the hospital six months ago "but did not have an HLA matched sibling donor", the doctors said.

"The hematology team at Army Hospital (R&R), embarked on an arduous journey to find a suitable donor and orchestrate a meticulously planned bone marrow transplant," the statement said. "The Matched Unrelated Donor (MUD) transplant, carried out on November 30 involved harvesting healthy stem cells from an HLA compatible donor, which in this case was a voluntary unrelated donor and infusing them into Sushant Paudel's bloodstream, after his own defective cells were destroyed by a very high dose of chemotherapy," it said.

# IIT Delhi student injured after jumping before metro

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

A 22-year-old IIT Delhi student allegedly tried to end his life by jumping before a Delhi Metro train on Sunday, officials said.

The incident was reported around 6:40 pm from the Tilak Nagar metro station.

The man was standing on platform no 2 of the station and jumped before a Dwarka-bound train when it was coming to a halt, they said.

The passenger suffered an injury on his head and he was soon rushed to a nearby hospital.

The student is a resident of a south Indian state and was pursuing a B.Tech degree from the Indian Institute of Technology Delhi, as per the officials.



Jain devotees protest to save girnar parvat at RamLila Ground. Ranjan Dimri



# Modi envoy Puri visiting Kuwait to pay condolences on Emir demise

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

Petroleum Minister Hardeep Singh Puri is travelling to Kuwait on Sunday as Prime Minister Narendra Modi's special envoy to pay condolences on the demise of Emir Sheikh Nawaf Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah on behalf of the government and people of India. Puri will also deliver personal letters of condolences from President Droupadi Murmu and Prime Minister Modi to Sheikh Meshal Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah, the new Emir of Kuwait, the Ministry of External Affairs (MEA) said on Sunday.



Emir Jaber Al-Sabah, who played a key role in boosting India-Kuwait relations, died at the age of 86 on Saturday. "India stands united in mourning with the leadership and the people of Kuwait," the MEA

said, adding the large Indian expatriate community in that country will miss his "presence and compassionate care". New Delhi has already declared a "state mourning" on Sunday as a mark of respect for the departed leader. In the demise of Sheikh Nawaf Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah, Kuwait has lost a visionary leader who took the country towards progress and prosperity, the MEA said. "The government and people of India express their deepest condolences on the passing away of His Highness Sheikh Nawaf Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah, the Amir of the State of Kuwait on December 16," it

said in a statement. "Hardeep Singh Puri, the Minister of Petroleum and Natural Gas and Housing and Urban Affairs, will be visiting Kuwait as the prime minister's special envoy on December 17 to pay condolences on behalf of the government and the people of India," it added. The MEA also referred to the role the late Emir played in strengthening India-Kuwait ties. "India and Kuwait maintained close and friendly relations under the leadership of the late Amir. He was steadfast in guiding and strengthening bilateral engagements for the mutual benefit of the people of the two countries," it said.

# President to visit Bengal, Telangana, Rajasthan to attend programmes

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

President Droupadi Murmu will visit West Bengal, Telangana and Rajasthan from December 18 to 23 to attend different programmes, a Rashtrapati Bhavan statement said on Sunday. On December 23, the President will witness the live firing exercise at Pokhran, Rajasthan, the statement said. On December 18, the President will attend the 69th convocation of IIT Kharagpur in West Bengal and later arrive at Rashtrapati Nilayam in Telangana's Secunderabad, the statement said. On December 19, Murmu will



grace the centenary celebrations of Hyderabad Public School Society. She will visit the handloom and spinning unit as well as theme pavilion of the Ministry of Textiles at Pochampally in Telangana on December 20. She will also interact with weavers on the occasion. On the same day, she will attend the golden jubilee celebrations of MNR Educational Trust in Secunderabad. On December 21, President Murmu will inaugurate various projects at Rashtrapati Nilayam. She will host an At Home reception at Rashtrapati Nilayam for dignitaries, including leading citizens of the state and academics.

# CWC meeting on Dec 21 to plan 2024 strategy

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

The Congress has called a meeting of its working committee on December 21 to deliberate on the strategy for the 2024 general election and chalk out a plan for its poll campaign to take on the BJP, sources said. Congress president Mallikarjun Kharge has called the meeting, which will take place at the All India Congress Committee headquarters two days after the INDIA bloc meeting on December 19, to deliberate on the political situation in the country and the way forward, they said. Seat sharing and campaign is likely to be top of the agenda,



they added. The meeting is also likely to discuss the possibility of a yatra that Congress leader Rahul Gandhi could undertake before the 2024 polls

with unemployment and price rise as its main planks, the sources said. An east-to-west yatra in hybrid mode, including on-foot, is being mulled by the

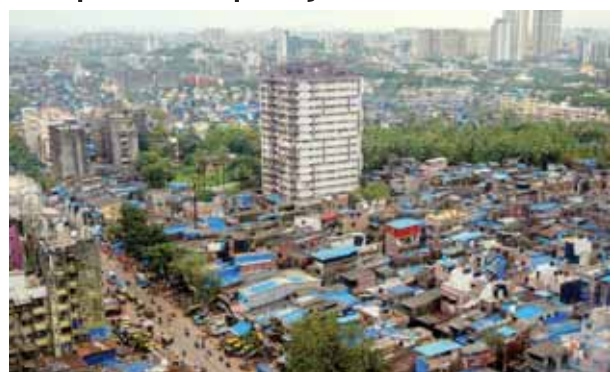
party and a final decision is expected to be taken soon, they said. Ahead of the Congress Working Committee meeting, the 4th meeting of the leaders of INDIA parties will be held at 3 pm on December 19 in New Delhi. Evolving a "core positive agenda", seat sharing and a programme to hold joint rallies are among the main challenges before the opposition INDIA bloc that will be taken up at its next meeting. The parties intend to move forward with the unity theme -- "Main Nahin, Hum" (We, Not Me) -- as a counter to the prime minister at the meeting, a senior leader of the Congress

said. The CWC meeting will also analyse the recent assembly poll results in which it was defeated in the Hindi heartland states of Madhya Pradesh, Chhattisgarh, and Rajasthan while winning and forming the government in Telangana. The party also lost the polls in Mizoram. The CWC would deliberate on the reasons for the defeat and the way forward for the 2024 polls, they said. The meeting is being held at a time when the challenge before the Congress is to come out with an alternative positive agenda to counter the BJP in the next general elections. There is a view in the party that it would need to think out of the box to take on the Bharatiya Janata Party in 2024.

# Congress criticises Centre for entrusting Dharavi redevelopment project to Adani

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

The Congress on Sunday slammed the government over the Dharavi redevelopment project being given to the Adani group, saying this is an example of how the conglomerate is getting enriched at the expense of people. The Congress' attack came a day after a protest was held in Mumbai against the Dharavi redevelopment project being helmed by the Adani group. It said "the biggest loot in modern India continues" in full public gaze with the "complete support" of the ruling party. Former Maharashtra chief minister Uddhav Thackeray has alleged it was the "world's biggest Transfer of Development Rights (TDR) scam". In a statement, Congress general secretary Jairam Ramesh alleged that the unique quality of the "Modani Mega Scam" is not just that Prime Minister Narendra Modi is channeling lakhs of crores towards his "close friends" and creating a Modi-Made Monopoly (3M), but that the money is coming straight from the pockets of ordinary Indians. "We already know that the inflated cost of over-invoiced coal imports is being borne by lakhs of electricity consumers and that middle-class travellers are paying Modani's inflated airport charges," he said.



Dharavi project will result in the Adani conglomerate being given a mammoth 10.5 crore square feet of real estate Transferable Development Rights (TDR) equivalent to 6-7 times the area of Dharavi, the Congress leader claimed. He said this has been presented in a detailed study by the Mumbai Regional Congress Committee President and Dharavi MLA, Varsha Gaekwad. TDR is a transferable credit that allows builders who use land, for instance, in approved slum development projects to be compensated with extra construction rights in other areas, Ramesh pointed out. "We have previously asked the PM to explain how the Adani conglomerate came to win the lucrative Dharavi project after an earlier tender? won by a different developer? was cancelled and rebid. In the earlier tender, the developer was offered a TDR equivalent to 5 crore square feet, but this has now jumped by 110%, which could give the Adani conglomerate a profit margin as high as 434%," Ramesh said. These supernormal profits have been enabled by Fadnavis' modifications of Development Control Regulations on 25 November, 2018 and 28 September, 2022 that have the effect of handing the Adani conglomerate a huge TDR bank, he alleged. "By doing away with indexation, these government resolutions give the Adani conglomerate the freedom to sell TDR anywhere in Mumbai, including south and central Mumbai and that too at much higher rates than previously allowed," Ramesh claimed.

All Mumbai developers will now be compelled to buy 40 per cent of their TDR requirement from the Adani conglomerate at exorbitant rates, he said. Noting that Dharavi is a very diverse, thriving community of seven lakh people that represents a mini-India, Ramesh said it has a large number of small, independent businesses that generate an estimated Rs 100 crore in annual income to the government. "Yet documents show that most of these people will be evicted out and only 54,461 slum dwellers and 9,522 residents in chawls and buildings will receive a rehabilitation home within Dharavi," the Congress leader said.

Furthermore, there has been no independent citywide assessment of what impact the creation of this mammoth TDR will have on Mumbai, in a contravention of prevailing rules and court orders, he said. "This lucrative revdi for the Adani conglomerate could have a huge negative impact on the quality of life in Mumbai, for rich and poor alike. And the people are well aware of this - a protest against this MegaScam was held on December 16th, led by senior leaders of the Maha Vikas Aghadi and attended by thousands of Dharavi residents," Ramesh said. "This is yet another example of how Modani is getting enriched at the expense of the people of India. And a reminder of how the biggest loot in modern India continues in full public gaze, with the complete support of the PM and the ruling party," Ramesh said in his statement.

# Refrain from doing research on ecigarettes, obtain prior permission from Ministry: NMC to medicos



PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

In a move that might leave a section of doctors supporting e-cigarettes squirming, the National Medical Commission (NMC) has asked the medicos affiliated with it to obtain approvals from the Union Health Ministry in case they plan to conduct or participate in any research activities related to e-cigarettes and heated tobacco products (HTPs). The move follows a letter written by the Directorate General of Health Services (DGHS) Dr Atul Goel to the NMC asking it to issue necessary instructions to the healthcare professionals affiliated with the NMC and the Indian Medical Association (IMA). The World Health Organization (WHO) too on December 14 had urged the Indian governments to take urgent measures to prevent rise in usage of e-cigarettes and counter nicotine addiction alongside a comprehensive approach to control tobacco use. The NMC, in a public notice on December 15, asked healthcare professionals to comply with Goel's instructions. In a letter dated December 8, Goel had said, "I am writing to address a matter of utmost importance concerning healthcare professionals' engagement in research related to electronic cigarettes (e-cigarettes) and heated tobacco products (HTPs). He highlighted that under the Prohibition of Electronic Cigarettes (Production, manufacture, import, export, transport, sale, distribution, storage and advertisement) Act, 2019 (PECA, 2019) the government has unequivocally banned the use of e-cigarettes, HTPs and such devices in India. "In light of this, it is imperative that all healthcare professionals affiliated with the NMC and the IMA refrain from initiating or participating in any research activities related to e-cigarettes and HTPs without obtaining the necessary approvals from the DGHS and the Union Health Ministry," read the letter sent to Dr B N Gangadhar, the officiating chairman of the NMC.

"In this regard, I would request that necessary instructions please be issued to all healthcare professionals affiliated with the NMC and the IMA. I trust that the NMC and IMA can play a pivotal role in disseminating this directive among their members, emphasising the gravity of adherence to the ban on e-cigarettes and HTPs, and promoting responsible research within the healthcare community," it stated. A copy of the letter has also been marked to the IMA National President Dr Sharad Kumar Agarwal. Mothers Against Vaping, a united front of concerned mothers, at various forums, has been emphasizing on the urgent need to take effective steps to check proliferation of e-cigarettes and vapes, especially among school-going children. Sushant Kalra, Parenting Coach & TEDx Speaker, said "The lack of awareness surrounding the risks associated with vaping is a huge concern in many countries including India. Many school-going children are taking up vaping under the false assumption that it carries no risks or dangers. This alarming trend is troubling because young individuals may unknowingly become addicted. Both children and their parents often remain unaware of the severe health consequences of vaping, as they perceive it as a harmless activity involving the inhalation of flavours like apple or strawberry." Varuna Pathak, former Professor of Gynaecology and Obstetrics at the Gandhi Medical College echoed similar views saying that "Despite the ban on vaping devices and e-cigarettes in India, their availability is cultivating a generation addicted to these habits, a potentially leading them towards tobacco use. "It's crucial to debunk misconceptions that paint e-cigarettes as harmless vapor inhalation. Recent research underscores the substantial harm caused by inhaling these substances, posing risks to lung health and impacting various facets of children's development, including cognitive abilities and brain development," said Pathak.

# Congress accuses Centre of scuttling debate on Parliament security breach

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

The Congress on Sunday accused Prime Minister Narendra Modi of running away from a debate on the security breach in Parliament and said the reason for it is that questions will be raised on the role of the Mysuru BJP MP in facilitating the entry of those who jumped into the Lok Sabha chamber. The opposition party's attack came after Modi said the seriousness of the security breach in Parliament cannot be underestimated and called for no squabbling over the issue amid the Opposition's protests over it in Parliament. In a post on X, Congress general secretary Jairam Ramesh said, "The Prime Minister has finally broken his silence on the extraordinary events in the Lok Sabha on December 13th. He says probe is needed and not debate and that such a probe is on." "All that INDIA parties are asking for and will continue to press for is a statement by the Home Minister on what happened on December 13th and how exactly it happened," Ramesh said. "The PM is running away from



a debate for a very simple reason. Questions will be raised on the role of the Mysuru BJP MP Pratap Simha in facilitating the entry of the intruders into the Lok Sabha on December 13th," he said. In an interview with the Hindi daily 'Dainik Jagran', Modi said probe agencies are investigating the incident and taking stringent measures, noting that it is equally necessary to go to the root of people behind it and their motives. The newspaper said he described the breach as painful and a matter of concern. "Efforts should also be made to look for a solution with collective spirit. Everyone should avoid squabbling over such an issue," he said. "The gravity of the incident

which happened in Parliament should not be underestimated, the prime minister said, adding that the Speaker has also been taking necessary steps with all seriousness. Two people jumped from the visitors' gallery into the Lok Sabha chamber on December 13, with opposition parties, demanding a statement from Union Home Minister Amit Shah. Some members have also sought Shah's resignation. The government has insisted that the security in Parliament complex is the responsibility of the Lok Sabha secretariat and it has been following the Speaker's directives. It has also cited numerous such violations in the past, accusing the opposition of politicising the issue.

# Loneliness, anxiety, depression in youngsters reduce by if they limit use of social media, says research

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

Loneliness, fear of missing out, anxiety and depression are all significantly reduced in young people when they cut down their use of social media to just 30 minutes a day, a research has found. The results follow a warning from the American Psychological Association and the U.S. Surgeon General about growing evidence that young people are using social media more, and their mental health is getting worse. One study has found that a simple intervention may help. Researchers from Iowa State University carried out a two-week trial with 230 college students, who were tasked with cutting their social media use to 30 minutes a day and received daily reminders. The study group also appeared to have more positive outlook on life, with "the tendency to experience positive emotions described with words such as



"excited" and "proud." Lead author Ella Faulhaber, a PhD student in human-computer interaction, said: "It surprised me to find that participants' well-being did not only improve in one dimension but in all of them. I was excited to learn that such a simple intervention of sending a daily reminder can motivate people to change their behaviour and improve their social media habits." The benefits of reducing social media use were also seen in those participants who sometimes went over the 30-minute

limit. Faulhaber said, "The lesson here is, it's not about being perfect but putting in effort, which makes a difference. I think self-limiting and paying attention are the secret ingredients, more so than the 30-minute benchmark." While the study participants said that the first few days of cutting back on social media were difficult, the benefits they reported included better sleep, spending more time with other people and feeling more productive and more in tune with their lives. Talking about the harms of social media consumption during adolescence, the study said it can lead to dissatisfaction with life as well as deteriorating health. Co-author Douglas A. Gentile, distinguished professor of psychology, said: "Knowing how much time we spend on activities each day and making something countable makes it easier for people to change their behaviour." The team called for creating awareness such as setting a timer or using an app to monitor the amount of time you spend on social media, giving oneself a grace, not giving up as limiting social media use has real benefits for your daily life. Gentile added: "We live in an age of anxiety. Lots of indicators show that anxiety, depression, loneliness are all getting worse, and that can make us feel helpless. But there are things we can do to manage our mental health and wellbeing."

# Chemical used to make plastic durable affects fertility, claims study

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

Exposure to "phthalates" -- a group of chemicals used to make plastics more durable and used in vinyl flooring, lubricating oils, and personal-care products (soaps, shampoos, hair sprays) can lower the probability of getting pregnant, a new study has warned. However, the study published in the journal Environmental Health Perspectives, at the same time said that there has been no evidence that these can cause pregnancy loss. It also found a link between phthalate exposure before conception and alterations in women's reproductive hormones, as well as increased inflammation and oxidative stress. "Phthalates are ubiquitous endocrine disruptors and we're exposed to them every day," said lead author Carrie Nobles, assistant professor of environmental health sciences in the School of Public Health and Health Sciences, US.

According to a Centers for Disease Control and Prevention fact sheet, people are exposed primarily by ingesting food and liquid that has come in contact with products containing the chemicals. To analyse, the study included detailed information on 1,228 participants during six menstrual cycles when they were attempting to get pregnant. The women who became pregnant were followed through pregnancy. Phthalates are broken down by the body into metabolites, which are excreted in urine and can be analysed. The researchers detected 20 phthalate metabolites in urine samples collected from study participants. "We found there were three parent compounds that seem to be most strongly associated with taking longer to get pregnant, although we saw a general trend toward it taking longer to get pregnant across the phthalates we looked at," Nobles said.



# 'Traditions, innovations should be balanced in Armed forces: Rajnath

PTI ■ HYDERABAD

Defence Minister Rajnath Singh on Sunday stressed the need for maintaining the traditions of the armed forces while adopting innovation and said there has to be a balance between both of them.

Addressing the Combined Graduation Parade (CGP) at the Air Force Academy at Dundigul near here, Singh urged the newly commissioned officers to never lose their openness towards new ideas, innovative thinking and idealism.

He exhorted the officers to give due importance to tradition in the Armed Forces, terming it as time-tested, but pointed out that if tradition is followed for a long time without thinking, then a state of "inertia or ossification" occurs in the system. To avoid this situation and



keep pace with the constantly-evolving times, there is a need to innovate. The Defence Minister called for striking a balance between tradition and innovation, describing it as extremely crucial. "Strike a balance between tradition and innovation to keep

pace with constantly-evolving times. If we follow only tradition, we will be like a dead lake. We need to be like a flowing river. For that, we will have to bring in innovation along with tradition. Keep flying and touch greater heights, but maintain your connection with

the ground," he said. Earlier, the Defence Minister was received by Chief of the Air Staff, Air Chief Marshal VR Chaudhari. A total of 213 Flight Cadets, including 25 women, were commissioned into various branches of the Indian Air

Force upon completion of their training. Eight officers from the Indian Navy, nine from the Indian Coast Guard and two from friendly countries were also awarded 'Wings' following the completion of their flying training. The highlight of the parade was the 'Commissioning Ceremony' in which graduating Flight Cadets were awarded their 'Stripes' by the Defence Minister. Flying Officer Atul Prakash from the flying branch was awarded the President's Plaque and Chief of the Air Staff Sword of Honour for standing first in the overall order of merit in the pilots' course. Flying Officer Amrinder Jeet Singh was awarded the President's Plaque for standing first in the overall order of merit amongst the ground duty branches.

# INDIA Bloc will fight unitedly in 2024 Lok Sabha polls: Shivpal

PTI ■ MUZAFFARNAGAR

Samajwadi Party leader Shivpal Yadav on Sunday expressed confidence that the INDIA bloc will defeat the BJP in the 2024 general elections. About seat sharing in the alliance, he told reporters that there is still time to decide the distribution of seats and talks will be held on the issue. "The INDIA alliance will unitedly accomplish the task of removing BJP from the country," Yadav claimed. The SP leader's remarks come ahead of the December 19 meeting of the opposition bloc in Delhi where seat sharing and other issues will be discussed. To a question about the Bahujan Samaj Party (BSP) joining the alliance, he said that the BSP leadership should first distance themselves from the BJP and not work "as a B-team" of the ruling party.



Asked about who will be the prime ministerial candidate of the INDIA bloc, he said that the alliance has several faces. "We still have time. It will not be an issue," he added. The SP national general secretary said that he has come to visit Muzaffarnagar and Saharanpur to strengthen the party. To a query on the SP leaders expressing unhappiness with

the Congress' attitude in the recent assembly polls, Yadav evaded a direct reply and said the INDIA alliance is mainly for the 2024 general elections. Evolving a "core positive agenda", seat sharing and a programme to hold joint rallies are among the main challenges before the opposition I.N.D.I.A bloc that will be taken up at its next meeting in the national capital on December 19, according to Congress sources. The parties intend to move forward with the unity theme - 'Main Nahin, Hum' (We, Not Me) - as a counter to Prime Minister Narendra Modi at the meeting, the sources said. The meeting is being held in the backdrop of the Congress' poor show in the just concluded Assembly elections, where it suffered humiliating defeats in Rajasthan, Chhattisgarh and Madhya Pradesh.

# Stalin launches flood relief of ₹6,000 for each flood hit families

PTI ■ CHENNAI

Tamil Nadu Chief Minister M K Stalin on Sunday launched the distribution of Rs 6,000 cash assistance to families affected by cyclone Michaung induced rains and flood.

The state government has allocated Rs 1,486.93 crore to provide the cash aid, which will benefit nearly 25 lakh families spread across the districts of Chennai, Tiruvallur, Chengelpet and Kancheepuram. Stalin gave away the cash dole to women heads of families at Velachery, one of the badly affected areas due to heavy inundation, marking the commencement of disbursement of flood relief to people in Chennai and nearby areas. State Ministers, elected representatives and top officials took part. Writing to DMK workers, Stalin said the central government team that assessed damage due to rains and flood in Chennai and nearby areas, without any political ill-will appreciated the state government.

Such appreciation is not only a 'certificate' of the government's dedicated, honest work but



also a slap on the face of those intending to do politics on the matter. The exercise of distribution of tokens, specifying the date and time of cash distribution at jurisdictional ration shops, started a couple of days ago. Those who have not received the token may submit applications at fair price shops to avail the cash assistance, a government press release said. A total of 24,25,336 families will be benefitted by the relief. Chennai accounts for most beneficiaries, approximately 13.72 lakh families, followed by Tiruvallur (6.08 lakh), and Chengelpet (3.12 lakh). In Kancheepuram, 1,31,149 ration card holders will be benefitted. The cash assistance will be distributed in Public Distribution System (PDS) outlets from 9 am to 1 pm and between 3 pm and 5 pm.

# Nine killed in blast at explosives making factory in Nagpur

PTI ■ NAGPUR

Nine people were killed and three others seriously injured in a blast at an explosives manufacturing factory in Chakdoh in Maharashtra's Nagpur district on Sunday, police said.

In a statement, Ashish Srivastava, senior general manager of Solar Industries India Limited, said, "A tragic incident occurred at 9am in building number HR-CPCH-2 (Mixing, Melting and Casting) in which nine workers lost their lives." He said the company was fully committed to providing all support and relief to the families of the deceased today and in the future. "We shall implement the recommendations of the inquiry committee as soon as they are received," he said in the statement. Speaking to reporters earlier, Srivastava said the incident occurred in the building where boosters used in coal mines are produced. It took place when sealing work of the product was going on, he added.

"Nine people have died. The injured workers have been rushed to hospital. All the workers have been evacuated from the building," he



added. A Kondhali police station official said 12 persons were present in the unit when the incident took place. Maharashtra Deputy Chief Minister Devendra Fadnis in a post on X termed the incident as unfortunate and condoled the death of the nine people. The state government will provide an ex-gratia of Rs 5 lakh to the families of the deceased and Chief Minister Eknath Shinde has approved the decision, he said. Fadnis said nine people, including six women, died in the blast at

Solar Industries. It is a company that manufactures drones and explosives for the armed forces, he said. "I am in touch with the Nagpur collector and superintendent of police. The IG, SP and collector are at the site," Fadnis added. The nine deceased have been identified as Yuvraj Charode, Omeshwar Macchirke, Mita Uikey, Aarti Sahare, Swetali Marbate, Pushpa Manupure, Bhagyashree Lonare, Rumita Uikey and Mausam Patle, a police official said. The other injured workers were rushed to a hospital. Their condition is reported to be critical, the official said. Authorities are assessing the extent of damage, conducting a thorough investigation into the cause of the explosion and ensuring safety of the surrounding areas. Superintendent of Police Harsh Poddar said.

# Tension erupts in Bihar after mutilated body of temple staff surfaces

PTI ■ PATNA

Tension erupted in Gopalganj district of Bihar on Sunday after the body of a local temple staff, who went missing a week ago, was found in a mutilated condition on the outskirts of a village, police said. The deceased, Manoj Kumar Sah, was last seen venturing out of the temple in Manjha village in Danapur area on Monday and his body was found on Saturday, Gopalganj Superintendent of Police Swarn Prabhat said. "A rumour is being spread that he was the priest of the temple. He was a caretaker who used to sleep inside the temple premises. Locals say they had last seen him locking the temple's gate on Monday night and going out. Further details will be known after an investigation," Prabhat said. Asked about reports of bullet injuries found on the body, eyes missing and cuts on private parts, the SP said, "We must await the post-mortem report before addressing these queries." On the possible motive behind the murder, Prabhat said the temple was embroiled in a land dispute. "The case is being probed from all angles and the culprits will be brought to book at the

earliest," he added. Sub-Divisional Police Officer, Pranjal Tripathi, said a group of villagers had staged a demonstration on a highway in the morning in protest against the killing of a local resident. A police party that went to the spot was attacked and its vehicle was vandalised, Tripathi said. "But, the situation was brought under control soon and an FIR is being lodged in connection with the incident. Those who were involved in the attack on policemen will be identified and caught," he said. Meanwhile, the opposition BJP lashed out at the Nitish Kumar government, alleging that the murder was proof of "jungle raj" in Bihar. Union Minister of State for Home Nityanand Rai, a former Bihar BJP president, alleged in a statement, "Criminals are roaming around without fear because of the patronage they receive from Chief Minister Nitish Kumar and Deputy CM Tejashwi Yadav." The BJP stands with the bereaved family members and will fight to ensure that justice is done, it said. "The people of Bihar will punish the government in the next elections," Rai said in the statement.

# 3 hybrid terrorists involved in attack on policeman arrested: J&K DGP

PTI ■ SRINAGAR

Three "hybrid" terrorists involved in last week's attack on a policeman in Bemina area of Srinagar city have been arrested. Director General of Police Jammu and Kashmir R R Swain said on Sunday.

Constable Mohammad Hafeez Chak was attacked on December 9 while he was returning home. The DGP said the conspiracy was hatched by one Pakistan-based terrorist Arjumand alias Hamza Burhan who got in touch with a local mastermind Danish Ahmad Malla to carry out the attack. "The hybrid terrorists who were involved in the attack have been arrested. This briefing is about the success that the J&K Police has achieved in tracing the killers (attackers) of one of our policemen," Swain told reporters here.

"Constable Mohammad Hafeez Chak fortunately survived the attack. We hope and pray that he will be back hale and hearty. As far as the killers (are concerned), they had done their job. Six bullets were fired, three hit the cop and three did not," he added. Hybrid terrorists are those who carry out attacks and then slip back into their routine lives, police said.

Swain said Malla, who lives in the same locality as the policeman, recruited two hybrid terrorists -- Intiyaz Khanday and Mehnaan Khan. "They managed (to get) pistols and followed him for several days before carrying out the attack. The pistol used (in the attack) has been recovered at the instance of Khanday who had fired the bullets," he said. The DGP said another pistol was recovered from Khan while 57 pistol rounds were recovered



from Malla. Swain said during questioning, the terrorists revealed that they had finalised a list of targets. "They had a number of other targets. While some were finalised, others were in the process of being identified. Most of the targets were policemen but there were some non-policemen also on their radar," he said. Asked if the arrested men had any hand in the killing of Inspector Masroor Wani, the DGP said the case was being investigated by the NIA. "That (case) is still under investigation, the NIA has taken over the investigation. I think it would be inappropriate to prematurely start connecting," he said. The DGP said Turkish pistol Canik TP9 was used in carrying out the attack. Canik TP9 is a high-quality pistol and its lightweight makes it very good, he said. It was not the first time that Canik TP9 has been recovered from terrorists in Jammu and Kashmir, the police chief said. "But we are seeing a pattern and a trend... This category of small arms is being brought into Jammu and Kashmir through drones and through a variety of other means, being smuggled into our side from Pakistan," he said.

# BJP MLA Ramvihar Netam appointed pro-tem Speaker of Chhattisgarh Assembly

PTI ■ RAIPUR

Senior BJP MLA Ramvihar Netam was on Sunday sworn in as the pro-tem Speaker of the newly-elected Chhattisgarh legislative assembly.

Governor Biswabhusan Harichandan administered the oath of office to 61-year-old Netam at a function held at the Raj Bhawan here. Chhattisgarh Chief Minister Vishnu Deo Sai, Deputy CMs Arun Sao and Vijay Sharma, Congress legislature party leader Charan Das Mahant, former chief minister Bhupesh Baghel and various officials were present at the occasion. The first session of the sixth assembly of Chhattisgarh is scheduled to start from December 19. Pro-tem speaker is a temporary speaker appointed for a limited period of time to conduct the business of the House



in the absence of a regular speaker. Netam won from Ramanujganj seat in the recently held state assembly elections, defeating Congress' Ajay Tirkey by a margin of 29,663 votes. A six-term MLA, Netam was also elected as the Rajya Sabha member in 2016. He served as a minister twice in the Raman Singh-led BJP government in Chhattisgarh (2003 and 2008).

# Vijayan accuses Kerala Governor of trying to destroy peace in State

PTI ■ PATHANAMTHITTA (KERALA)

Kerala Chief Minister Pinarayi Vijayan on Sunday accused Governor Arif Mohammed Khan of deliberately 'attempting to destroy' the peace in the southern state by making provocative statements. The hard-hitting accusation by the CM came during a press conference held here as part of the Nava Kerala Sadas, an outreach programme of the state government. Responding to reporters' queries about the Governor calling the protesting SFI activists as "criminals", Vijayan said Khan has "reached a situation where he is saying whatever comes to mind". "He (Khan) is forgetting that he is the Governor of Kerala," the CM said. Vijayan said that he had earlier also pointed out that Khan was "deliberately attempting to destroy the peace in the state through his actions" and



the same has been proven by the Governor's subsequent actions. "He (Khan) has tried to create the maximum possible provocation on every issue," he added. The CM also criticised Khan for referring to the protesting activists of the CPI(M)'s student wing -- the Students Federation of India -- as "criminals" and "goondas". "How can he use such rude words against the protesters?" he asked. Khan, a day ago, reiterated that the volunteers of the

ruling CPI(M)'s students' wing were "criminals" to whom he was not accountable to explain any of his decisions. He had alleged that the protesting students were "criminals hired by the chief minister". Earlier this week, he had accused the CM of 'conspiring' to hurt him physically. Khan had made the accusation after his vehicle was allegedly attacked by SFI activists while he was on his way to the Thiruvananthapuram International Airport to leave

for Delhi. On Sunday, Vijayan lashed out the Governor for attempting to confront the protesting SFI activists when they had allegedly blocked his vehicle and attacked it earlier this week. "Has anyone ever tried to physically confront or take on those waving black flags at them? And then he (Khan) boasts that they (protestors) ran away when he went towards them. Look how provocative his statements are. His actions and interventions are totally bereft of common sense," the CM said. Claiming that the Governor's actions were in violation of all normal protocols, he said the central government needs to take a look into that. "The CM further said that when black flags are waved at him or his cavalcade, neither he nor the ministers or members of the Left front use derogatory words against the protesters.

# Gloomy 2023 for Sikkim as flash flood wreaks havoc

PTI ■ GANGTOK

Sikkim will remember 2023 mostly as a gloomy year due to the deaths of scores of people in a massive flash flood in Teesta River triggered by a cloudburst in glacial South Lhonak Lake. At least 42 people were killed, while 77 others remained missing and thousands were displaced as the raging Teesta, which was in spate after the cloudburst in north Sikkim on October 4, inundated towns and villages downstream. At least 1,173 houses were damaged and 13 bridges washed away, while the Chungthang hydroelectric

power dam in Mangan district was completely destroyed. Over 25,000 people were displaced and sheltered in 22 relief camps. However, the visit of Dalai Lama to the Himalayan state in December after over a decade brought some solace to the people scarred by the devastation, as over 30,000 people listened to his sermons on Buddhist philosophy at Gangtok's Paljor Stadium. Sikkim hosted a G20 meeting in August, during which the state showcased its rich culture and traditions to the world. Investors showed interest in pumping in Rs 1,000 crore in the Himalayan state.



The year started with nine-year-old Sikkimese girl Jetshen Dohna Lama bringing cheers to the people of the state by winning a prestigious reality singing contest on national

television, as thousands lined up on both sides of the road to welcome her upon her return home after the victory. The state got a new governor in Lakshman Prasad Acharya,

who was sworn in on February 16, replacing Ganga Prasad. February also saw protests over a Supreme Court verdict referring to Sikkimese Nepalis as "foreigners of Nepali origin". Civil society organisations, political parties and all sections of the society came together to demand the deletion of the word "foreigner" from the verdict, which was later done ceasing all the protests. The state also witnessed violent protests after the body of Padam Gurung, a student leader of Namchi Government College, was found in a drain in June. Opposition political parties and various other organisations staged protest

rallies demanding a CBI inquiry into the incident. Prohibitory orders under Section 144 of CrPC were imposed in Namchi town in south Sikkim in August after protestors turned violent during a rally demanding justice for Gurung. Police baton-charged the agitators and fired tear gas shells at them to bring the situation under control. The state government constituted a one-man inquiry committee comprising a retired high court chief justice, who in the first week of November submitted his report in which it was stated that Gurung's death was "accidental".





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PAPER WITH PASSION

## Reaching out

The PM's focus is rightly on developing smaller cities for all-round growth of the nation

Acknowledging that robust infrastructure is the cornerstone of progress, Prime Minister Narendra Modi has articulated a visionary plan that underscores the significance of smaller cities in India's developmental journey. The Viksit Bharat Yatra, translating to "Developed India Journey," serves as a platform for the Prime Minister to share his insights and aspirations for the nation's growth. Modi's emphasis on smaller cities signals a paradigm shift in the approach to urban development and economic progress. Modi's call to focus on smaller cities reflects a strategic understanding of the integral role they play in the nation's overall development. While metropolitan regions often grab the spotlight, smaller cities form the backbone of the country's economic, cultural and social fabric. These cities are often reservoirs of untapped potential, waiting to be harnessed for the greater good. Modi's vision for the Viksit Bharat Yatra revolves around empowering local economies and creating sustainable growth engines in smaller cities. By directing attention and resources to these areas, the Government aims to decentralise development, ensuring that the benefits of progress reach every corner of the country. This approach aligns with the idea of a self-reliant India, where each region contributes significantly to the nation's economic well-being. The 'One District, One Product' (ODOP) programme by the Government is all about promoting balanced regional development. The UP Government has already taken the lead in this direction.



Improved connectivity, modern amenities and state-of-the-art facilities are vital to attracting investments

and fostering a conducive environment for businesses to thrive. The Government's commitment to developing smart cities and upgrading existing infrastructure aligns with its goal of creating a more inclusive and balanced growth trajectory. Smaller cities have the potential to emerge as hubs of employment opportunities, offering a counter-narrative to the urban migration phenomenon. By investing in skill development programmes and encouraging industries to set up operations there, the Government aims to create a scenario where citizens can find meaningful employment opportunities in their hometowns. This not only addresses the issue of unemployment but also contributes to the overall socio-economic uplift of the regions. In the digital age, the Prime Minister's focus on smaller cities also entails a commitment to bridging the digital divide. This includes initiatives to improve digital literacy, enhance online connectivity and promote e-governance, thereby ensuring that smaller cities are not left behind in the fast-paced world of technological advancements. For a long time, smaller towns have been ignored by urban planners and it is time to correct that. By recognising their potential and addressing the unique challenges they face, the Government aims to create a more balanced and inclusive growth trajectory.

### PICTALK



People celebrate the 'Hubballi Akashbutti Habba' with enthusiasm, in Hubballi

PTIO

## Fossil fuels and the rapid retreat of glaciers

There is link between fossil fuel emissions and global warming that has serious consequences for the Himalayan region

The recently concluded Conference of Parties (COP28) took a major decisive step to end to the fossil fuel era for the survival of humanity. Interestingly this landmark decision was taken from the land of the powerful oil-producer group Organization of the Petroleum Exporting Countries (OPEC). Nations struck a historic deal in Dubai to work towards the transition of the global economy away from fossil fuels. Addressing a meeting with mountain countries at COP28, the U.N. Secretary-General Antonio Guterres emphasised the need to protect the Himalayan glaciers.



around 240 million people depend on glaciers and ten major rivers originating in the Himalayas. These rivers include the Indus, Ganga, and Brahmaputra. Glacier-fed rivers are vital to the livelihoods of another billion people who live downstream of these rivers in eight different nations, including India. Burning peaks of the Himalayas exhibit a high albedo. Albedo refers to the reflective properties of a surface, indicating the percentage of incoming solar radiation that is reflected into space. Snow and ice have high albedo values because they are highly reflective, meaning they reflect a significant portion of the sunlight that hits them. In the case of the Himalayas, the snow-covered peaks contribute to a high albedo, especially at higher elevations where snow cover is more persistent. Changes in snow cover due to climate

change can alter this effect, potentially influencing local temperatures and weather patterns.

The burning of fossil fuels, such as coal, oil, and natural gas, is a major contributor to climate change, and it has direct implications for the Himalayan glaciers. The increased tourist influx to the Himalayan regions, including the glaciers beyond their threshold limit, has enhanced fossil fuel emissions. The burning of fossil fuels releases greenhouse gases, including carbon dioxide (CO<sub>2</sub>), methane (CH<sub>4</sub>), and nitrous oxide (N<sub>2</sub>O), into the atmosphere. These gases trap heat, creating a "greenhouse effect." The combustion of fossil fuels produces black carbon, a particulate matter that can settle on snow and ice. It is emitted into the atmosphere due to incomplete combustion of fossil fuels in motor vehicles and aircraft exhausts, bio-fuel and biomass. Black carbon reduces the reflective properties of snow and ice, absorbing more sunlight and emitting infrared radiation that increases the temperature. So, when there is an increase in black carbon in the high

Himalayas, it will contribute to the faster melting of Himalayan glaciers. The rising temperatures cause glaciers to retreat, and the rate of melting exceeds the accumulation of new ice and snow. Glacier retreat contributes to changes in river flow patterns, affecting water availability downstream. As the glacier retreats a moraine-dammed lake forms and meltwater fills the space between the proglacial moraine and the retreating glacier. As the volume of the glacial lake grows, so does the pressure on the dam containing it. Fragmentation of the source glacier, landslides and other processes can trigger displacement waves in the lake, compromising the stability of the dam and resulting in a Glacial Lake Outburst Flood (GLOF). GLOFs pose significant threats to downstream communities. Preserving the Himalayas is crucial for the welfare of the region's diverse ecosystems and local communities. (The writer is an adjunct faculty at the National Institute of Advanced Studies, Bengaluru, views are personal)



BIJU DHARMAPALAN

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## Cash for query case: Was expulsion justified

The hasty expulsion of Mahua Moitra from Parliament is not a good omen for parliamentary democracy and sets a bad precedence



PRADEEP BAJPAI

Indian politicians, generally, are not known for their intellect, education, or articulation. Mahua Moitra stood out in this motley crowd of mediocrity. She had all these, plus international exposure, having left a prestigious, remunerative job in investment banking abroad to join politics in her country in 2009. With her sophistication and affluence, she appeared immune to that ubiquitous trait of the lowest common denominator in Indian politics — corruption. Her expulsion from Lok Sabha in the alleged "Cash for Query" scam is lamentable in more ways than one. If the charges are justified, they undermine the public's trust in our politicians; more ominously, it makes citizens question whether democracy is suitable for our society.

Secondly, it underscores the depravity to which even our power elite have now sunk. Such a loss of moral innocence could perhaps be overlooked, even rationalised, in the case of a newbie politician, with a deprived background and hailing from the rustic hinterland, getting bedazzled by the blandishments with which businesses seek favours from the powerful. It is difficult for the millennial generation to imagine a stalwart like Lal Bahadur Shastri dying in harness without a house of his own and with only an Ambassador car, purchased through a bank loan, being his most valuable asset. If the allegations are not true, Moitra's expulsion augurs a worse scenario where a majority government can wreak havoc on its inconvenient opponents at will on false charges. This would stymie all dissent and let a totalitarian regime impose its imperious will on differing ideologies and interests. This is a loss-loss situation for the nation where citizens stand to lose either way. And therefore, it needs to be probed further. Quite apart from the financial corruption angle, the case throws up some disconcerting issues. Time was when "parliamentary language" connoted civility and decorum; to use words like "besharam" and "behooda" for another MP was unthinkable.



Politicians led sober, even austere, lives and lived up to the country's cultural ethos and values. Smt Indira Gandhi, with all her affluence, westernised family background, sported an inexpensive HMT watch. Upon being asked by President Johnson at the White House banquet for the customary dance, during her US visit in 1966, she politely declined saying that it would not be liked in Indian society. Today, gallivanting socialites find their way into Parliament and flaunt their West-inspired moral shenanigans and ultra-rich accessories in utter disregard of public opinion. In 1951, Congress MP HD Mudgal was found to have taken two bribes of merely 1000 each from the Indian Bullion Association in return for asking questions on their behalf. Faced with Parliamentary enquiry, he chose to resign to avoid the ignominy of expulsion. Nehru, always a stickler for financial propriety, insisted even after the resignation, that the Parliamentary Committee resolution record that the ex-MP "was deserving of expulsion". His political career ended, there being no question of going back to the hustings and getting re-elected. Ms Moitra's party, the TMC, sees no problem in giving her a ticket to

HER EXPULSION FROM LOK SABHA IN THE ALLEGED "CASH FOR QUERY" SCAM IS LAMENTABLE IN MORE WAYS THAN ONE. IF THE CHARGES ARE JUSTIFIED, THEY UNDERMINE THE PUBLIC'S TRUST IN OUR POLITICIANS

### LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

#### SMOKE BOMB IN PARLIAMENT

Sir — Police believe that the two men who jumped from the visitors' gallery to the floor of the Lok Sabha and spread yellow gas of phosphorus or phosphate-based chemicals inside were trying to replicate Shaheed Bhagat Singh's feat in the Indian Parliament. Perhaps, a major mishap in Parliament was averted thanks to the timely and brave intervention of the two members in the opposition ranks, who caught the two prowlers and pinned them down. The attackers have been arrested and remanded.

The officers of the Delhi Police have been suspended. And in a bizarre twist, more than a dozen opposition members in Parliament have been suspended for displaying placards in the House and demanding a statement from the Home Minister. Yet, the Bharatiya Janata Party MP, who paved the way for the entry of these offenders, remains untouched. And the Home Minister stubbornly refuses to make any statements on the incident, which shook the nation, in the supreme bodies of the Indian state. The ruling establishment needed to be told that an attack on Parliament is an attack on India, and the Government's actions are not to be influenced by the perceived electoral prospects of the ruling party.

Haridasan Rajan | Kozhikode

#### MAYAWATI PASSING THE BATON

Sir — Mayawati seems to have given a go-by to her political ambitions if the appointment of nephew Akash Anand as her political heir is any indication. Despite keeping to herself of late, in Uttar Pradesh politics none could ignore Mayawati. But by her latest announcement, the Bahujan Samaj Party (BSP) leader has shocked even her most ardent supporters because Akash Anand, a political novice, is no match to his redoubtable aunt.

Politics is about perception, and people are here to judge their leaders by the latter's approach and attitude more than anything else. Admittedly, Mayawati has not been her usual self in electoral politics over the

#### Who cares for farmers?



Indian farmers did not agitate and take to the streets in 2020-21 just because this government had passed three farm bills. But it was also done because small farmers' financial condition is very bad in this country. Not only this, the plight of the labourers working in the fields of these farmers related to agriculture cannot be described even in words. This government is aware of the financial condition of the farmers, which is why under the PM-Kisan scheme, it started depositing Rs 6,000 in three equal instalments of Rs 2,000 every four months in the bank account

linked to the farmer's Aadhaar. But is this amount enough? Do those who do not have any agricultural land? Lakhs of people are forced to earn their living by labouring in the fields. They are not getting any kind of assistance.

Perhaps this is the reason why the trend of farmers and labourers committing suicide is not stopping. Maharashtra Relief and Rehabilitation Minister Anil Bhaidas Patil has told the Assembly that since March this year, 2366 farmers have committed suicide across the state. These figures are those which have been recorded and have been sent to the government. But the number of suicides is even much higher than this. This is the data of only one state Maharashtra. The situation of the entire country will become even more dire. Yet the government is feeling proud in continuously ignoring the demands of our food providers. MSP law was promised but no one is ready to do anything about it.

Jang Bahadur Sing | Jamshedpur

last half-decade. The four-time chief minister had high hopes for BSP in the 2017 assembly elections. But the party cut a sorry figure bagging only 19 seats swept away by the Narendra Modi wave. However, the humiliation was complete in 2022 as the BSP could win only 1 out of 403. Despite allegations of massive corruption during her chief ministerial tenure, the 67-year-old BSP chief has always been admired for her efficient administration and social engineering. The fighter that she is, Mayawati would know that no leader other than her would do full justice to her vote bank. But, by the look of things, she appears to have chosen to fade into oblivion.

Ganapathi Bhat | Akola

#### DMK FAILED CHENNAI

Sir — The DMK party having an election symbol of the rising sun, is now trying to fathom the mishandling of Cyclone Michaung and the Chennai floods. It proved the government's failure in a rather big way. To cover up all the misdoings including the wasteful expenditure of

Rs.4000 crores in drainage desilting not done up to the expectations leading to a flood-like situation in the city and the suburbs. Nothing has been done in honesty and transparency resulting in such a hopeless situation. The people crossed the fence and the failed administration jumped into action rather late.

The measures taken to control flood were inadequate in Chennai and its neighbouring areas and the expenditure involved went simply as a waste. Now trying to do damage control is trying to break shackles but it is rather late. It appears as though the government is trying to take Surya Namaskar after losing both eyes one to Sanatan and the other to the monsoon floods now trying to take a sunbath to recover lost eyes. The amount spent was lost in water and now the party is trying to observe Surya Namaskar to recover lost eyes.

Nikhil Ramani | Chennai

Send your feedback to: letterstopioneer@gmail.com





## FIRST COLUMN

## THE PHILOSOPHY OF RITUALS

Purva Mimamsa focuses on adherence to duty and reverence for the Vedas



SWAMI CHARANASHRITH

Purva Mimamsa, often referred to simply as Mimamsa, is one of the six classical schools of Indian philosophy. It is an ancient philosophical system that focuses on the interpretation of the Vedas, the oldest and most authoritative scriptures in Hinduism. The term "Mimamsa" itself means investigation or inquiry, reflecting the essence of this school's approach to understanding the Vedic texts.

**Origins and Development:**

Purva Mimamsa is traditionally attributed to the sage Jaimini, who is believed to have composed the Mimamsa Sutras, the foundational text of this philosophical school, around the 3rd century BCE. The Mimamsa Sutras consist of twelve chapters, with each chapter containing aphorisms that delve into the intricacies of Vedic rituals, sacrifices, and the correct interpretation of Vedic texts.

**Key Concepts:***Karma Kanda and Jnana Kanda:*

Purva Mimamsa distinguishes between two main sections of the Vedas: Karma Kanda and Jnana Kanda. Karma Kanda deals with the ritualistic and sacrificial aspects of the Vedas, prescribing various rites and ceremonies to achieve desired outcomes. Jnana Kanda, on the other hand, focuses on the knowledge of the ultimate reality and the self.

*Karma (Action) and Dharma (Duty):*

Central to Purva Mimamsa is the concept of Karma, which refers to ritualistic actions prescribed in the Vedas. The performance of these actions is considered a sacred duty, and adherence to one's duty, or Dharma, is seen as crucial for spiritual and moral growth.

*Authority of the Vedas:*

Purva Mimamsa places unparalleled importance on the authority of the Vedas. It asserts that the Vedas are apauruṣeya, meaning they are not authored by any human being but are divinely revealed. As such, the Mimamsa school insists on the literal interpretation of Vedic texts.

*Swadhyaaya (Self-study):*

Mimamsa encourages the practice of Swadhyaaya, which involves the systematic study and recitation of Vedic texts. The meticulous study of the Vedas is considered essential for a correct understanding of the rituals and their proper performance.

**Philosophical Significance:**

Purva Mimamsa is primarily concerned with practical aspects of life, focusing on the rituals and duties outlined in the Vedas. Its emphasis on the authority of the Vedas and the precision in performing rituals has contributed to the preservation of Vedic traditions over centuries. While it may seem ritualistic and orthoprax, Mimamsa has a deeper purpose - to guide individuals on the path of righteousness and facilitate their spiritual evolution.

**Criticism and Legacy:**

Purva Mimamsa has faced criticism from other schools of Indian philosophy, particularly from Vedanta, which prioritizes knowledge of the self and the ultimate reality over ritualistic practices. Despite this, Purva Mimamsa has left an indelible mark on Hindu thought and continues to be influential, particularly in shaping the conduct of religious ceremonies and preserving the Vedic heritage.

Purva Mimamsa stands as a testament to the rich tapestry of Indian philosophical thought. While it may not be as well-known as some of the other schools, its focus on the practical aspects of life, adherence to duty, and reverence for the Vedas have contributed significantly to the cultural and spiritual landscape of India. Purva Mimamsa emerges as a unique and valuable perspective, inviting us to contemplate the profound interplay between ritualistic practices and the quest for ultimate knowledge.

(The writer is a spiritual guide; views are personal)

# Fight lifestyle diseases with millets

To prevent lifestyle-related diseases and lead a healthy life, regular consumption of millets, and pseudocereals is highly desirable



SUDARSAN MANDAL



India is facing the epidemiological transition with a spike in non-communicable diseases (NCDs) or "lifestyle" diseases like diabetes, stroke, hypertension, kidney, liver and heart diseases as well as the "dual disease burden" due to the prevailing raised prevalence of communicable diseases. The various factors contributing to this exponentially growing epidemic are dominated by the unhealthy diet intake which affects all the age groups equally. The growing epidemic of diet-communicable diseases (DR-NCDs), along with widely prevalent undernutrition results in a substantial socioeconomic burden.

Over the past three decades, the increasing consumption of processed food or unhealthy diets has resulted in the decreased intake of coarse cereals, pulses, fruits and vegetables, and an increased intake of meat products and salt. This has further increased about 6% of energy being derived from fats and a decrease of 7% in the energy derived from carbohydrates. Contributing to the growing burden of NCDs, the Nutrition transition coupled with reduced physical activity due to rapid urbanization has resulted in escalating levels of obesity, atherogenic dyslipidemia, subclinical inflammation, metabolic syndrome, type 2 diabetes mellitus, and coronary heart disease in Indians (Mishra, et al, 2011). Also, the increased prevalence of malnutrition is characterized by an increased intake of Western-style diets and a decrease in physical activity in association with high consumption of tobacco and alcohol among fathers and mothers. The growing trend of preventing diet-related diseases by consuming functional foods has been taken up by the Government of India. As epidemiological studies show diets rich in plant foods, including whole grains, protect us against non-communicable diseases like diabetes, cancer and cardiovascular diseases, due to the protective effects of phy-



tonutrients. Therefore, the Department of Health & Family Welfare provides, advocates & implements initiatives for increasing public awareness and for the promotion of a healthy lifestyle under the National Programme for Prevention and Control of non-communicable diseases (NP-NCD). Furthermore, healthy eating is also promoted by the Food Safety and Standards Authority of India (FSSAI). Further to the efforts towards introducing healthy eating habits in the population, Millets have resurfaced as a healthy & more efficient option. Millets are the traditional grains, grown and consumed in the Indian subcontinent from the past more than 5000 years. They are rain-fed hardy grains that have low requirements of water and fertility when compared to other popular cereals.

They are a group of small, grained cereal food crops that are highly tolerant to drought and other extreme weather conditions and are grown with low chemical inputs such as fertilizers and pesticides. Most of millet crops are native to India and are popularly known as Nutri Cereals as they provide most of the nutrients required for the normal functioning of the human body. Millets comprising sorghum, pearl millet, finger millet, minor millets etc as Nutri cereals. Millets are connected to climate resilience. The need of the hour is to understand that it's crucial to increase the productivity of millets, which includes R&D, good care of crops and a robust supply chain.

Globally Millets are grown in the Asian region where countries like India, Nigeria and China are the

largest producers of millets in the world, accounting for more than 55% of the global production. For many years, India was a major producer of millet - However, in recent years, millet production has increased dramatically in Africa. In India, pearl millet is the fourth-most widely cultivated food crop after rice, wheat and maize - Millets are available almost across India.

India has been aware of the multitude of benefits that Nutri Cereals offer. Our ancestors were smart enough to reap all these benefits, as compared to the present generation which has been diverted and misguided with the growing commercialisation & urbanisation. Millets are highly nutritious, non-glutinous and non-acid-forming foods. They have many nutraceutical and health-promoting properties, especially the high fibre content. Millets act as a prebiotic feeding for micro-flora in our inner ecosystem.

They hydrate our colon to keep us from being constipated. The Niacin content helps in lowering cholesterol. It contains major and minor nutrients in good amounts along with dietary fibre. It can very well be a substitute for wheat or gluten-containing grains for celiac patients.

The exceeding benefits of having millet/ nutri-cereals in our regular diet help tackle health challenges such as obesity, diabetes and lifestyle problems owing to their low glycaemic index, high dietary fibre and antioxidants. Nutri-cereals are highly nutritious and known to have high nutrient content which includes protein, essential fatty acids, dietary fibre, B-Vitamins and minerals such as calcium, iron, zinc, potassium and

magnesium. It can provide nutritional security and protect against nutritional deficiency, especially among children and women. It will also be critical for climate change measures in drylands and important for smallholder and marginal farmers.

Nutri-cereals are nutritionally superior to major cereals in terms of slow digestible carbohydrates, non-allergenic proteins, dietary fibre and micronutrients. They contain 55-75% starch, 7-15% protein, 2-5% lipid, 2-4% minerals, and 7-15% dietary fibre. The nutritional and health benefits of millet and pseudocereals have been very well documented and they are recommended to minimize the intensity as well as management of non-communicable diseases such as diabetes, cardiovascular diseases, and obesity. In the present scenario of a sedentary lifestyle, prevention of lifestyle-related diseases and leading a healthy life, regular consumption of millet, and pseudocereals is highly desirable.

**Government Initiatives:**

To enhance awareness and promote the production & consumption of millets, the millets were rebranded as "Nutri Cereals and "2018" was designated as the National Year of Millets. Later, the United Nations General Assembly on its 75th session declared 2023 as the International Year of Millets. This will provide an opportunity to (i) increase global production, (ii) efficient processing and better use of crop rotation and (iii) promote millets as a major component of the food basket.

(The writer is Deputy Director General, Dte.GHS, MoHFW, Government of India, views are personal)

# Higher education in Kerala needs an overhaul

Politics has claimed the quality of Kerala's higher education. The standards are at an all time low and no meaningful research is coming out of its universities

Kerala is undergoing a turmoil and political churning process. Governor Arif Mohammed Khan, who is described by the general public as the most popular citizen the State has seen in the last two decades, is being waylaid and attacked by the ruling CPI-M and their student wing, the SFI. The charge against the Governor is that he is acting as a hitman of the RSS and saffronising the institutions of higher learning. The attacks against him saw a sudden spurt since Saturday evening as SFI activists showed black flags at the fleet of cars accompanying the Governor. What irked the CPI-M leadership was Arif Mohammed Khan's stance against the party's move to appoint fellow travellers, card-



KUMAR CHELLAPPAN

holding members of the party and relatives of party leaders as vice-chancellors and faculty members in the State's universities. The Governor's stance was vindicated by the Supreme Court which in a recent judgment declared as null and void the appointment of Gopinath Raveendran, the Marxist historian as the vice chancellor of Kannur University. The apex court is in the process of hearing an appeal filed by the UGC, Save University Campaign Committee and an aggrieved teacher against the appointment of the spouse of a CPI-M leader in the same university as an associate professor. The face-off between the Governor and Chief Minister Pinarayi Vijayan has led to a situation where the universities



in the State remain without vice chancellors for the last year. The SUCC, a body consisting of academics, veteran educationists and former teachers, allege that all appointments in the State's universities are made at AKG Centre (the

imposing State headquarters of the CPI-M at the capital city) and the Governor is forced to sign on dotted lines. Since the Governor questioned the impropriety in these appointments he has become persona non grata to the party commis-

sars as well as the SFI leaders. On Monday night when the SFI activists waved black flags at the governor and attacked his official car when he was on his way to the airport, a visibly shocked Arif Mohammed Khan got down from his car and rebuked the student leaders that they were acting as goondas. By Tuesday morning the young CPI-M ministers in the State accused the Governor of acting as the hatchet man of the RSS. Interestingly, this charge has been made by a minister who has been charged with cases of sexual assault on women. Another minister asked why the Governor got down from the car when the SFI workers were staging a protest against him. Interestingly, the SFI, once known for its commit-

ment and dedication to the causes of the CPI-M has become a butt of jokes for the kind of demands being made to the university authorities. The recently concluded students' election to the universities in the State saw the young CPI-M activists demanding that the staff councils (a body of faculty members in colleges) should have adequate representation for students and that university examinations to be held only in the afternoon as students wake up late. The next set of demands would feature that the vice-chancellors and faculty members should be appointed only with their concurrence! Gone are the days when vice-chancellors and faculty members were appointed based on their teaching

skills and ability to elevate the quality of students to new heights. The director of public education said in a closed-door meeting recently that marks are being showered on students who could not even write their own names without errors. Politics has claimed the quality of Kerala's higher education as the PhD thesis submitted by research scholars is not worth the papers in which they are written. Saraswathi, the goddess of education, could be heard weeping in universities and educational institutions. Sarva Kala Sala (Malayalam for University) has degenerated into Sarva Kalla Sala (shops of deception and claptrap). (The writer is a special correspondent with the Pioneer, views are personal)



# Sunak: Illegal migration threatens to overwhelm

PTI ■ LONDON

British Prime Minister Rishi Sunak, who was in Italy over the weekend on an official visit, has warned that illegal migration threatens to "overwhelm" Europe and indicated that it may be time for an update of international law. At an event in Rome on Saturday, the British Indian leader also cautioned that "enemies" could use immigration as a "weapon" by "deliberately driving people to our shores to try to destabilise" European society. He was addressing the Atrium political festival, organised by Italian Prime Minister Giorgia Meloni's right wing Brothers of Italy party.

"If we do not tackle this (illegal migration) problem, the numbers will only grow," said Sunak. "It will overwhelm our countries and our capacity to help those who actually need our help the most. If that

requires us to update our laws and lead an international conversation to amend the post-war frameworks around asylum, then we must do that. Because if we don't fix this problem now, the boats will keep coming and more lives will be lost at sea," he said.

Sunak has made "stop the boats" a government pledge on the domestic front and has faced several hurdles in efforts to control the large numbers of migrants crossing the English Channel to enter the UK illegally. "Criminal gangs will find ever cheaper ways to ply their evil trade. They will exploit our humanity. They think nothing of putting people's lives at risk when they put them in these boats at sea," he told the festival in Rome.

While in Italy, Sunak also held bilateral talks with counterpart Meloni during which tackling illegal migration was stated as a key area of discus-

sion. "They committed to continuing to strengthen the collective effort to fight criminal people smuggling gangs and ensure control of Europe's borders," Downing Street said in an official readout of the meeting.

"The Prime Minister and Prime Minister Meloni also discussed wider geopolitical issues, including the situation in Israel and Gaza and their unwavering support for Ukraine.

They noted progress on cooperation on Artificial Intelligence following the UK summit and agreed to continue driving forward initiatives on AI safety," the readout added. During a trilateral between the UK, Italy and Albania, Downing Street said the leaders welcomed progress to date and agreed to intensify joint activity to tackle organised immigration crime, including law enforcement cooperation.

# Canadian youth facing terrorism charges for alleged plot against Jewish

OTTAWA (AP): Canada's national police force said on Saturday that a youth was arrested and charged with terrorism-related offenses that allegedly targeted Jewish people. The Royal Canadian Mounted Police said the young person arrested on Friday was charged with facilitating terrorist activity by communicating instructional material related to an explosive substance.

The youth is further charged with knowingly instructing a person to carry out terrorist activity against "Jewish persons". Police did not release further details about the alleged offenses. Officials also said no further information about the youth could be released due to the suspect's age.

In a news release, the national police force said it is seeing a concerning trend of violent extremism and terrorist use of the internet, including among young people.

The RCMP urged adults in authority positions to watch for early warning signs of radicalization. Those include dehumanization of others, extreme anti-government attitudes and clear statements of intention to carry out violent acts. Many officials have been raising the alarm about a reported rise in hate crimes against Jewish communities since Hamas's October 7 attack in Israel, prompting that country's military offensive in Gaza.

"I was shocked to learn the details of a planned attack against Ottawa's Jewish community," Ottawa Mayor Mark Sutcliffe said on X, formerly known as Twitter. "There has been a rise in antisemitism in Ottawa in recent weeks."

He added he was grateful that strong investigative work by the RCMP and Ottawa police was able to avert an attack.

He said police would continue to patrol synagogues and other Jewish institutions.

# UN: 60 drowned as migrant boat capsizes off Libya

AP ■ CAIRO

A boat carrying dozens of migrants trying to reach Europe capsized off the coast of Libya, leaving more than 60 people dead, including women and children, the UN migration agency said.

The shipwreck, which took place overnight between Thursday and Friday, was the latest tragedy in this part of the Mediterranean Sea, a key but dangerous route for migrants seeking a better life in Europe. Thousands have died, according to officials. The UN's International Organisation for Migration said in a statement late on Saturday that the boat was carrying 86 migrants when strong waves swamped it off the town of Zuwara on Libya's western coast and that 61 migrants drowned, according to survivors.

"The central Mediterranean continues to be one of the world's most dangerous migration routes," the agency wrote on social media platform X, formerly known as Twitter.

The European Union's border agency said in a statement on Sunday that its plane located the partially deflated rubber boat on Thursday evening in Libya's search and rescue zone. "The people were in severe danger because of adverse weather conditions, with waves reaching heights of 2.5 metres," the agency, known as Frontex, said.

Alarm Phone — a hotline for migrants in distress — said in a tweet that some migrants onboard reached out to the volunteer group who in turn alerted authorities including the Libyan coastguard, "who stated that they would not search for them."

A spokesman for the Libyan coast guard was not immediately available for comment. Libya has in recent years emerged as the dominant transit point for migrants fleeing war and poverty in Africa and

the Middle East, even though the North African nation has plunged into chaos following a NATO-backed uprising that toppled and killed longtime autocrat Moammar Gadhafi in 2011.

More than 2,250 people died on the central European route this year, according to Flavio Di Giacomo, an IOM spokesperson.

It's "a dramatic figure which demonstrates that unfortunately not enough is being done to save lives at sea," Di Giacomo wrote on X.

According to the IOM's missing migrants project, at least 940 migrants were reported dead and 1,248 missing off Libya between January 1 and November 18.

The project, which tracks migration movements, said about 14,900 migrants, including over 1,000 women and more than 530 children, were intercepted and returned to Libya this year.

In 2022, the project reported 529 dead and 848 missing off Libya. Over 24,600 were intercepted and returned to Libya.

Human traffickers in recent years have benefited from the chaos in Libya, smuggling in migrants across the country's lengthy borders, which it shares with six nations. The migrants are crowded onto ill-equipped vessels, including rubber boats, and set off on risky sea voyages.

Those who are intercepted and returned to Libya are held in government-run detention centres rife with abuses, including forced labour, beatings, rapes and torture — practices that amount to crimes against humanity, according to UN-commissioned investigators.

The abuse often accompanies attempts to extort money from the families of the imprisoned migrants before allowing them to leave Libya on traffickers' boats to Europe.

# Israel faces new truce calls

AP ■ DEIR AL-BALAH

Israel's government faced local protests and calls for a cease-fire from some of its closest European allies on Sunday after a series of shootings, including of three hostages who were waving a white flag, added to mounting concerns about its conduct in the 10-week-old war in Gaza.

The protesters are calling on the government to renew hostage negotiations with Gaza's Hamas rulers, whom it has vowed to destroy. Israel could also face pressure to scale back major combat operations when US Defence Secretary Lloyd Austin visits this week, as Washington has expressed growing unease with civilian casualties even while providing vital military and diplomatic support.

The air and ground war has flattened large parts of northern Gaza, killed thousands of civilians and driven most of the population to the southern part of the besieged territory, where many are packed into crowded shelters and tent camps, surviving off a trickle of humanitarian aid.

Some 1.9 million Palestinians — nearly 85 per cent of Gaza's population — have fled their homes.

Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu said Israel "will continue to fight until the end," with the goal of eliminating Hamas, which triggered the war with its October 7 attack into southern Israel. Palestinian militants killed some 1,200 people that day, mostly civilians, and captured scores of hostages.

Netanyahu vowed to bring back the estimated 129 hostages still in captivity. Israeli media reported that David Barnea, the head of Israel's Mossad spy agency, met over the weekend with Qatar's prime minister, Sheikh Mohammed bin Abdulrahman Al Thani, who has mediated with Hamas, to discuss renewed talks. Gaza meanwhile remained under a communications blackout for a fourth straight day — the longest of several outages during the war, which aid groups say complicate rescue efforts and make it even more difficult to monitor the toll on civilians.

In a sign of desperation, dozens of Palestinians surrounded aid trucks after they drove in through the Rafah crossing with Egypt, forcing them to stop before climbing aboard, pulling the boxes down and carrying them off.

SHOOTINGS DRAW SCRUTINY

Military officials said on Saturday that the three hostages who were mistakenly shot by Israeli troops had tried to signal that they posed no harm. It was Israel's first such acknowledgement of harming hostages in a war that it says is largely aimed at rescuing them.

The three hostages, all in their 20s, were killed on Friday in the Gaza City area of Shijaiyah, where troops are engaged in fierce fighting with Hamas. An Israeli military official said the shootings were against the army's rules of engagement and were being investigated at the highest level.

Israel says it makes every effort to avoid harming civilians and accuses Hamas of using them as human shields. But Palestinians and rights groups have repeatedly accused Israeli forces of recklessly endangering civilians and firing on those who do not threaten them, both in Gaza and the occupied West Bank, which has seen a surge of violence since the start of the war.

At least five Palestinians were killed during an Israeli raid in a built-up refugee camp in the West Bank town of Tulkarem, the Palestinian



Families and supporters of Israeli hostages held by Hamas in Gaza attend a rally calling for their return, in Tel Aviv, Israel, Saturday. More than 100 Israeli hostages are held in Gaza after being abducted in a Hamas cross-border attack. AP/PTI

Health Ministry said on Sunday. Last week, Israel said it was opening a military police investigation after an Israeli rights group posted videos that appeared to show troops killing two men — one who was incapacitated and the second unarmed — during a West Bank raid.

In Gaza, Palestinians on several occasions have said Israeli soldiers opened fire at fleeing civilians. Hamas has claimed other hostages were killed by Israeli fire or airstrikes, without presenting evidence.

The offensive has killed more than 18,700 Palestinians, the Health Ministry in the Hamas-run territory said Thursday. It has not been able to update the toll since then because of the communications blackout, and has said for weeks that thousands more casualties are buried under the rubble.

The ministry does not differentiate between civilian and combatant deaths, but throughout the war has said that most of those killed were women and children.

The military says 121 of its soldiers have been killed in the Gaza offensive. It says it has killed thousands of militants, without providing evidence.

CALLS FOR ANOTHER CEASE-FIRE

In Israel on Sunday, French Foreign Minister Catherine Colonna called for an "immediate truce" aimed at releasing more hostages, getting larger amounts of aid into Gaza and moving toward "the beginning of a political solution."

France's Foreign Ministry had earlier said one of its employees was killed in an Israeli strike on a home in the southernmost town of Rafah on Wednesday. It condemned the strike, which it said had killed several civilians, and demanded clarification from Israeli authorities.

The foreign ministers of the UK and Germany meanwhile called for a "sustainable" cease-fire, saying "too many civilians have been killed."

"Israel will not win this war if its operations destroy the prospect of peaceful co-existence with Palestinians," British Foreign Secretary David Cameron and German Foreign Minister Annalena Baerbock wrote in the UK's Sunday Times.

Austin is set to travel to Israel to continue discussions on a timetable for ending the war's most intense phase. Israeli and US officials have spoken of a transition to more targeted strikes aimed at killing Hamas leaders and rescuing hostages, without saying when it would occur.

The plight of Palestinian civilians has gotten little attention inside Israel, where many are still deeply traumatised by the October 7 attack and where support for the war remains strong.

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CALLS FOR ANOTHER CEASE-FIRE

In Israel on Sunday, French Foreign Minister Catherine Colonna called for an "immediate truce" aimed at releasing more hostages, getting larger amounts of aid into Gaza and moving toward "the beginning of a political solution."

France's Foreign Ministry had earlier said one of its employees was killed in an Israeli strike on a home in the southernmost town of Rafah on Wednesday. It condemned the strike, which it said had killed several civilians, and demanded clarification from Israeli authorities.

The foreign ministers of the UK and Germany meanwhile called for a "sustainable" cease-fire, saying "too many civilians have been killed."

"Israel will not win this war if its operations destroy the prospect of peaceful co-existence with Palestinians," British Foreign Secretary David Cameron and German Foreign Minister Annalena Baerbock wrote in the UK's Sunday Times.

Austin is set to travel to Israel to continue discussions on a timetable for ending the war's most intense phase. Israeli and US officials have spoken of a transition to more targeted strikes aimed at killing Hamas leaders and rescuing hostages, without saying when it would occur.

The plight of Palestinian civilians has gotten little attention inside Israel, where many are still deeply traumatised by the October 7 attack and where support for the war remains strong.

# European diplomacy steps up calls for Gaza cease-fire

Jerusalem (AP): Some of Israel's closest European allies pressed for a cease-fire in the war with Hamas on Sunday, underscoring growing international unease with the devastating impact of the conflict on Gaza's civilian population. The concerted push by top European diplomats comes ahead of a visit to Israel on Monday by US Defence Secretary Lloyd Austin, who is also expected to put pressure on Israeli leaders to end the war's most intense phase and transit to a more targeted strategy against Hamas.

Western allies of Israel have increasingly expressed concern with civilian casualties and the mass displacement of 1.9 million Palestinians — nearly 85% of Gaza's population — though the US has continued to provide vital military and diplomatic support to its close ally.

In a joint article in the Sunday Times, a British weekly, UK Foreign Secretary David Cameron and German Foreign Affairs Minister Annalena Baerbock called for a cease-fire and said "too many civilians have been killed. The Israeli government should do more to discriminate sufficiently between terrorists and civilians, ensuring its campaign targets Hamas leaders and operatives."

"Israel will not win this war if its operations destroy the prospect of peaceful co-existence with Palestinians," they said. They said the cease-fire should take place as soon as possible, but also said it must be "sustainable." At a news conference with her Israeli counterpart in Tel Aviv on Sunday, French Foreign Minister Catherine Colonna also pushed for a cease-fire. "An immediate truce is necessary, allowing progress to be made toward a cease-fire to obtain the release of the hostages, to allow access and the delivery of more humanitarian aid to the suffering civilian population of Gaza, and in fact to move toward a humanitarian cease-fire," she said.

# North Korea fired ballistic missile towards our eastern waters: S Korea

SEOUL (AP): South Korea's military said Sunday that it had detected that North Korea fired at least one ballistic missile toward its eastern waters, adding to a torrent of weapons tests in recent months that has elevated tensions. South Korea's Joint Chiefs of Staff didn't immediately say what type of missile it was or how far it flew.

Tensions on the Korean Peninsula are at their highest in years, with North Korean leader Kim Jong Un accelerating the expansion of his nuclear and missile programme, and flaunting an escalatory nuclear doctrine that authorises the preemptive use of nuclear weapons.

The United States, South Korea and Japan have responded by increasing the visibility of their trilateral partnership in the region, and strengthening their combined military exercises, which Kim condemns as invasion rehearsals.

North Korea's latest launch followed high-level security talks between American and South Korean officials in Washington over the weekend, where they agreed on plans to incorporate nuclear operation scenarios in their combined military exercises next year to cope with the North's evolving threats, according to details announced by Seoul's presidential office.

In the face of North Korean threats, South Korea has been seeking stronger reassurances from the United States that it would swiftly and decisively use its nuclear capabilities to defend its ally in the event of a North Korean nuclear attack.

The North has test-fired more than 100 missiles since the start of 2022 as Kim used the distraction caused by Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine to speed up the expansion of his military nuclear programme, which he sees as his strongest guarantee of survival.

# Pope Francis celebrates 87th birthday

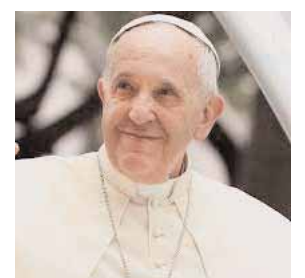
AP ■ ROME

"Pope Francis turned 87 on Sunday, closing out a year that saw big milestones in his efforts to reform the Catholic Church as well as health scares that raise questions about his future as pope. Francis celebrated his birthday with cake during a festive audience with children Sunday morning, and there were "Happy Birthday" banners in St Peter's Square during his weekly noon blessing. One early present came Saturday, when a Vatican tribunal handed down a mix of guilty verdicts and acquittals in a complicated trial that Francis had supported as evidence of his financial reforms. The biggest-name defendant, Cardinal Angelo Becciu, was convicted of embezzlement and sentenced to 5½ years in prison.

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Only seven popes are known to have been older than Francis at the time of their deaths, according to the online resource Catholic Hierarchy. Francis is fast closing in on one of them, Pope Gregory XII, perhaps best known for having been the most recent pope to resign until Pope Benedict XVI stepped down in 2013.

Gregory was 88½ when he voluntarily stepped down in 1415 in a bid to end the Western Schism, in which there were three rival claimants to the papacy. Francis has said he, too, would consider resigning if his health made him unable to carry on, but more recently he

said the job of pope is for life. Twice this year, however, Francis' less-than-robust respiratory health forced him to cancel big events: In spring, a bout of acute bronchitis landed him in the hospital for three days and made him miss the Good Friday procession at the Colosseum.

More recently, a new case of bronchitis forced him to cancel a planned trip to Dubai to participate in the UN climate conference. Francis had part of one lung removed as a young man and seems to be increasingly prone to respiratory problems that make breathing difficult and speaking even more so.

In between those events, he was hospitalized again in June for nine days for surgeons to repair an abdominal hernia and remove scar tissue from previous intestinal surgeries.

The hospitalisations have raised questions about Francis' ability to continue the globe-trotting rigors of the modern-day papacy, which is increasingly dependent on the person

of the pope, said David Gibson, director of the Centre on Religion and Culture at Fordham University.

"It's a great improvement from the time when the pope was just a king in his throne surrounded by a royal court," he said. "But with such expectations can any pope govern into his 80s and even 90s and be effective?"

While Francis' health scares punctuated his 87th year, perhaps the biggest milestone of all, one that is likely to shape the remainder of Francis' pontificate, was Benedict's Dec 31 death.

Benedict largely stuck to his promise to live "hidden to the world" and allow Francis to govern unimpeded. But his death after 10 years of retirement removed the shadow of a more conservative pope looking over Francis' shoulder from the other side of the Vatican gardens. His death has seemingly freed up Francis to accelerate his reform agenda and crack down on his right-wing opponents.

# Hindus organise car rally in America ahead of Ram Temple inauguration

PTI ■ WASHINGTON

Ahead of the inauguration of the Ram Temple in Ayodhya next month, members of the Hindu American community have kicked off the month-long celebrations to commemorate the event by organising a car rally in a suburb of Washington DC. Several community members on Saturday afternoon gathered at the Shri Bhakta Anjaneya Temple in Ayodhya Way, near Frederick City Maryland, for the rally.

The grand inauguration of the Ram Temple in Ayodhya is set for January 22, 2024.

The rally, the organisers said, started the month-long celebrations of the Ram Mandir in India. "After 500 years of struggle by Hindus, Bhagwan Shri Ram Mandir is being inaugurated and so we



are organising a historic celebration of the same in the Washington, DC area on January 20 next year with about 1,000 American Hindu families," said Mahendra Sapa, the president of Vishwa Hindu Parishad of America DC chapter.

"The celebration will include Ram Leela, stories of

Shri Ram, Hindu prayers to Shri Ram, bhajans (devotional songs) to Bhagwan Shri Ram and his family," Sapa said. "The celebration will feature the enactment on the life of God Shri Ram by kids of various ages for about 45 minutes in a manner understandable to kids born in America," he said.

# 'Work is my magical spell for luck'

PTI ■ WASHINGTON

Indian-American Republican presidential aspirant Vivek Ramaswamy has said that "W-O-R-K" is his magical spell for luck as he participated in over 40 campaign stops last week, surpassing any other 2024 White House candidate.

During one of the many events held last week in Iowa, Ramaswamy tried to convince voters why he should be the Republican nominee instead of former President Donald Trump, who leads him by more than 50 points in most national polls. By the end of Saturday, the 38-year-old biotech entrepreneur participated in 42 campaign stops - more than any other 2024 candidate, USA Today newspaper reported. He'll keep up his rigorous timetable this week, hitting 38 events. In a line he's repeated in



other public appearances, Ramaswamy said it all stems from a lesson learned from his parents.

"Here's how you spell luck: W-O-R-K," the newspaper quoted Ramaswamy as saying. "It's always been a formula that has worked for me in my life be it in my academic background, be it as a student, be it in my career, as a businessman and now on this journey," he

said. While he acknowledges there is a "logistically grueling element" to his schedule, the 38-year-old Ramaswamy is campaigning caffeine-free.

He said he stayed motivated by the energy of the crowds in Iowa, the first state to hear from voters next month, as he blitzes crucial early battlegrounds.

"I'm confident that's going to be the right way to get elected - not being insulated from the people who are representing, but in many ways, being responsive to the people we're representing," Ramaswamy, the self-proclaimed outsider, said. "I'd rather spend time with these caucusgoers and Pizza Ranches across the state, rather than being a cloistered mega-donor retreat," he said. Ramaswamy, a Yale law school graduate with a net worth of about USD 630

million, is running his campaign like he's run his business - with very little time off.

Anson Frericks, who co-founded the company Strive Asset Management with Ramaswamy early last year, told the newspaper there's no time for rest in the businessman's schedule. "There's no one that I've ever met that gets up in the morning, works out while he's taking phone calls," said Frericks, who's known Ramaswamy since high school.

Ramaswamy worked 16 hours per day at Strive, Frericks said, and that work ethic culture "permeated" throughout the organisation.

Ramaswamy is juggling his presidential aspirations with fatherhood, and Frericks said he has been able to "seamlessly integrate" his professional life and family life on the campaign trail.



# Japan, ASEAN bolster ties at summit focused on security, economy

AP ■ TOKYO

Leaders from Japan and the Association of Southeast Asian Nations, at a special summit on Sunday marking their 50th anniversary of friendship, adopted a joint vision that emphasises security and economic cooperation while respecting the rule of law amid growing tensions with China in regional seas.

Ties between Japan and ASEAN used to be largely based on Japanese assistance to the developing economies, in part due to lingering bitterness over Japan's wartime actions. But in recent years the ties have focused more on security amid China's growing assertiveness in the South China Sea, while Japan's postwar pacifist stance and trust-building efforts have fostered friendlier relations.

The leaders, in a joint statement, called for strengthening their "mutually beneficial" partnership and working together for peace and stability in the Indo-Pacific. They also called to pursue greater prosperity for the region and to promote people exchanges among the younger generations, Kishida told a joint news conference with Indonesian President Joko Widodo, this year's ASEAN chair. The leaders adopted an implementation plan for 130 projects. Japan called to step up cooperation in security and defense, while reinforcing support for efforts in climate change and investment, including in the region's automotive industry, he said. "As divisions and confrontations deepen and the



Leaders of ASEAN nations, from left, Philippine's President Ferdinand Marcos, Jr., Singapore's Prime Minister Lee Hsien Loong, Thailand Prime Minister Srettha Thavisin, Vietnam's Prime Minister Pham Minh Chinh, Indonesian President Joko Widodo, Japanese Prime Minister Fumio Kishida, Laos's Prime Minister Sonehay Siphandone, Brunei's Sultan Hassanal Bolkiah, Cambodia's Prime Minister Hun Manet, Malaysia's Prime Minister Anwar Ibrahim, East Timor's Prime Minister Xanana Gusmao pose for a group photo prior to their talks session during ASEAN-Japan 50th Year Commemorative Summit in Tokyo on Sunday. AP/PTI

world faces compounded crises, Japan will tackle the issues together with ASEAN, which is the linchpin of a free and open Indo-Pacific," Kishida said. "Based on our mutual trust, we will tackle new issues, and contribute to peace and prosperity of the region in order to create a world where people can benefit while their dignity is respected."

Japan adopted a new security strategy last year and has been rapidly building up its military and expanding its military partnerships to better counter China's growing assertiveness in the region.

On Saturday, on the sidelines of the Dec 16-18 summit, Kishida held a series of bilateral talks as Japan seeks to step up bilateral security ties with

ASEAN countries.

Kishida and his Malaysian counterpart, Anwar Ibrahim, signed a 400 million yen (\$2.8 million) deal to bolster Malaysia's maritime security capability. It is a new Japanese official security assistance programme specifically for militaries of friendly nations to help strengthen their law enforcement and security capabilities.

The assistance includes provisions of rescue boats and other equipment to help improve the military capability of Malaysia, which sits at a crucial location on sea lanes connecting the Indian Ocean and East Asia and serves a vital role in warning and surveillance operations for the entire region. Separately on Saturday, Kishida signed a deal with Widodo,

offering a grant of up to 9.05 billion yen (\$63.7 million) to fund Indonesia's maritime security capability advancement plan and includes a Japanese-built large-scale maritime patrol boat. In November, Japan announced a provision of coastal surveillance radars to the Philippine navy, and the two sides also agreed to start talks for a key defence pact called the Reciprocal Access Agreement designed to smooth their troops' entry into each other's territory for joint military exercises.

Later that month, Japan and Vietnam agreed to elevate the status of their relationship to a top-level comprehensive strategic partnership, under which they will discuss details of a possible deal to broaden their defence cooperation.

# Pakistan EC resumes training of ROs, DROs after SC order

**Islamabad (PTI):** Pakistan's election commission resumed training of Returning Officers (ROs) and District Returning Officers (DROs) as it ramped up preparation for the general elections following the Supreme Court's verdict over their appointment, a media report said on Sunday.

Pakistan's apex court late on Friday suspended an order by the Lahore High Court (LHC) on the appointment of bureaucrats as Returning Officers, a ruling that led to uncertainty over the much-awaited February 8 elections. The LHC's decision, which came on a plea filed by Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI) lawyer Umair Niazi, suspended the ECP's decision to appoint the ROs and DROs from the executive branch.

After much deliberation over measures to avoid the delay in the conduct of polls, the apex court paved the way for the elections to take place on the announced date, which remains a major demand of political stakeholders and the electoral body. The Election Commission of Pakistan (ECP) said in a statement on Sunday that the training has kick-started across the country and will be completed on December 19, Geo News reported. At least 859 ROs and 144 DROs are currently being trained by senior ECP officers, the electoral authority said.

A ban has also been imposed by the DRO Islamabad on the holidays of officers and officials of government institutions in the national capital on the ECP's instructions. "Education department officers and employees will not leave Islamabad," DRO Islamabad said. The DRO has also asked the Federal Directorate of Education officials to stay in Islamabad following ECP's directions.

Jailed former prime minister Imran Khan's PTI, however, continued to question the biases of bureaucrats to be appointed as poll officers. But the party said it wants "timely, free and fair polls." The PTI had expressed its concerns along with the demand that the ECP announce the polls schedule and allot the 'bat' symbol back to Khan's party.

# Russia, Ukraine launch numerous drone attacks

AP ■ KYIV

Russia and Ukraine launched over a dozen drones at each other's territory for a second straight day on Sunday, one of which apparently targeted a Russian military airport while a Ukrainian civilian was killed after drone debris slammed into his house near the Black Sea.

At least 35 Ukrainian drones were shot down overnight over three regions in southwestern Russia, the Russian Defense Ministry said in a post on the messaging app Telegram. A Russian air base hosting bomber aircraft used in Ukraine was among the targets, according to a Russian Telegram channel critical of the Kremlin. The channel posted short videos of drones flying over low-rise housing in what it claimed was the Russian town of Morozovsk, whose air base is home to Russia's 559th Bomber Aviation Regiment.

Vasily Golubev, the governor of Russia's Rostov province, separately reported "mass drone strikes" near Morozovsk and another town farther west, but did not mention the air base. Golubev said most of the drones were shot down and there were no casualties. He did not comment on damage. Also Sunday morning, Ukraine's air force said it shot down 20 Iranian-made Shahed drones launched overnight by Russian troops in southern and western Ukraine, as well as one X-59 cruise missile launched from the country's occupied south.

A civilian was killed overnight near Odesa, a key port on Ukraine's southern Black Sea coast, after the remnants of a destroyed drone fell on his house, Ukraine's military said. Stepped-up drone attacks over the past month come as both sides are keen to show they aren't deadlocked as the war approaches the two-year mark. Russia's Defence Ministry on Friday evening said its anti-aircraft units destroyed 32 Ukrainian drones over the Crimean Peninsula, which Moscow annexed from Ukraine in 2014. Ukraine's air force on Saturday said it had shot down 30 out of 31 drones launched by Russia against 11 Ukrainian regions the previous night.



Neither side has gained much ground despite a Ukrainian counteroffensive that began in June. Ukraine's foreign minister, meanwhile, welcomed what he called a sea change in Germany's approach toward Kyiv's EU membership bid. In an interview with Germany's Bild newspaper, Dmytro Kuleba said that German Chancellor Olaf Scholz has won "sincere and well-deserved admiration" among Ukrainians for his role in the EU's recent decision to

open membership talks for Kyiv. Ukraine has long faced strong opposition in its attempts to join the 27-member bloc from Hungary's Prime Minister Viktor Orban, who has repeatedly spoken of his desire to maintain close ties with Russia.

Scholz said that at an EU summit last week he proposed that Orban leave the room to enable the summit to launch accession talks with Ukraine, something the Hungarian leader agreed to do.

# Video provides grim look at casualties as Russian troops advance toward Avdiivka

**Kyiv (AP):** As Russian forces press forward with an attempt to capture the town of Avdiivka in eastern Ukraine, The Associated Press obtained aerial footage that gives an indication of their staggering losses. A Ukrainian military drone unit near Stepove, a village just north of Avdiivka, where some of the most intense battles have taken place, shot the video this month.

It's an apocalyptic scene: In two separate clips, the bodies of about 150 soldiers — most wearing Russian uniforms — lie scattered along tree lines where they sought cover. The village itself has been reduced to rubble. Rows of trees that used to separate farm fields are burned and disfigured. The fields are pocked by artillery shells and grenades dropped from drones. The drone unit said it's possible

that some of the dead were Ukrainians.

The footage was provided to the AP by Ukraine's BUAR unit of the 110th Mechanized Brigade, involved in the fighting in the area. The unit said that the footage was shot on Dec 6 over two separate tree-lines between Stepove and nearby railroad tracks and that many of the bodies had been left there for weeks.

The AP verified the location by comparing the video with maps and other drone footage of the same area shot six days later by the 47th Mechanized Brigade. Russian forces launched an offensive in Avdiivka in October. Though they have made some incremental gains, Western analysts say the push has resulted in thousands of casualties. Russia launched Europe's biggest war since WWII, invading Ukraine in February 2022.

# Bangladesh's main Opp BNP defers strike

PTI ■ DHAKA

Bangladesh's main opposition BNP on Sunday deferred its nationwide strike scheduled for Monday which was called to mount pressure on the Sheikh Hasina-led Awami League government to quit power and hold the next month's general elections under a non-partisan administration.

Bangladesh is headed to general elections on January 7. The strike would now take place on Tuesday, the Bangladesh Nationalist Party

(BNP) senior joint secretary general Ruhul Kabir Rizvi said during a virtual press briefing. The BNP deferred the protest as Bangladesh declared a day of state mourning on Monday following the death of Kuwait's Emir Sheikh Nawaf al-Ahmad al-Sabah, Dhaka Tribune newspaper reported, quoting the BNP leader.

The BNP, led by former prime minister Khaleda Zia, had announced the nationwide strike on Saturday to press their demands for the current government's resignation and the

restoration of a caretaker government, the paper said. The BNP earlier announced that it would boycott the elections. The opposition parties have so far observed blockades in the 11th phase to mount pressure on the Awami League government to quit power and hold the next election under a non-partisan administration, the paper said. With political activity heating up, the Bangladesh Army has said it will deploy troops to maintain law and order as the country gears up for the general elections. With the BNP boy-

cotting the election, and no other credible opposition party against it, Hasina's Awami League is likely to gain an upper hand and likely to form the government for the fourth consecutive term. The BNP had boycotted the 2014 election but took part in 2018 polls. The US and other major Western countries called for dialogue between the ruling Awami League and particularly with the BNP to ensure an inclusive and credible election, which, however, saw no headway due to reluctance from both sides.

# China faces 'middle-technology trap', warns official think-tank

PTI ■ BEIJING

A top state-run Chinese think-tank warned China of a potential "middle-technology trap" unless it opens doors "wide open" for new investments and scientific innovation to deal with increasing containment in the ongoing tech war with the US.

"China's manufacturing sector is still in the downturn of the global value chain, and it faces a risk of being hamstrung at the low and mid-end by developed countries such as the United States, Germany and Japan," the Chinese Academy of Sciences said in its latest report released during the weekend. "The countries that develop later usually have difficulties in industrial upgrading and transitioning to high-income countries because they lack original technological advances after technology importation, imitation, absorption, and tracking," the report said. The report came amid

stepped-up technology curbs by the US, while Chinese manufacturers are finding it increasingly difficult to move up value chains.

The "middle-technology trap" describes a scenario in which developing countries benefit from industrial transfers due to their low-cost advantages, but face long-term economic stagnation when the advantages diminish, and local firms struggle to catch up with the core technologies retained by developed nations, the Hong Kong-based South China Morning Post reported on Sunday.

Concerns over China's state of the economy were increasing as the property sector, which is one of the growth sectors of the country is in deep crisis. Besides, China for the first time in recent years faced high youth unemployment as a result the government has stopped publishing official employment data to prevent public protests.

Also, the piling of local

government debts is adding to pressures on the financial system of the second-largest economy. Significantly, the annual Central Economic Work Conference presided over by President Xi Jinping held on December 12 has flagged the concerns while analysing the current economic situation and laid guidelines for next year's economic policies.

"To further revive the economy, China still has to overcome some difficulties and challenges, including lack of effective demand, overcapacity in some sectors, cluttered social expectations, certain risks and hidden problems, bottlenecks in the domestic circulation, as well as rising complexity, severity and uncertainty of the external environment," the key meeting said.

"It is important to be more mindful of potential dangers and to effectively respond to and solve these problems," the meeting said, according to the state-run Xinhua news agency.

# HK activist publisher to stand trial this week

AP ■ HONG KONG

The trial of Hong Kong's most famous activist publisher who was arrested under China's crackdown on dissidents will start on Monday after being delayed for over a year. Jimmy Lai, 76, broke into the city's once freewheeling media world about three decades ago, armed with the belief that delivering information is equal to protecting freedom. Now, his own freedom is at stake as he faces a possible life sentence if convicted under a national security law imposed by Beijing following the 2019 pro-democracy protests.

Lai is charged with colluding with foreign forces to endanger national security and conspiring with others to publish seditious publications. The landmark case — tied to the now-defunct pro-democracy newspaper Apple Daily that Lai founded — is seen by many as a trial for press freedom and a test for judicial independence in the former British colony, which was promised to have its Western-style civil liberties remain intact for 50 years after

returning to Chinese rule in 1997.

Lai is the founder of Apple Daily, one of the city's media outlets most critical of the government. He was smuggled into Hong Kong from mainland China at age 12 and embarked on a rags-to-riches path, from working at a glove factory to founding the casual clothing chain Giordano.

After the 1989 Tiananmen Square crackdown, Lai became an outspoken advocate for democracy. Later, following Chinese government attacks on Giordano, Lai sold his shares in the business.

In 1995, he launched Apple Daily, which quickly became one of the city's top-selling newspapers with its sometimes outrageous coverage of politics and celebrities. The paper adopted a strong pro-democracy stance, often urging readers to join protests and denounced the enactment of the security law in June 2020.

During the 2019 protests, Lai took to the street and met with then-Vice President Mike Pence and US Secretary of State Mike Pompeo to discuss



the controversial extradition bill that sparked the protests but was eventually withdrawn. After the enactment of the security law, he was openly critical of the legislation and said the city he once knew "is dead."

Although the 2019 protest movement lacked a clear leader, Lai's high profile made him a target of the authorities. He was arrested in August 2020 under the law, with about 200 police officers raiding the paper's building. The newspaper was forced to shut down in June 2021 after police froze USD 2.3 million of its assets, searched its

offices and arrested some of its top editors and executives, accusing them of foreign collusion to endanger national security. The paper's final edition sold out in hours, with readers scooping all 1 million copies of it.

Lai is now serving a term of five years and nine months over fraud charges linked to lease violations in a separate case as he awaits his security trial.

Lai's trial is Hong Kong's first on charges of collusion with foreign forces. He faces two counts of conspiracy to col-

lude with foreign forces and one charge of collusion under the security law. He is also charged with sedition under a colonial-era law that has been increasingly used to quash dissent. Six former Apple Daily executives who were also slammed with collusion charges entered guilty pleas last year, admitting to the court they conspired with Lai to call for sanctions or blockade, or other hostile activities against Hong Kong or China.

Prosecutors earlier pointed to the publication's English version, alleging it was introduced by Lai for the purpose of asking foreign forces to impose sanctions or be hostile to Hong Kong or China. They said Lai was the mastermind of the conspiracy and the six acted to implement the plans.

Eric Lai, a research fellow at Georgetown Centre for Asian Law who is not related to Jimmy, said the case will impact whether ordinary advocacy activities with foreign parties constitute a crime in the future. The trial is not just against the media tycoon but also against Apple Daily, he said.

# 'Belarus political prisoners face abuse, no medical care and isolation'

AP ■ TALLINN (ESTONIA)

During his three years in a Belarusian penal colony, human rights activist Leamid Sudalenka says he and other political prisoners were regularly deprived of family visits, phone calls and parcels. He nearly died when COVID-19 swept through the facility. And he was forced to spend the last nine days of his sentence in a damp punishment cell, sleeping on the concrete floor with a roll of toilet paper for a pillow.

He had to wear a yellow tag on his uniform — as do all the estimated 1,473 political prisoners held in Belarus — so they're easily identifiable to guards who he said routinely bullied, abused and humiliat-

ed them. "The Belarusian authorities deliberately create terrible detention conditions for political prisoners, which qualify as torture," Sudalenka said in an interview with The Associated Press after he finished his time behind bars and fled to neighboring Lithuania.

Belarus has cracked down on opponents of authoritarian President Alexander Lukashenko ever since the August 2020 election that gave him a sixth term in office in balloting that was widely viewed as fraudulent. Protesters swept the country for months afterward, bringing hundreds of thousands into the streets. More than 35,000 people were arrested, thousands were beaten in police custody, and hundreds of independent media

outlets and nongovernmental organizations were shut down and outlawed. Although most demonstrators served a few days or weeks in jail, those like the 58-year-old Sudalenka — a political activist for two decades — were hit with more serious charges that landed them in prison for years. Last month, he learned authorities had opened a new case against him, although he is now safely abroad, having sneaked out of Belarus last summer.

Still imprisoned is 2022 Nobel Peace Prize winner Ales Bialiatski, who founded Viasna, Belarus' oldest and most prominent human rights group. He is serving a 10-year sentence and is being held "in complete isolation," without access to doctors, said his

wife, Natalia Pinchuk, in an AP interview. A few prisoners haven't survived incarceration, she said, noting that artist Ales Pushkin died in July of a perforated ulcer after receiving no medical care, and Vitold Ashurak, whose body was turned over to his relatives in 2021 still bearing a head bandage.

Some have vanished into the prison system after their arrest. There has been no word on the fate of Viktor Babaryka, who sought to challenge Lukashenko in the election and reportedly was beaten while serving a 14-year sentence. Another opposition leader, Mikola Statkevich, hasn't been heard from for nearly a year.

"The world needs to know

this and respond to it," Pinchuk said. "People disappear in Belarusian colonies and prisons, and the relatives of many political prisoners do not hear anything about them for hundreds of days."

She has taken her husband's case to UN human rights officials. Officials at the penitentiary department of the Belarus Interior Ministry told AP on Wednesday that they have no comment on the allegations. At the time of the protests in 2020, Lukashenko labeled reports of abuse and beatings of protesters in detention as "fake" and "not true."

"Listen, why torture them? They were not being investigated there. If someone there had bruises, then they got them in the street, when they

charged toward the domestic troops and riot police," he told reporters. "There was no torture. You invented it because you had to invent it."

Sudalenka was first detained in the southern city of Homel in January 2021 and charged with "organizing and financing actions that grossly violate public order" — a common allegation. The evidence against him included making a Facebook post in which he collected money to buy fireworks for the family of someone accused of "mass rioting" in the protests. The court also said he once held a workshop on digital security for human rights activists and had helped pay fines and legal fees for others who were accused.

A police search of his

office and apartment yielded over 350 files on protesters for whom he helped prepare appeals of their cases. He said he learned at trial that authorities eavesdropped on his conversations with his wife when she visited him in detention, and "then used it against me."

"A terrible conveyor belt of repression has been launched in Belarus, and the courts have been turned into blind executors of this state lawlessness," Sudalenka said. He was sent to the Vitba-3 penal colony near the northern city of Vitebsk and had the distinctive yellow tag sewn onto his uniform marking him as a political prisoner "prone to extremism," which he said singled them out for abuse. The tags, he

said, were "too clearly reminiscent" of those that Jews were forced to wear in Nazi Germany. "All political prisoners with yellow tags are subjected to extra trouble and humiliation every day," Sudalenka said. "Methods of bullying can range from punishment cells and complete information isolation, to refusing a meeting with a lawyer and denying of medical care and medicine."

About a third of Vitba-3's 1,000 inmates are political prisoners, he said, noting their number "increased noticeably after the start of the war in Ukraine," when arrests were stepped up against Belarusians who opposed the Russian invasion.



# GST return filers up 65 per cent to 1.13 crore in 5 years

## 90 PER CENT FILING TAX PAYMENT FORM IN TIME

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

The number of GST return filers rose about 65 per cent to 1.13 crore in 5 years till April 2023 as compliance by taxpayers improved, the Finance Ministry said on Sunday.

Also, the number of active taxpayers registered under GST increased from 1.06 crore as of April 2018, to 1.40 crore. As per data shared by the ministry, 90 per cent of eligible taxpayers are filing GSTR-3B returns by the end of the filing

month in current fiscal year, up from 68 per cent in 2017-18, the first year of GST rollout. "Simplification in Rules and Procedure in GST has resulted in increase in return filing percentage by eligible taxpayers," the ministry said in a post on X.

A nationwide Goods and Services Tax (GST) was rolled out on July 1, 2017. It subsumed over a dozen local taxes like excise, service tax and VAT. The number of GSTR-3B filers increased from 72.49 lakh in



April 2018, to 1.13 crore as of April 2023. GSTR-3B is the monthly return form for filing outward supplies details and tax payment. "With effective policy and systemic changes in GST, the compliance level in GST return filing has improved over the years," the ministry said in another post on X.

Increase in return filing across the years indicates improvement in compliance level, the ministry added. Monthly collection from GST came in at Rs 1.68 lakh crore

in November. It is for the sixth time that gross GST collection has crossed Rs 1.60 lakh crore mark in current fiscal. The Goods and Services Tax collection has been showing an upward trend on an annual basis since its rollout on July 1, 2017, and the average gross monthly mop-up in the current fiscal so far is Rs 1.66 lakh crore, Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman had said in the Lok Sabha earlier this month. The collection had touched a record Rs 1.87 lakh crore in April.

# 'LIC to play key role in achieving Insurance for all by 2047'

PTI ■ NEW DELHI



In a bid to achieve 'Insurance For All by 2047', LIC will play a significant role and to meet that objective it is planning to launch a product especially designed for rural areas.

"The focus would be how to cover maximum rural masses who actually need insurance. In coming days, rural share will also go up to our total business kitty," LIC Chairman Siddhartha Mohanty told PTI. He said to achieve the objective of 'Insurance For All by 2047', LIC will play a very significant role and in that direction the insurer has already started working.

"I must thank the regulator. The regulator IRDAI has already proposed 'Bima Vistar', a composite product. The product will consist of life, health and property insurance," he said.

To sell those products Bima Vahak would be engaged, he said, adding, it will be a women-centric distribution channel model. Prime Minister Narendra Modi has given a clarion call to make India a developed nation by 2047, when the country achieves 100 years of independence from British rule. As of now, India is the fifth largest economy in the world but insurance penetration is low compared to the global average. In June this year, Insurance Regulatory and Development Authority of India (IRDAI) came out with draft guidelines for 'Bima Vahaks', which seeks to establish a dedicated distri-

tribution channel at the level of Gram Panchayats. The guidelines proposed Corporate Bima Vahaks and Individual Bima Vahaks for the distribution channel. Corporate Bima Vahak would be legal persons registered in accordance with the respective laws and engaged by an insurer. Corporate Bima Vahak would be legal persons registered in accordance with the respective laws and engaged by an insurer. Individual Bima Vahak could be any individual appointed by an insurer or appointed by a Corporate Bima Vahak. Meanwhile, LIC has initiated a total digital transformation project DIVE (Digital Innovation and Value Enhancement) and appointed a consultant to steer the project. "Our objective is to get best-in-class digital initiatives for all our stakeholders, customers, intermediaries, marketing people and everybody through the project DIVE," he said. In the first phase, the customer acquisition part is going to be transformed, he said. Customer acquisition is done through three modes—agent, bancassurance and direct sale. LIC gets most of its new customers through its agents.

# Diesel sales recover after Diwali drop

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

India's diesel consumption in the first half of December recovered from the steep fall seen last month on transporters taking a Diwali break, but sales were still lower than last year, preliminary data of state-owned firms showed.

Diesel consumption at 3.15 million tonne during December 1 to 15 was 0.7 per cent higher than 3.13 million tonne demand in the first half of November. The demand was 8.1 per cent lower than 3.43 million tonne consumption in December 1-15, 2022. Industry officials said the November dip in sales was largely on account of some truckers taking Diwali break to visit their homes.

Diesel is India's most consumed fuel, accounting for almost 40 per cent of all petroleum product consumption. The transport sector accounts for 70 per cent of all diesel sales in the country. Petrol sales by three state-owned fuel retailers rose 0.7 per cent to 1.22 million tonne in the first fortnight of December on increased personal vehicle movement. Fuel consumption has been on a see-saw over the last couple of months. Petrol demand had fallen 9 per cent year-on-year in the first half of October and diesel sales by 3.2 per cent but the start of Navratri/Durga Puja celebration helped reverse the trend. Diesel demand fell 12.1 per cent in the first half of November and recovered a bit in the second half.

Consumption of petrol during December 1 to 15 was 9.5 per cent more than in the COVID-marred December 1-15, 2021 and 27.5 per cent more than in pre-pandemic December 2019. Diesel demand was up 9.5 per cent over the first fortnight of December 2021 and 8 per cent higher compared to December 1-15, 2019. Jet fuel (ATF) sales rose 2.6 per cent year-on-year to 309,500 tonne in December 1-15 this year. But this was 8.6 per cent lower than in December 2019, primarily because not all international flights have resumed after the pandemic. ATF consumption was 22.8 per cent more than in December 2021, but lower than 338,890 tonne used in pre-COVID December 2019.

# 'AI can add \$1.2-1.5 trillion to India's GDP by FY30'

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

Generative artificial intelligence (Gen AI) has the potential to add a cumulative USD 1.2-1.5 trillion to India's Gross Domestic Product over the next seven years, according to a report by EY India. The report, titled "The Aldea of India: Generative AI's potential to accelerate India's digital transformation", provided insights into the industry's preparedness and challenges in embracing Gen AI.

Generative AI can potentially add a cumulative USD 1.2-1.5 trillion to India's GDP by FY2029-30, as per the report.

"The report forecasts that by fully capitalising Gen AI technology and its applications across sectors, India can potentially add USD 359-438 billion in FY2029-30 alone, reflecting a 5.9 per cent to 7.2 per cent increase over and above base-line GDP," it said.

Nearly 69 per cent of the overall impact is expected to be derived from sectors such as business services (including IT, legal, consulting, outsourcing, rental of machinery and equipment, and others), financial services, education, retail, and healthcare. The anticipated impact entails improvements in workforce



productivity, increased operational efficiency, and personalised customer engagement, the report said.

The findings emerged from a comprehensive survey that engaged over 200 C-suite participants, revealing that 60 per cent of organisations acknowledge the significant influence of Gen AI on their businesses. "However, 75 per cent of them express a low to moderate level of readiness to harness the benefits of Gen AI," the report pointed out.

The two primary challenges faced by organisations currently are skills-gap (52 per cent) and the availability of unclear use cases (47 per cent), while only 36 per cent organisations see data privacy as the risk of Gen AI.

# Commerce Ministry to help exporters maintain proper papers

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

The commerce ministry has started an exercise to help Indian exporters keep proper documentation to deal with US countervailing duty cases on domestic products, an official said.

As part of the exercise, teams of the directorate general of foreign trade (DGTR) and directorate general of trade remedies (DGTR) are working on a roadmap to work on the kind of documentation that needs to be maintained by Indian exporters. Before imposing countervailing or anti-subsidy duty (CVD), a country carries out detailed investigations on products which it believes that its trading partner is subsidising for

export purposes. Subsidising exports is a kind of unfair trade practice. Countervailing duties can only be imposed if the investigating agency of the importing country determines that the imports of the product in question are subsidised and are injuring a domestic industry. Imposition of this duty does not prohibit or restrict imports. World Trade Organisation (WTO) allows its member countries to use these tools to provide a level-playing field to their domestic players. The US has conducted countervailing investigations and submitted final determination on three Indian products -- paper file folders, common alloy aluminum sheet, and forged steel fluid end blocks.

The European Commission too has conducted a similar probe on certain graphite electrode systems from India. The Indian government and the affected exporters have strongly defended the subsidy allegation against various programmes and schemes of the government, both at central and state level, in their written and oral responses during the conduct of investigations, the official said. While imposing CVD, it has been stated that there is a need for a reasonable and effective system to confirm inputs, consumption amount and imposed indirect taxes. The official said that products which the US have investigated involved



reimbursement of levies like electricity duty, VAT on fuel or APMC taxes. These levies are reimbursed under the Scheme for Remission of Duties and Taxes on Exported Products

(RoDTEP), a WTO-compliant measure. "What the US authorities want is a highly technical kind of a report under the investigation. So what we are trying to do is that in association with the DGTR and their team, we are now trying to sensitise exporters about the kind of documentation which they need to maintain to satisfy the US investigating authorities," the official who did not wish to be named said. The DGTR has recently held a meeting with the DGTR on the issue. "Now we are working on a roadmap as to what kind of documentation should be maintained by our exporters so that our exporters are able to produce those documents

before the investigating authorities. In addition to that, a certain random test check by Indian authorities would also be required. So on both these steps, we have initiated action," the official added. RoDTEP scheme has been implemented for exports from January 2021 to refund, currently un-refunded taxes/duties/levies, which are not being refunded under any other mechanism, at the central, state and local level, but which are incurred in the process of manufacturing and distribution of exported products. The scheme is being implemented by the Central Board of Indirect Taxes and Customs (CBIC), Department of Revenue, in an end-to-end IT environment.

# Emaar India to invest ₹900 crore to develop luxury housing project in Gurugram: CEO

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

Realty firm Emaar India will invest Rs 900 crore over the next four years to develop a luxury housing project in Gurugram as part of its expansion plan, a top company official said. The company, which is part of Dubai-based Emaar Properties, has launched and already sold 424 luxury homes in its group housing project 'Urban Oasis' located at Sector 62, Golf Course Extension Road in Gurugram. In an interview with PTI, Kalyan Chakrabarti, CEO of Emaar India, said, "We launched a residential project after a gap of almost four years, and were humbled by the response from the market." Emaar India has sold out all 424 flats launched in the first phase for Rs 1,723 crore in



revenue. It received 10 times subscription with 4,259 expression of interests for the 424 homes available. He said the demand for luxury homes in all major cities including Gurugram is very strong from both end users and investors. Asked about the project cost,

Chakrabarti said it will be around Rs 900 crore excluding cost of the land. "We enlisted one of the big-4 audit firms -- E&Y -- for overseeing the process fairness and transparency, while leveraging the robustness of SFDC software for a streamlined registration process," he said. On the status of existing projects, Chakrabarti said the company has completed all legacy housing projects and the possessions are being given to customers. He said the company would focus on launching more residential projects in Delhi-NCR and other locations in North India where it has land bank. Emaar Properties entered the Indian real estate market in 2005 in partnership with India's MGF Development

and invested Rs 8,500 crore through the joint venture firm Emaar MGF Land. In April 2016, Emaar Properties decided to end the JV through demerger. Chakrabarti said the demerger process got completed in 2018, although "some residual" issues are still there with the erstwhile JV partner and being sorted out. "We are now looking forward to a solid performance ahead with respect to launches and with respect to taking care of some of the residual problems that we are trying to solve," Chakrabarti said. The market scenario has been kind because of the economic growth, he said. "However, it's clear that we want to develop more and more. There are a lot of projects in the pipeline that we will bring," Chakrabarti said.

# Post Adani takeover, ACC-Ambuja Cement EBITDA rises to ₹1,350/tonne

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

After Adani Group taking over ACC and Ambuja Cement, the EBITDA has risen to Rs 1,350 per tonne from Rs 350 and the group is looking to scale it up to Rs 1,400 by 2024, sources said. In a move to broaden its business verticals, Adani Group last year acquired Ambuja Cement Ltd and ACC Ltd. Ambuja Cement has a cement capacity of 31 million tonne per annum with 6 integrated cement manufacturing plants and 8 cement grinding units across the country. ACC has a cement capacity of 34.45 million tonne with 17 cement manufacturing units, 85 ready-mix concrete plants. The acquisition placed Adani in direct competition with Ultratech Cement, India's largest

cement manufacturer. And Adani Group is now planning to double the annual cement making capacity by 2027. Since taking over in September 2022, the EBITDA per tonne of cement has increased from Rs 350 to Rs 1,350, company sources said adding this will be scaled up to Rs 1,400 per tonne by 2024. The current EBITDA margin is about 20 per cent, which is being targeted to be raised to about 25 per cent. Sources said the group is looking to achieve a sale of 120 million tonne by March 2028. The target is to achieve a topline of Rs 70,000 crore and EBITDA of Rs 17,500 crore. At those levels, the EBITDA per tonne will be close to Rs 1,450 which translates to a margin of about 25 per cent.

# Unemployment rate among graduates declines

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

Unemployment rate among graduates in a age group of 15 years and above has declined to 13.4 per cent in 2022-23 from 14.9 per cent in year ago, according to a government survey. As per the latest Periodic Labour Force Survey (PLFS), conducted by the Ministry of Statistics & Programme Implementation, the lowest unemployment rate among graduates aged 15 years and above witnessed in Chandigarh at 5.6 per cent, which was followed by Delhi with 5.7 per cent during 2022-23.

The data showed the highest unemployment in Andaman & Nicobar Island at 33 per cent, followed by Ladakh at 26.5 per cent and Andhra Pradesh at 24 per cent. Among larger states, the unemployment rate was high in Rajasthan at 23.1 per cent and in Odisha at 21.9 per cent. Joblessness or unemployment rate is defined as the percentage of unemployed persons in the labour force. Considering the importance of the availability of labour force data at more frequent time intervals, the NSSO launched the Periodic Labour Force Survey (PLFS) in April 2017. The reference period here is from July 2022 to June 2023. Earlier, five annual reports have been brought out on the basis of the data collected in PLFS during July 2017-June 2018, July 2018-June 2019, July 2019-June 2020, July 2020-June 2021 and July 2021-June 2022.

# FPIs flood Indian equity markets, infuse ₹1.5 lakh crore in 2023

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

In a dazzling resurgence, foreign investors have graced the Indian equity markets with an influx of nearly Rs 1.5 lakh crore in 2023, fuelled by optimism over the country's resilient economic fundamentals amid shadows of a gloomy global scenario. Experts believe that the positive trend may continue in 2024. This follows Indian equities witnessing the worst-ever net outflow of Rs 1.21 lakh crore by FPIs in 2022 on aggressive rate hikes by the central banks globally after net inflows for three consecutive years. Going forward, as the general elections approach next year,

political stability and economic growth will become focal points for foreign investors. Besides, global cues on the inflation and interest rate scenario would dictate the flow of foreign money into Indian equities, said Himanshu Srivastava, Associate Director - Manager Research at Morningstar Investment Research India. India, with its promising position for economic growth, is expected to continue attracting foreign investment flows, he added. As of now, the foreign portfolio investors (FPIs) have made a net investment of around Rs 1.5 lakh crore in the Indian equity markets and around Rs 60,000 crore in the debt market. Collectively,



they pumped over Rs 2 lakh crore into the capital market, according to data available from the depositories. Of Rs 1.5 lakh crore net equity market inflow, close to Rs 43,000 crore have been invested in the first two weeks of December following the enhanced political

stability, owing to the BJP's success in recent elections across three significant states. If this trend persists, it could become the best year for FPI flow. FPIs made a net infusion of Rs 25,752 crore in equities in 2021, Rs 1.7 lakh crore in 2020, which was the best year, and Rs 1.01

lakh crore in 2019. In the year 2022, the flows from foreign investors were largely driven by factors like inflation and interest rate scenarios in developed markets, such as the US and UK, currency movement, the trajectory of crude oil prices, geopolitical scenario and the health of the domestic economy, among others, Srivastava said. Heightened FPI investment was triggered by the nation's resilient economic fundamentals, forward-looking policy reforms, optimistic corporate earnings outlook, global liquidity trends, and a growing recognition of India's enduring long-term growth potential, said Bharat Dhawan, Managing Partner,

Mazars in India. Mazars is an international audit, tax and advisory firm. "India is one of the top investment destinations of FPIs. There is a near consensus now in the global investing community that India has the best prospects among the emerging economies for sustained growth for many years to come," said VK Vijayakumar, Chief Investment Strategist at Geojit Financial Services. "This growth has the potential to create phenomenal wealth through the stock market. FPIs are investing to benefit from this potential wealth creation," he added. After pulling back for three consecutive years, foreign

investors made a comeback in the debt markets as well this year, as they injected around Rs 60,000 crore in 2023 (till December 15), marking a noteworthy shift in their capital flow. They took out funds totalling Rs 15,910 crore in 2022, Rs 10,359 crore in 2021, and Rs 1.05 lakh crore in 2020. The announcement by JP Morgan Chase & Co in September that it will add Indian government bonds to its benchmark emerging market index from June next year has influenced the inflow in the country's bond markets this year, said Mayank Mehra, smallcase Manager and Principal Partner at Craving Alpha.



# 'India has become a trendsetter in sports shooting'

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

Olympian rifle exponent Anjum Moudgil believes the standard of shooting in India is so high because no other country in the world can boast of such degree of competitiveness in the sport. The World Championships silver medalist in 10m air rifle added that on several occasions Indian shooters were bettering world record scores in domestic competitions, a clear sign that the standard of the sport had touched an altogether different level.

"Indian athletes are doing really well. If we look at our National Championships, many a time, the scores even top international scores," said Anjum on the sidelines of the

Khelo India Para Games at the Karni Singh range here on Saturday.

"Shooters in bulk are scoring very high (scores), which is not there in any other country. So, I think the level in India is very high," the Commonwealth Games silver medalist and former world No.1 told PTI Video.

One of Anjum's rivals in 50m rifle 3-positions, Sift Kaur Samra, recently gave an indication of her potential when she shattered the world record at the Hangzhou Asian Games on way to winning gold. Sift has also earned the 2024 Paris Olympics quota for the country in the event along with Shriyanka Sadangi.

Anjum feels all those who have bagged Olympic quota places

have put in a lot of effort and that India will send its best shooting contingent to Paris.

"Sift was the first to win a quota for India (in women's 50m rifle 3-positions) and this is very good for our sport, then Shriyanka won a quota place. I feel that whoever is winning a quota place has worked very hard and I feel that India's best team would go to Paris."

Anjum hoped she and Sift could become "worthy idols" for upcoming shooters, and indicated that the two enjoyed a cordial relationship on and off the shooting ranges.

"Sift and I play together for Punjab, we've played and won medals for Punjab together. Both of us won our first international medal together," said Anjum, adding, "I hope that for



the coming generations of shooters we become worthy idols and prepare a good base for them."

Anjum's performance following a none-too-impressive showing at the Tokyo Olympics has dipped, but the 29-year-old believes she will learn from the struggles to come back stronger.

"Ups and downs are part of an athlete's life. Some of my scores this year were not good and I was also out of some competitions this year. I feel that we need to learn from those struggles. I always told myself during those times that I would make a strong comeback."

"I think we should always strive to improve every day and perform, things like selection

are the job of the federation while my job is to concentrate on shooting and work on myself, and I am doing that wholeheartedly."

Anjum conceded that not concentrating on the key aspect of mental training early in her career had impacted her performance.

"There are many things which one incorporates in ones routine. I feel the physical and mental training that I have done is coming in use now. I think that I started mental training very late in my career and one that aspect I want to be stronger."

"How to deal with a positive situation, how to deal with a negative situation. Pressure is important as that brings out the best in an athlete," she added.

## Sathish wins men singles title

### Tanisha, Dhruv claim mixed doubles crown at Odisha Masters

PTI ■ CUTTACK

India's Sathish Kumar Karunakaran secured his maiden BWF super 100 title after outwitting world junior championship bronze medalist Ayush Shetty in an all Indian men's singles final at the Odisha Masters here on Sunday.

The 22-year-old Sathish, who won men's singles title at India International and had a runner-up finish at Maldives International this season, prevailed 21-18 19-21 21-14 over Ayush in an exciting final.

Indian pair of Tanisha Crasto and Dhruv Kapila also stood at the podium after winning the mixed doubles title following a thrilling three-game win over Singapore's Hee Yong Kai Terry and Tan Wei Han Jessica in a pulsating final.

Tanisha, 20, and 23-year-old Dhruv dished out a gallant fight to rally their way to outwit Hee

and Tan 17-21 21-19 23-21 in an hour and 14 minutes.

Sathish had come into the final, having beaten Ayush at the Chhattisgarh India International Challenge this season.

However, there was hardly anything to separate the two Indians though Sathish showed better control and won the key moments to move ahead from 13-13 in the opening game. From 14-18, Ayush tried to fight back but was erratic. Eventually, Sathish pushed one at the forehand corner to take two game points and sealed it with a smash.

Sathish kept the tempo high to eke out a 6-3 lead before staying ahead at 15-13 but Ayush stepped up and grabbed a one game point with a smash and then dominated a flat exchange to take it to the decider.

Ayush fell into a pool of errors as he sprayed into net, smashed



out and also made judgement errors to lag 1-7 in the decider. Sathish took a six-point advantage at the interval after his opponent sent another wide.

Ayush's game fell apart against some relentless hitting from Sathish, who grew in confidence and it showed in his body language.

Sathish moved to nine championship points after Ayush

found the nets. He squandered three chances before converting. He threw his racquet in the air in celebration.

Sathish had also won the mixed doubles titles with partner Aadya Variyath at the Maldives International and finished second best at Malaysia. He had also played for Chennai Superstarz in Premier Badminton League in 2020.

Tanisha will again be in action in the women's doubles final with partner Ashwini Ponnappa taking on the Indonesian combination of Mellysa Trias Puspitasari and Rachel Allessya Rose.

Sixth seeded Indian men's doubles pair of Krishna Prasad Garaga and Sai Pratheek K also progressed to the final and will face seventh seeded Lin Bing-Wei and Su Ching Heng of Chinese Taipei.

The BWF (Badminton World Federation) World Tour is divided into six levels, namely World Tour Finals, four Super 1000, six Super 750, seven Super 500, and 11 Super 300. One more category of the tournament, the BWF Tour Super 100 level, also offers ranking points.

Each of these tournaments offers different ranking points and prize money. The highest points and prize pool is offered at the Super 1000 level.

## Ramandeep clinches WBC India light

PTI ■ HYDERABAD

Dunjab's Ramandeep Kaur clinched the prestigious WBC India title in the light flyweight division by eking out a narrow split decision win over eight rounds against Mamta Singh from Haryana.

The Indian Boxing Council (IBC) sanctioned event showcased 10 fights including two title fights -- WBC India & WBC Middle-East at the Gachibowli Stadium on Saturday.

Top-ranked Ramandeep entered her 14th pro bout with an impressive record of 10 wins and 3 losses while Mamta boasted an undefeated streak of four wins.

Mamta faced an uphill battle, shedding weight and adjusting to a lower weight class, unlike her usual super flyweight bouts.

The technical expertise of Ramandeep, seasoned in six previous six-round contests, was evident. She showcased superior technique from the outset, skillfully maneuvering and delivering precise punches, leaving Mamta struggling to find her rhythm.

In the other Co Main event of the night, India's Sabari J seized the WBC Middle East title by triumphing over Khasshair Ghassemi from Iran via a unanimous decision.

The two-time time WBC India Champion and former WBC Australasia champion Sabari, after the fight said that he couldn't perform at his peak because he had to lose about 7 kgs in the past month and a half to make weight for this contest.



## Ramkumar to lead Indian challenge against Pakistan

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

Ramkumar Ramanathan was on Sunday named in a five-member squad for the grass court challenge against Pakistan -- a clear sign that an Indian Davis Cup side is preparing to play on Pakistan soil for the first time in 60 years even as AITA awaits ITF tribunal's decision on its appeal against travel to neighbouring nation on security concerns.

India last travelled to Pakistan way back in 1964 when they beat the hosts 4-0. India have never lost to Pakistan in the Davis Cup competition in eight ties against each other.

Ramkumar, whose serve and volley game style suits the grass surface, will lead the squad that includes N Sriram Balaji, Yuki Bhambri, Niki Poonacha and Saketh Myneni as All India Tennis Association (AITA) on Sunday named the team for the February 3-4 World Group I play-off tie.

The team has only Ramkumar and 2019 national champion as singles players while the three others now play only doubles on the ATP Tour.

It will not be a surprise if captain Rohit Rajpal asks Bhambri to play the singles. Balaji can also be asked to play one of the singles.

Digvijay Pratap Singh, who made his debut against Morocco in India's last Davis Cup assignment in Lucknow in September, has been named as a reserve player in the squad.

India's top players Sumit Nagal and Sasikumard Mukund have pulled out of the tie, where the winning

team will ensure its stay in World Group I for the rest of the 2024 season.

India had requested ITF to relocate the tie to a neutral venue but the ITF Davis Cup Committee had rejected the appeal.

"We have appealed against the Davis Cup committee decision and a final call will be taken by the ITF tribunal on December 19. If the tribunal also rejects the appeal we will then travel to Pakistan," AITA Secretary General Anil Dhupar told PTI.

Asked if the government will grant the Indian squad permission to travel to Pakistan, Dhupar said, "It's a World Cup of tennis and the government is likely to allow travel in this case."

"Only one month is left for the tie and the selected players need to know the schedule so that they can plan their ATP engagements, that's why we have announced the team. Whether we are asked by ITF to travel to Pakistan or we go to a neutral venue is a different matter, the team had to be picked."

India were drawn to meet Pakistan in Pakistan in 2019 also but the ITF had moved the tie to Kazakhstan on AITA's request and India emerged winner with an emphatic 4-0 margin.

Pakistan's top players had then pulled out of the tie in protest against AITA's decision to not travel to their country. Pakistan fielded rookie players who were no match to India's strong team.

The Pakistan Tennis Federation (PTF) has already made it clear that it will not field its team if the ITF decides to shift the tie to a neutral venue again.

PTI ■ KOLKATA

Kenya's Daniel Simiu Ebenyo and Ethiopian Sutume Asefa Kebede set new meet records in the men's and women's categories respectively to win the Tata Steel Kolkata 25K here on Sunday.

Ebenyo stopped the clock at one hour 11 minutes and 13 seconds to better fellow Kenyan athlete Leonard Barsoton's record of 1:12:49s.

Finishing behind Ebenyo was his compatriot Victor Kipruto Togom who also bettered the previous record with a timing of 1:12:26 followed by Ethiopia's Tesfaye Demeke (1:13:36) in the third spot.

Ebenyo, who earlier this year secured two significant silver medals from Budapest Worlds (10,000m) and the World Half-Marathon championships in Riga, led the field on most

## Ebenyo, Kebede clinch Kolkata 25K titles

occasions clocking 43:01 after crossing 15K.

Ebenyo increased his pace after 19K (59:12) and broke away from Togom to run a solo race thereafter.

Ethiopian Yalemzerf Yehualaw (24), the half-marathon world championships bronze medalist in 2020, was favourite to win the women's title on her debut.

However, her teammate Kebede had other plans in her mind.

Running only her second race at this distance, Kebede remained in the lead together with her compatriot until the waning stages of the race and applied



pressure at the last kilometre to win in 1:18:47.

Yehualaw (1:19:26) and Kenya's Betty Chepkemai Kibet (1:21:43) finished behind her.

Sawan, Reshma grab Indian honours

Sawan Barwal and Reshma Kevate topped among the Indians with a timing of 1:17:49 and 1:30:38 in the men's and women's categories respectively.

Sawan pushed Gaurav Mathur (1:20:33) to the second position followed by MD Aseem (1:42:08) in the third spot.

In the women's category, Seema finished second with a timing of 1:32:07 while Nirmaben Thakor Bharatjee stood third with a timing of 1:32:40.

Overall, Barwal was eighth, while Reshma stood ninth.

RESULTS

Men: 1. Daniel Ebenyo (Kenya; 1:11:13 NMR); 2. Victor Kipruto Togom (Ken; 1:12:26); 3. Tesfaye Demeke (Eth; 1:13:36); 4. Haymanot Alew (Eth; 1:13:44); 5. ABE Gashahun (Eth; 1:13:51); 6. Bennard Biwott (Ken; 1:13:57); 7. Jackson Kipleting (Ken; 1:17:49); 8. Sawan Barwal (Ind; 1:17:49); 9. Gaurav Mathur (Ind; 1:20:33); 10. Genetu Molalign (Eth; 1:31:39).

Women: 1. Sutume Asefa Kebede (Eth; 1:18:47 NMR); 2. Yalemzerf Yehualaw (Eth; 1:19:26); 3. Betty Chepkemai Kibet (Ken; 1:21:43); 4. Emebet Niguse (Eth; 1:22:43); 5. Nelly Jepto (Ken; 1:23:00); 6. Anchinale Dessie (Eth; 1:23:18); 7. Micyline Chelangat (Uga; 1:25:37); 8. Tsige Haileselase (Eth; 1:28:37); 9. Reshma Kevate (Ind; 1:30:38); 10. Seema (Ind; 1:32:07).

## Pranavi tied 7th after round 1 of LET Final Stage

PTI ■ MARRAKECH (MOROCCO)

Pranavi Urs gave her hopes of getting into the Ladies European Tour full-time a big boost as she began with a 5-under 68 in round one of the LET Final Stage Q-School event at the Al Maaden Golf Marrakech course.

Pranavi, who played on the Epson Tour in the US in 2023, made a superb recovery after being two-over through four holes following bogeys on the third and the fourth.

With five birdies and an eagle on the par-5 seventh, she rose

to tied-seventh with four rounds to go on Saturday.

After a par-par start, Pranavi suffered back-to-back bogeys to go 2-over after four.

She rallied from there with back-to-back birdies on fifth and sixth, followed by an eagle on seventh and then again back-to-back birdies on the eighth and ninth for a 4-under 32 on the front nine.

She added one more birdie on the back on 11th and parred the rest for a round 67.

Mexican Fernanda Lira produced a sensational opening round of 62 (-11) at Al Maaden Golf Marrakech to



lead the Final Qualifier by three shots. She had two eagles and seven birdies in her round.

Apart from Pranavi, the other Indians had a modest start. The next best was Ridhima Dilawari (74 at Al Maaden) in T-69 with Vani Kapoor (74 at Royal Golf de Marrakech) in T-69.

Two other Jasmine Shekar (75 at Al Maaden), Tvesa Malik (74 at Royal Golf de Marrakech) were T-88.

Amandeep Drall (75), Avani Prashanth (75) and Neha Tripathi (75) playing at Al Maaden were T-106, while Seher Atwal (77 at Royal Golf de Marrakech) was T-131.

Durga Nittur (80) and Ananya Datar (80) at Royal Golf de Marrakech were T-147 and Sneha Singh (83 at Al Maaden) was T-151. The event is being played over two courses, the Par-72 Royal Golf de Marrakech and the Par-73 Al Maaden Golf Marrakech.

All players will play both courses twice each and then the Top-65 and ties will play the final round from where the Top-20 and ties get a full card for 2024.

Lira, 28, set a women's course record at Al Maaden with a total of 11-under-par and holds a three-shot lead at the end of the first day.

Spain's Luna Sobron Galmes and Slovenia's Ana Belac sit in a share of second place after they both carded rounds of 65 (-8) at Al Maaden.

Spain's Teresa Diez Moliner and Finland's Linda Osala are in a tie for fourth place on seven-under-par with England's Amy Taylor one shot further back in sixth place - the trio played at Al Maaden.

Six players are in a share of seventh place with Aunchisa Utama, Pranavi Urs, Nataliya Bhattacharya were third at 295.

The All-India Amateur Championships is India's oldest golf tournament having started in 1892. The Championships were not held during the two World Wars and was cancelled once in 2020 due to Covid.

PTI ■ KOLKATA

Subhash Tamang, who comes from a humble background, became the first golfer from Nepal to win the prestigious All India Amateur Championships run by the Indian Golf Union.

Tamang, who was almost 10 when he first held a golf club, beat Rohit of India 9&7 to win the 122nd edition of the tournament at the iconic Royal Calcutta Golf Club.

The 21-year-old Tamang, who was neck-and-neck with Rohit for the first 15 holes, pulled away to 3-up after 18 holes. In the afternoon session he was unstoppable, and the match ended when he was nine ahead with seven holes left.

## Subhash Tamang beat Rohit

### To become first golfer from Nepal to win All India amateur championships

"It is the happiest moment of my life," said Tamang, who came over to India in 2022 to hone his skills under an India pro, Tarun Sardesai at his academy near Bengaluru.

Tamang's performances earned him starts at the prestigious Asia Pacific Amateur Championships and other internationals, but this is his biggest win.

Tamang was first spotted by Tashi Ghale, a Nepalese businessman and the President of



Nepal Golf Association. Ghale took him to Deepak Acharya, the Director of Operations, and a teaching professional at Gokarna Golf Club, where Tamang trained and played.

Then around the start of 2022, Ghale and Acharya helped Tamang to get to India and train with Sardesai, who now trains the Nepal team.

Tamang, who was 54th at Asia-Pacific Amateur Championships in 2022 in Thailand, missed the cut at the

AAC this year in Melbourne. His best world rank has been 105th but was ranked 153rd at the start of the week. Now this latest win could once again bring him closer to career-best rank.

The flagship event of the IGU, the All-India Amateur Championships began with a 36-hole stroke play event to narrow the field down to 32 for the Matchplay section.

Tamang was fourth in the 36-hole stroke play at the start of

the week, he made his way through numerous rivals to reach the final. His toughest match came in the first round, when he was taken to extra holes and won on the 19th hole against Kanav Chauhan.

Then he beat Vishesh Sharma in the pre-quarter finals and Dhruv Suri in the quarter finals by similar margins of 4&3.

In the semi-finals, he again got good in crucial stages and beat the top seed Altin Van der Merwe of South Africa 3&1.

Earlier in the stroke play team event, South Africa emerged winners with Altin Van der Merwe and Jordan Clay Burnand leading the charge.

The two South Africans lost out in the semi-finals, as Tamang beat Van der Merwe and Rohit eliminated Burnand.

India A with Sandeep Yadav and Rohit were second at 294 and India B comprising Vinamra Anand and Shaurya Bhattacharya were third at 295.

The All-India Amateur Championships is India's oldest golf tournament having started in 1892. The Championships were not held during the two World Wars and was cancelled once in 2020 due to Covid.



# India crush South Africa by eight wickets

PTI ■ JOHANNESBURG

India pace bowlers Arshdeep Singh and Avesh Khan wreaked havoc as the KL Rahul-led visitors thrashed South Africa by eight wickets in the opening One-Day International at the Wanderers here on Sunday.



On a wicket offering pace and bounce to the quicks, Avesh returned figures of 4 for 27 in his eight overs, while left-arm Arshdeep had excellent figures of 5 for 37 in 10 overs as the Proteas were dismissed for a paltry 116 in 27.3 overs. Sai Sudharsan (55 not out) and Shreyas Iyer (52) then struck fine half centuries to chase down the target in 16.4 overs for the loss of two wickets. India and South Africa handed debut caps to 22-year-old top order batter B Sai Sudharsan and bowling all-rounder Nandre Burger respectively. Playing their first 50 over game post the World Cup final, it seemed that Arshdeep and Avesh had picked up a cue from their seniors Mohammed Shami and Jasprit Bumrah as a

quality Proteas batting line-up were made to look like novices on a track that offered a lot of help. It was Arshdeep's first five-wicket haul in ODIs and the Punjab left-arm bowler would certainly feel good having drawn a lot of flak for his inconsistency in the shortest format. In their last encounter at

Kolkata's Eden Gardens, South Africa were bowled out for 83 under lights on a slow deck but never would have Aiden Markram envisaged that he and his men would be bullied at the 'Bull Ring' which has been a safe haven for them in white ball cricket. Their innings lasted only 27.3 overs. Only three players-- skipper

fact were on hat-tricks with dismissals off successive deliveries. Arshdeep would get more credit as he blew away the top-order within the first Powerplay with four wickets and then left it to Avesh, who bowled fast and full, hurrying the batters for pace. In between, Avesh would slip in the occasional short ball for the tail-enders, who were in two minds whether to go on the front-foot or back-foot.

It started with Reeza Hendricks (0), who dragged a delivery that was angled across the right-hander back onto the stumps and the dangerous Rassie van der Dussen (0) must have expected an away-going one but got one that darted back from middle-stump. Tony de Zorzi (28 off 22 balls), chanced his arms and Mukesh Kumar (0/46 in 7 overs), who had an off-day, went for a few before Arshdeep showed his variation by digging one short and the ball ballooned for skipper Rahul to complete an easy catch. However the wicket that completely broke the home team's back was Heinrich Klaasen's

(6) dismissal, which would have even made the great Wasim Akram proud. Arshdeep bowled one slightly back of length but flicked his wrists in a manner that it turned into a vicious in-dipper that clipped the leg stump ball, leaving the right-hander in complete daze.

The end of Powerplay didn't end Proteas' woes as skipper Markram played on, completely beaten for pace. David Miller (2) also fell prey to relentless pressure to a delivery pitched on drivable length while Wiaan Mulder and Keshav Maharaj found the speed of deliveries too hot to handle. It was Andile Phehlukwayo, whose 33, coming in at No. 8, took the home team past 100-run mark before Arshdeep, in his second spell, complete his five-for. **BRIEF SCORES:** South Africa: 116 all out in 27.3 overs (Tony de Zorzi 28, Andile Phehlukwayo 33; Arshdeep Singh 5/37, Avesh Khan 4/27). India: 117 for 2 in 16.4 overs (Sai Sudharsan 55 not out, Shreyas Iyer 52).



## Australia beat Pakistan by 360 runs

AP ■ PERTH

Australia skittled Pakistan to record a thumping 360-run victory in the first test inside four days with Nathan Lyon achieving the elusive landmark of 500 test wickets on Sunday. Pakistan was blown away for 89 all out in 30.2 overs in the final session on Day 4 for its 15th consecutive test defeat in Australia after the home team set up a daunting 450-run target when it declared its second innings at 233-5 around half an hour after lunch. "Great start to the summer, everything fell into place," Australia captain Pat Cummins said at the presentation ceremony. "We've played a lot of cricket, so the build-up was very chilled and relaxed. No hiccups this week, it's all gone to the plan."

Captain Shan Masood could make only 2 before he played a loose drive off Hazlewood and Imam-ul-Haq was pinned leg before wicket by Starc with another gem of a delivery that came sharply into the left-hander. Hazlewood quickly folded Pakistan's fragile batting by having top-scorer Saud Shakeel (24) leg before wicket and dismissing No. 11 batter Khurram Shahzad off successive deliveries. Earlier, Usman Khawaja fell short of his century before he holed out for 90 against out of sorts Shaheen Shah Afridi as Australia looked for quick runs after lunch. Afridi had a disappointing start to the series as Pakistan's premier fast bowler returned with match figures of 2-176 off his 45.2 overs. Left-handed Khawaja and Mitchell Marsh, who remained unbeaten on 63, shared a run-a-ball 126 with Marsh scoring his second successive half century at his home ground. Resuming Sunday at 84-2, Australia lost Steven Smith and Travis Head in the first hour of the day as Pakistan's bowlers took advantage of the tricky wicket and movement offered by the deteriorating Perth pitch to frequently trouble Australia's batters. After Smith and Marnus Labuschagne took painful blows on Day 3, Khawaja and Marsh also received nasty hits as the Aussies did their best to keep their wickets, and bodies, intact in a spicy morning session. Khawaja reached his half century off 151 balls and Marsh lifted the hosts' scoring rate with some exquisite drives on both sides of the wicket as Pakistan was sloppy in the field with captain Shan Masood dropping a regulation catch of Marsh at mid-off when the batter was on 23. Debutant fast bowler Khurram Shahzad, who took both the Australian wickets to fall on Saturday, continued his fine start to test cricket by getting Smith (45) leg before wicket to reduce Australia to 87-3. It was the second time in the match Shahzad had captured Australia's premier batter. Fellow debutant Aamer Jamal, who took 6-111 in Australia's first innings of 487, got Head for the second time as Australia's one-day international World Cup star holed out to Imam-ul-Haq at mid-off for 14. "We could have batted a bit quicker (in the first innings), missed on 60-70 runs," said Masood in reference to Pakistan's first innings effort of 271 in 101.5 overs. "A lot of positive things to take forward. It's never easy when you play two debutants but thought they were very mature. They bowled really well, on another day could have got more wickets." The two debutant fast bowlers -- Jamal and Shahzad -- claimed 12 of the 15 wickets in the game dominated by some aggressive Australian batting in both innings. The second test of the three-match series starts on Boxing Day at Melbourne, with Sydney hosting the third test from Jan.

## Borussia Dortmund suffers another Bundesliga setback

AP ■ BERLIN

Excelling in the Champions League, disappointing in the Bundesliga. Borussia Dortmund suffered another domestic setback when it was held at Augsburg to 1-1 on Saturday just days after topping a Champions League group with Paris Saint-Germain, AC Milan and Newcastle.



When asked how the team cannot maintain its good Champions League form in the Bundesliga, Dortmund defender Nico Schlotterbeck answered, "I don't know." Ermedin Demirovic held off Schlotterbeck's challenge - arguably with a shove - to fire Augsburg into a 23rd-minute lead. Donyell Malen played a one-two with Niclas Füllkrug to equalize in the 35th. Augsburg missed three good chances early in the second half before Dortmund coach Edin Terzic sent on Gio Reyna for Marco Reus, then the 19-year-old Samuel Bamba for his Bundesliga debut, but Dortmund was unable to grab a winner. "We said before the game that we want and need to get six points in the remaining two games (of 2023)," Terzic said. "Once again, it's not an easy game to explain because we did a lot of things well, we didn't like some things, and in the end it's 1-1 and we have to live with that."

Leverkusen if Leverkusen beats Eintracht Frankfurt at home on Sunday. Bayern hosts Stuttgart on Sunday and still has a game to catch up on in January. Dortmund also fell further behind Leipzig in the race for Champions League qualification. "Complaining doesn't help," said Terzic, after referring to his team's busy schedule. "It's a matter of moving forward again and showing that we also accept this challenge. And we will face that. And then hopefully we can reward our fans in the last home game (of 2023) on Tuesday." Dortmund next faces Mainz. **TASTY TAKUMA** Fueled by chocolate from supporters' protests, Takuma Asano scored to set up Bochum's 3-0 win over visiting Union Berlin in their duel at the lower end of the table. The Japan forward grabbed a chocolate coin that was among many thrown onto the field by fans protesting the league's plans to bring in an outside investor, unwrapped the gold foil, and ate the chocolate inside. Then Asano broke the deadlock in first-half injury time by firing Bochum ahead. Gonçalo Paciência and Kevin Stöger - from a penalty - scored in the second half to deal Union its first league defeat under new coach Nenad Bjelica.

## Lockyer stable after cardiac arrest on field

AP ■ LONDON

Luton captain Tom Lockyer collapsed on the field for the second time this year after suffering cardiac arrest, prompting the abandonment of their English Premier League game at Bournemouth. Lockyer was taken to the hospital and was "stable and currently undergoing further tests with his family at his bedside," Luton said. The Wales defender dropped to the ground untouched in the 59th minute. Players from both sides immediately called for help and Luton manager Rob Edwards entered the field, looking distressed. The 29-year-old Lockyer received a long period of medical treatment and was carried away on a stretcher, by which time he was responsive, Luton said. The score was 1-1 at the time and referee Simon Hooper made the decision to abandon the game, with the clock having stopped in the 65th. Fans stayed behind at Vitality Stadium after the match was called off and chanted the name of Lockyer. "We are sorry to all supporters present that players from both sides were in no state of mind to continue with the game after seeing their much-loved teammate and friend taken off like that," Luton said, "and



staff could not carry on with managing the game in such circumstances having had to deal with the situation." Lockyer also collapsed during the second-tier Championship playoff final at Wembley Stadium in May because he suffered an atrial fibrillation. He underwent heart surgery and was given the all-clear during the offseason to continue playing. "Now is the time for all of our players, staff and supporters to come together as we always do and give our love and support to Tom and his family," Luton said. **CITY STUMBLES AGAIN** There was a very different kind of drama at Etihad Stadium, where Manchester

for the Club World Cup and doesn't play again in the Premier League until Dec. 27. Liverpool, which is in first place and three points ahead of fourth-placed City, has three games in that period - starting at home to Manchester United on Sunday.

**NEWCASTLE REBOUNDS** Fatigued, hindered by a slew of injuries and hurting after a Champions League exit, Newcastle wasn't in a good place ahead of the visit of a Fulham team coming off back-to-back 5-0 wins. The Saudi-owned northeast team was given a helping hand courtesy of a red card to Fulham striker Raul Jimenez, who was sent off for a dangerous challenge in the 22nd minute, and went on to win 3-0. Lewis Miley, a 17-year-old midfielder, broke the deadlock before goals from Miguel Almiron and Dan Burn. The negative for Newcastle was the sight of Fabian Schar and Joelinton going off in the first half with hamstring injuries. Chelsea beat Sheffield United 2-0 thanks to goals by Cole Palmer and Nicolas Jackson. It was the same score at Turf Moor where Amadou Onana and Michael Keane netted in Everton's win at next-to-last Burnley to move seven points clear of the bottom three.

## Indian women go down 1-2 to Belgium

PTI ■ VALENCIA

The Indian women's hockey team suffered its second consecutive defeat by going down 1-2 to Belgium in the 5 Nations Tournament here. Belgium won the match riding on goals from Ambre Ballenghien (22') and Louise Versavel (37'). Meanwhile, Vaishnavi Vitthal Phalke (56') scored the only goal for India on Saturday. India had lost 2-3 to Spain in the opener. The match was intense from the first whistle, with both teams



looking to breach the defence of the other, but a goal was not

forthcoming. The teams ended the first quarter on level terms.

The breakthrough finally came in the second quarter as Ambre scored, giving Belgium the lead going into the halftime break. Both teams were eager to score next and it was Versavel's shot on goal, early in the third quarter which extended Belgium's lead in the contest. India kept probing Belgium's defence in search of a goal in the last quarter. In the dying moments of the game, Vaishnavi found an opening and scored, swinging the momentum in their favour. However, India failed to capitalise further.

AP ■ ROME

Freshly crowned African player of the year, Victor Osimhen showed why he's considered one of the world's top strikers. Having already scored one goal with a towering header between two defenders, Osimhen was even more impressive when he provided the assist for Khvicha Kvaratskhelia's winner in defending champion Napoli's 2-1 win over Claudio Ranieri's Cagliari in Serie A. First, Osimhen controlled a pass with his right foot. He used his chest before bouncing the ball three times off his right

# Osimhen's assist in Napoli's 2-1 win

thigh and onto his head. Appearing to lose control at that point, Osimhen instead muscled his way past three defenders to cross to the unmarked Kvaratskhelia, who pounded the ball in off the near post. Kvaratskhelia immediately pointed at Osimhen after the ball went in. "We did everything we could but when you go up against champions like Osimhen and Kvara they can decide the



match in an instant," Ranieri said. Ending a four-match winless streak at Stadio Diego Armando Maradona in the league, Napoli moved up to fourth place, 11 points behind leader Inter Milan, which visits Lazio on Sunday. Osimhen was instrumental during Napoli's title run last season with 26 goals to lead the league. Slowed by injury this season, he has only six. And he's due to miss a big chunk of

the season when he joins Nigeria's squad for the African Cup of Nations in January. Napoli is still adapting to a midseason coaching change where Walter Mazzarri replaced the fired Rudi Garcia. There were boos when the first half ended 0-0 despite numerous chances for the Partenopei. Osimhen took over when he rose to meet a cross from Mario Rui with a powerful header. The ball went directly at Simone Scuffet but the Cagliari goalkeeper couldn't stop it. Leonardo Pavoletti equalized three minutes later when he got past Napoli defender Juan Jesus to redirect in a cross. Then Osimhen drew the entire defense toward him and set up the winner with his dribbling show. "I'm really pleased that Osimhen and Kvara scored, because they were both nervous," Mazzarri said. "Napoli needs both of them to rediscover last season's form." The effort for the assist appeared to leave Osimhen with an injured groin and he came off a few minutes later.