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PAPER WITH PASSION

## Bond of secrecy

### The SC ruling on the 'opacity' of electoral bonds can be a game-changer for political donations

In any democracy, electoral transparency and accountability are paramount. However, a facet of political funding has remained shrouded in secrecy – electoral bonds. Their 'opaque' nature has now come under the Supreme Court's radar. Electoral bonds were introduced in India in 2017 with the purported aim of promoting "clean and transparent political funding" by the Narendra Modi Government. The idea was to allow donors to contribute funds in a traceable manner while maintaining their anonymity. The bonds could be purchased from authorised banks (SBI) and donated to a particular political party. However, the system has been under the cloud for its "lack of transparency". The Association for Democratic Reforms (ADR) and the CPI (M) in April 2019 filed petitions challenging the scheme's transparency and the apex court is now hearing the matter. A primary concern is that the bonds shield the donor's identity, leaving no trail for public scrutiny. This opacity raises doubts about donors' identity and the interests governing their decision. The Government defends electoral bonds, arguing it protects the privacy of donors who may face potential discrimination due to their political affiliations. It contends that the scheme balances the right of donors with the need for transparency as parties are required to disclose their funding details to the Election Commission. But the petitioners argue that electoral bonds undermine the principle of transparency, saying it allows for "opaque financing" and potentially opens the door for illegal/foreign funding. Prashant Bhushan, representing ADR, told the



top court that donations through electoral bonds until 2021-2022 for the BJP were Rs 5,271 crore and Rs 952 crore for the Congress. The ongoing case has profound implications for the future of political funding and electoral transparency. If the court upholds the scheme as it is, it would continue allowing political parties to receive anonymous and unlimited funds. Conversely, if the scheme is found in violation of democratic principles, it could push the Government to enact reforms that demand greater transparency in political financing. The nation's people deserve to know who funds the parties as it is likely intricately linked to the issue of corruption in high places: Individuals or corporations could buy a high worth of electoral bonds and donate it to a particular party with the understanding that it would stand to curry favour when the latter had power by framing or tweaking policies that help the donor's business interests. Moreover, the party in power could discreetly ask for donations from individuals or corporations to help them in awarding contracts or favouring them over business rivals. After all, it is not for nothing that a party in power gets roughly five times more donations than the main Opposition party!

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### PICTALK



A lady from Christian community decorates the grave on "All Souls Day", in Mumbai

PTI

## Why a beeline to overseas universities?

### Over the years, there has been a substantial increase in the number of Indian students opting to go abroad for higher studies

Students in large numbers are fascinated by the idea of going to a university outside their home country. Students who get into a good institution in India get best education at home itself. But not all are so lucky. Due to the surreal cutoff in the high-ranking universities, many deserving candidates are left out. To them studying abroad is the only option available even though it drills a hole in their pocket. Indeed, graduating from a reputed university in the West opens up many career options but it also comes with its own set of challenges and costs. Better academic opportunities, career prospects and availability of financial aid and scholarships are driving students to go abroad for higher studies. As per information available from the Ministry, there were approximately 1.5 million Indian students pursuing education abroad as of January 2023. There are several factors behind this exponential surge. Studying abroad or in a home country has its pros and cons. Studying in my home country is much cheaper. Besides, one could save costs on



accommodation, travel, food etc. But the downside is that staying with family gives a comfort that hardly encourages you to become independent. The students who go abroad to study are indeed more confident and independent. When students study overseas they also work part-time to support their living. This helps in boosting their confidence and hones up interpersonal skills. Of course, an international degree along with work experience will have a significant impact on the career graph. The institutions abroad offer better programmes, facilities and resources. Students are taking advantage of the latest technology, research opportunities and top-notch faculty. This opens up a broader range of subjects,

and fields to choose from. Employers often prefer to hire those candidates who have completed their education at prestigious institutions abroad. With more and more Indian students coming out of school every year, there aren't enough quality colleges and universities to accommodate them. Attractive post-study work rights in many countries, easy availability of education loans, and scholarship options are some of the other reasons why more Indians are going abroad to study. Many countries are keen to welcome international students and are working tenaciously to clear the visa backlog. The availability of scholarships and financial aid has made studying abroad more doable. Since many universities offer financial assistance to international students, it can significantly reduce the cost of tuition and living expenses. Most Indian students prefer studying in English-speaking countries, such as the US, UK, Australia and Canada. The US and UK, for instance, had record-breaking visa issuance for Indian students

in 2022-23. The reason for these countries' popularity is the demand for top-notch universities, specialised courses and better post-study work rights. However, many non-English speaking countries like France have also stepped up their efforts to invite more Indian students to their universities by giving them advantages that are lucrative and cost-effective. France for instance is at the forefront of such countries. Emmanuel Lebrun-Damiens, Country Director of the French Institute in India, says, "Apart from the fact that France and India have an agreement for the Mutual Recognition of Academic Qualifications, which eases admissions in each other's institutions, President Macron has also announced an ambitious goal of welcoming 30,000 Indian students to France by 2030." So, with many foreign universities targeting Indian students and promising job search and finance facilities, it is no wonder the students are looking West for higher education. (The author is a development writer and a social worker; views are personal)



PRABHA GUPTA

## Navigating the Qatari issue

### The Government must open backroom engagement channels and not dial-up nationalistic sentiment to secure the release of eight Indian ex-Navy officers



BHOPINDER SINGH

With among the world's largest reserves of natural gas and oil reserves, the tiny Sheikhdom of Qatar punches above its weight, on the global highway. Besides being home to the swanky Doha skyline, and hosting prestigious events e.g., the recently concluded FIFA World Cup et al, it has retained the status of the 'safest country in the world', for the fifth time in a row in 2023! Located at the peninsula of the restive and ultra-sensitive Persian Gulf, its sovereign security in a region of violent conflicts is additionally guaranteed by the Al-Udeid Air Base – the largest military installation of the United States in the Middle East. Operations as far and wide as Afghanistan, Syria and Iraq are coordinated from this nerve centre. It has leveraged its outsized relevance and Arab nativity to mediate many international conflicts. It was in the news for the complex agreement with Iran and the United States that led to the release of five long-term American detainees, in exchange for the release of \$6 billion frozen under sanctions. It mediated the Sudanese conflict among the Darfur parties. It was also host to the shadowy 'Doha Talks' between the Afghan Taliban and the US Administration that preceded US evacuation from Afghanistan. Now, it is deeply involved in negotiations between Hamas and Israelis to secure the release of hostages, cross-held. Optics of enhanced Qatari footprint and relevance beyond having to lurk in the traditional shadows of Saudi Arabia drive its ambition and purpose. To achieve this sought-after 'voice', Qatar has deployed and used its hugely successful and influential Al Jazeera media, as a tool of soft diplomacy. Recently, US Secretary of State, Anthony Blinken had to request the Qatari Prime Minister, Sheikh Mohammed bin Abdulrahman bin Jassim al-Thani, to 'turn down the volume'. Implicit in the request was the popular positing of a narrative that could be viewed as offering an alternative to the unilaterally accusative and simplistic 'terror



perspective (read, anti-Israeli/US stand) on the ensuing Israel-Palestine war. But a Qatar, which rails equally in the eyes of Israel as much as it does in neighbouring Sheikhdoms who are wary of the 'openness' of Al Jazeera whose reportage especially hurt in the days of the 'Arab Spring'. Many in the Arab World believe that through Al Jazeera and other provocative actions e.g., cosying up to the likes of Hamas, Hezbollah and Taliban, or to sectarian rival Iran (even though Qatar is essentially Sunni) and the equally maverick Turkey, adds to its unique unpredictability and unreliability. Qatar's manoeuvring of the narrative often affords a bundle of deliberate contradictions, that defies so many stereotypes of a typical Arab Sheikhdom. Like most affluent Sheikhdoms that attract a lot of immigrant workforce from the Indian Sub-Continent – the tiny state with a 2.7 million population has only 0.3 million local Qataris, and more than 0.7 Indian nationals, as its workforce. This substantial Indian diaspora along with growing bilateral trade and commerce, lends considerable depth and vibrancy to the Indo-Qatari relationship. So, while it has remained off the



WHILE STILL FROM A LOWER COURT, THE IMPORT AND SIGNIFICANCE OF SUCH A VERDICT WOULD NOT BE LOST ON ITS JUDICIAL SYSTEM, WHICH PRESUMABLY FELT EMPOWERED TO ISSUE THE SAME, KNOWING THE REACTION – THIS IS DISCONCERTING

radar as far as Kashmir is concerned, respecting the strong Indian position on the same – it has gone tangential with the recent news of the court of first instance, pronouncing the death penalty onto eight former Indian naval personnel who are accused of spying for a 'third country' (supposed euphemism for Israel). Delhi is outraged at the audacity of the judgement and has promised to 'exploring all legal options'. It is cautiously word-smithing its reaction to suggest reassuring caution to the families back home, but at the same time buying time and reason to navigate and understand the Qatari intrigues that led to such a verdict. While still from a lower court, the import and significance of such a verdict would not be lost on its judicial system, which presumably felt empowered to issue the same, knowing the reaction – this is disconcerting. Since there were no bilateral issues besetting the two nations, could it be acting on behalf of another country (say, Pakistan?) or could it be part of a larger leverage for the ensuing Israel-Hamas discourse? Unlikely, but with Qatar you can never say never. Thankfully, Qatar does have a de facto moratorium on the death penalty with only one

execution of a Nepali citizen (convicted for killing a Qatari national) in 2021, and then the prior one, as back as 2003. This unexpected verdict on former Indian Naval personnel belies the strategic bonhomie between the two navies conducting joint naval exercises, Za'ir Al-Bahr (Roar of the Sea). Also, in the unlikely situation that Delhi is not able to secure the release of its citizens, it is not unusual for Qatari authorities to practically convert the death penalty to life imprisonment, as they have done so, often. Lastly, as Qatar is striving to project itself as a progressive, preferred and engaging regional power – herein, the optics of a medieval-style mass execution would not reflect well with its sovereign credentials and perceptions. Therefore, time and space must be afforded to Indian Ministry of External Affairs mandarins to do backroom engagement and not dial-up hyper-nationalistic and intimidatory rhetoric or even unfounded aspersions (as has become the won't) of the Qatari state, as that could be highly counterproductive. (The writer, a military veteran, is a former Lt Governor of Andaman & Nicobar Islands and Puducherry. The views expressed are personal)

### LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

#### SOCIAL MEDIA IS A MENACE

Sir—Social media is indeed a double-edged sword, and it's challenging to imagine life without it. However, when children can't resist enticing apps, it's time to take notice. In the United States, a coalition of 33 states has filed lawsuits against Meta, the company behind Facebook (FB), Instagram, Messenger, and WhatsApp. Meta stands accused of intentionally designing features on Facebook and Instagram to entice children into engaging with these platforms, ultimately profiting at the expense of children's mental health through harmful content. These allegations are not unfounded, as concerns about children's addiction to various apps, including Facebook and Instagram, have reached alarming levels. Today's school education heavily involves mobile phones and internet use, making it challenging for parents to distinguish between beneficial and harmful content. Apart from the potential dangers of undesirable influences, psychological issues like anxiety, insomnia, and depression are rampant among youngsters glued to social media. As a result, their intellectual abilities, self-esteem, and academic performance may suffer. Age-appropriate apps are essential, and parents should actively engage in guiding their children's social media use. Ganapathi Bhat | Akola

#### SUMMIT ON AI

Sir—The two-day summit in England, which commenced shortly after US President Joe Biden signed an executive order on artificial intelligence (AI) security, drew leaders and scientists from 27 countries. It is becoming increasingly evident that the risks to humanity's survival from AI outweigh the potential benefits. Consequently, industrialists who stand to profit from AI are not only embracing technology controls but also advocating for government oversight.

#### The falling rupee



The Indian rupee is currently at an all-time low of 83.33 against the US dollar. Foreign funds continue to exit stock markets, while rising oil prices, compounded by geo-

political uncertainties in the Middle East, have bolstered the demand for dollars. The US dollar has also strengthened on the dollar index against a basket of six major currencies, rising 0.20% to 106.87. Higher yields on US bonds are causing hot money to flow out of Indian stock markets, posing challenges for the Indian rupee. While the Reserve Bank of India (RBI) is actively managing rupee volatility by releasing US dollars from its reserves, this can only continue for a limited time. In recent weeks, India's foreign exchange reserves have been steadily declining, falling by \$2.36 billion to \$583.53 billion during the week ended October 20, according to RBI data released on Friday. This decline in the Indian rupee suggests that India is facing economic troubles, and in the coming months, the rupee may depreciate to Rs 90 to Rs 100 against the US dollar, which could have disastrous consequences for the Indian economy. Bhagwan Thadani | Mumbai

Some individuals falsely claim that any country can become a "technology superpower" through AI. However, notable figures like Geoffrey Hinton, often referred to as the "Godfather" of artificial intelligence, resigned from Google, warning that the technology he was developing could pose an existential threat to humanity. This revelation prompted countries worldwide to take AI dangers more seriously. Visionaries like billionaire business magnate Elon Musk and ChatGPT-maker OpenAI CEO Sam Altman attended the conference in England to emphasise the future risks of AI that could potentially outweigh its benefits. Jang Bahadur Singh | Jamshedpur

#### IPHONE ALERT

Sir—With upcoming state assembly elections and the 2024 general elections on the horizon, the timing of these threat notifications is alarming. We

should not let public cynicism or judicial inaction deter us from demanding an independent, transparent technical analysis and clear disclosures from the Government of India regarding its spyware purchases and deployments. This issue strikes at the heart of Indian democracy. In the past, we witnessed Pegasus, a mythical winged divine horse and a well-known figure in Greek mythology. It's almost as if we are fortunate to witness the mythical horse in action in Parliament and on TV screens, as it defies logic and reason. Now, it's the case of Apple, the forbidden fruit of Adam and Eve. The notification implies that state actors and stage actors are sounding false alarms. C K Subramaniam | Mumbai

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## FIRST COLUMN

### INDIA MAY HAVE A BIGGER ROLE IN W ASIA

West Asia is in turmoil and may need Indian intervention to stabilise it



KUMARDEEP BANERJEE

The ongoing pounding of the Gaza strip by Israel, as a retaliation to the terror act by the militant group Hamas towards Israeli citizens, is slowly but shifting the geo-political alignments across the globe. It now seems India has a far greater role to play, than what was being originally perceived. US President Biden has reiterated that the Hamas terror act was a means to sabotage the India-Middle East Europe Economic Corridor (IMEEC). The ambitious IMEEC infrastructure project was formally announced during the recently concluded G20 summit in New Delhi, which saw the US, India, UAE, Saudi Arabia Italy France, Germany and the European Commission come together to create a dual infrastructure project through an eastern trade corridor from India to the Gulf and a northern corridor connecting the Gulf to Europe.

The presence of an inland railway network primarily in the Gulf region, complementing the shipping lines culminating in ports dotting the region, has been conceived to promote greater integration of Israel with the rest of its neighbourhood, primarily Saudi Arabia and UAE, while also promoting greater regional integration, and creating an alternative to China sponsored BRI ( Belt and Road initiative).

The IMEEC has its roots in the Abrahams Accord, a US-led exercise to bring stability and peace between not-so-cordial nations in the Middle East, and firmly bringing Israel into the picture. This was followed by the grouping of 4, the I2U2 comprising India, Israel, the US and UAE. The blueprint for IMEEC was drawn by the National Security Advisors representing I2U2, given the security threats at work in the volatile region. The IMEEC is also the US's way of getting its way back in the region, where for decades it has served as the police and peace and kingmaker. The pulling out of American boots on the ground from the Middle east necessitated a new-age alliance with a bias for the economic imperatives of the participating countries while building key infrastructure for clean energy.

The war on the Gaza strip could effectively topple this, carefully placed chessboard as the Arab world is surely losing patience with Israel's actions towards a fellow Muslim country. Israel is angry today, and justifiably so as, as the death of more than 1000 of its innocent civilians, and several hundred taken into captivity by Hamas militants requires a just equitable reaction. However, the visuals and news of the death of humanitarian workers, journalists, children and elderly serving in the conflicted Gaza strip are testing the patience of the world population, many of whom would not be cued onto the intricacies of fragile foreign relations diplomacy and, impact it has on their daily lives.



This is where India comes in, which is careful to justly condemn any acts of terror carried out by Hamas against Israel while trying not to sour its recently established warm relations with the Arab world. One of the first victims could be the eight decorated Indian Navy men, who have been declared to be spies. While India is working at the highest levels through diplomatic and other backchannel channels to secure the release and safety of its citizens, the timing and action dictated by Qatar cannot be missed. Secondly, Saudi Arabia whose crown prince was on a state visit to India highlighting the depth of the carefully nurtured bilateral relationship with India, is also starting to echo the Arab world's demand for a ceasefire, and saving lives of thousands of civilians in the Gaza Strip.

There are others like UAE another of India's carefully curated allies in the region, which has been maintaining a balanced reaction to the ongoing conflict, but it may not last long, given the domestic political pressures. If the conflict spills over for a longer war resulting in many more thousands of Palestinians being killed, India may need to recalibrate its relationship with the region.

(The writer is a policy analyst; views are personal)

# A global call for peace in Gaza

Diplomacy, backed by the principles of justice and compassion, should be the cornerstone of international engagement



RAJDEEP PATHAK



One of the challenges that the world faces today is the challenge of transforming the pervasiveness of violence in all its forms into a culture of peace; a peace that goes beyond the mere absence of war, to include living with justice and compassion, human rights and responsibilities and celebration of diversity. Mahatma Gandhi's peaceful, unconventional, non-violent strategy to achieve peace, is akin to the principles of Global Citizenship. Mahatma Writing for the "Young India" on June 18, 1925, Gandhi once stated "It is impossible for one to be an internationalist without being a nationalist. It is not nationalism that is evil it is the narrowness, selfishness and exclusiveness which is evil."

In the current global scenario, the world continues to grapple with the pervasive challenge of wars and conflicts that persist in various regions. The principles advocated by Mahatma Gandhi for achieving peace through non-violent means resonate strongly in the face of such challenges. The transformation from a culture of violence to one of peace, as envisioned by Mahatma Gandhi, remains an ongoing struggle. The emphasis on global citizenship, characterized by a commitment to justice, compassion, human rights, and the celebration of diversity, aligns with the ideals necessary to overcome the current landscape of conflict. The Mahatma's insight that nationalism, in itself, is not inherently evil underscores the importance of embracing a broader perspective that transcends narrowness, selfishness, and exclusiveness. In confronting present-day conflicts, fostering a sense of global interconnectedness and shared responsibility is essential for promoting lasting peace and addressing the root causes of discord in the international arena.

The ongoing conflict in the Gaza Strip that has caused enormous loss of lives calls for



ISRAEL HAS BEEN BOMBARDING GAZA AND HAS NOW BEEN WAGING GROUND OPERATIONS AFTER HAMAS' SURPRISE ATTACK THAT KILLED AT LEAST 1,400 ISRAELIS

(The writer is Programme Executive, Gandhi Smriti and Darshan Samiti, views are personal)

action from the international community to open the doors towards the negotiation table between the conflicting parties (Israel and Hamas) to put an immediate end to the war - which at this stage seems an illusion, but the efforts shouldn't be halted. In a media report with the BBC, Gaza on October 29 announced that more than 8,000 had been killed in the Palestinian territory since the start of the Israel-Hamas war on October 7. "The death count linked to the Israeli aggression is past 8,000, half of whom are children," the health ministry told the news agency AFP. Israel has been bombarding Gaza and has now been waging ground operations after Hamas' surprise attack killed at least 1,400 Israelis.

"This is the second stage of the war whose goals are clear - to destroy Hamas' governing and military capabilities and to bring the hostages home," Israel Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu told reporters late on Saturday, October 28.

A look at the history of the Israel-Palestine conflict, one finds that it has long been a source of turmoil. The Israel-Palestine conflict traces its roots to the late 19th century when nationalist movements gained momentum in the Middle East. The clash of historical narratives, religious claims to the same land, and geopolitical interests has perpetuated this conflict for decades. The establishment of the State of Israel in 1948 and subsequent wars have only intensified the hostilities.

The recent Gaza war has left a trail of destruction, with civilian casualties and infrastructural damage

painting a grim picture, further underscoring the urgent need for international intervention to establish lasting peace. The densely populated Gaza Strip, home to nearly two million Palestinians, witnessed relentless airstrikes, artillery fire, and ground operations. Civilians, including women and children, bore the brunt of the violence, leading to a staggering loss of life and widespread destruction of infrastructure. Images of homes reduced to rubble, hospitals overwhelmed - and bombarded - and families torn apart evoke a sense of urgency for the international community. World leaders have to find a sustainable resolution to this conflict.

While it seems like another illusion in the happening for many in the world, nonetheless, Mahatma Gandhi's philosophy of non-violence, justice, and compassion resonates with the principles of global citizenship. Gandhi's teachings underscore the idea that peace is not merely the absence of war but a state of harmony that encompasses justice, compassion, and respect for human rights. Mahatma Gandhi had earlier written in "Young India" on May 21, 1925, that "I object to violence because when it appears to do good, the good is only temporary. The evil it does is permanent."

Therefore, a paradigm shift, in the approach of world powers and leaders in working on negotiations for the settlement of the ongoing conflict in the Gaza Strip is of utmost requirement. World leaders must adopt a mindset that transcends national boundaries and prioritizes the well-being of all people, regardless of their origin.

Gandhi's perspective on nationalism provides a nuanced understanding of the delicate balance between national identity and global cooperation, which is interconnected.

While there seems to be no end to this disruption and loss of innocent human lives in the ongoing war in the Gaza Strip, it becomes all the more necessary for the world powers to navigate this balance delicately. While recognizing the legitimate aspirations of both Israelis and Palestinians for self-determination and national identity, it is essential to transcend narrow interests and exclusivity. The pursuit of peace should take precedence over political posturing, and global cooperation should be the guiding principle.

The urgency of the Israel-Palestine crisis demands a proactive and concerted effort from world powers to stop war. While historical alliances and geopolitical considerations often shape the stance of nations, the humanitarian cost of inaction cannot be ignored. The international community must prioritize peace over anything else. Diplomacy, backed by the principles of justice and compassion, should be the cornerstone of international engagement.

The celebration of diversity, respect for human rights, and a commitment to global cooperation should guide the efforts of nations seeking to mediate and facilitate a just resolution to this violence. The lessons of history show us that even the most entrenched conflicts can be resolved through dialogue, compromise, and a genuine desire for peace. It is a collective responsibility.

# Naveen Patnaik's 'Pandian' move checkmates opponents

The Odisha CM has appointed VK Pandian as chairman of 5-T initiative and Nabin Odisha to implement his dream projects, ahead of elections

In a move that stumped his critics and political opponents, Odisha Chief Minister Naveen Patnaik appointed his most trusted lieutenant and now-retired IAS officer VK Pandian as the chairman of his flagship 5-T initiative and Nabin Odisha, sending waves across the state's political circles. Having been at the receiving end of the opposition's ire over the growing influence of the Tamil Nadu-born officer in the state's governance, the 'gentle giant' of Indian politics, Patnaik stunned everyone by this appointment - by its nature, speed and timing.

While Patnaik's good relation and rapport with the BJP central leadership ensured Pandian's VRS was accepted



PRASHANT KUMAR

(Prashant Kumar is a freelance journalist, views are personal)

in no time and the notice period waived off - despite letters against the officer by BJP state leaders, his decision to make the 2002 batch Odisha Cadre officer his man Friday at this moment marks his political brilliance, with the state assembly elections scheduled early next year.

**How VK Pandian became the go-to man for Naveen Patnaik:**

An officer known for his simplicity and rare magnanimity, his journey into the good books of CM Patnaik started during his stint as the Collector of Ganjam district. It was his vision and action on the ground, ensuring justice and work for people apart from setting up a special facility for HIV-infected orphans in the district that

put him in direct sight of the chief minister. His initiatives in the district won several national awards.

His successive stints in various districts and unique initiatives there cemented his position as a person who was connected with grass-roots and portrayed him as someone who had the vision to solve issues of people on the ground. He was then picked up by Patnaik as his private secretary in 2011 and there has been no looking back for him since then. He was the man who would deliver CM's dreams and promises on the ground very, very effectively. His proactive involvement in the delivery of schemes was also criticised by the opposition who targeted Patnaik over his absence,



largely accusing him of renting the kingdom to his secretary while he was constantly napping - CM Patnaik never paid heed to any such accusations and his image as the leader remains intact.

CM Patnaik knew Pandian as someone who could deliver just about anything. From effective communication to coordination between the departments to chalking input strategies to make Odisha a state that powered sports and sports stars. The

revamp of Indian Hockey has seen Odisha as its biggest support system thanks to the great policies of the state. From sports to making Puri the world's best heritage site with all world mass amenities and ensuring a far better experience for devotees at the Shree Jagannath Temple in the town, Pandian is the man who's been overseeing the key initiatives of the Patnaik government.

Pandian over the past few years rose the ranks as a peo-

ple's officer. His work in education and the healthcare system made him a crowd-favourite. Revamping the schools of the state and making the health facilities sound by ensuring good public hospitals and facilities, Pandian's work in these two core sectors is talked about a lot among the masses of the state. Now, with him being given a cabinet minister status and the post of chairman, 5-T, the murmurs are abuzz about his induction into the Biju Janata Dal (BJD) party. The murmurs stem from the fact that it was he who, under the directions of CM Patnaik, set out to touch base with people across all 30 districts, listening to their grievances and giving solutions on the

spot. This drive by Pandian raised many eyebrows in the state. The opposition parties took turns attacking Patnaik over his absence and non-seriousness in governing the state, but it cemented Pandian's place as someone who could drive the future political narrative of Patnaik. For now, in Pandian's appointment, Naveen Patnaik has shut the mouth of his opposition before the all-important Lok Sabha elections and the assembly elections due in the state. He has also been able to successfully give a message out to youth by Pandian's appointment. How lethal and politically beneficial does this step of Patnaik turn out to be, only time will tell.

# Countries at UK summit pledge to tackle AI's potentially 'catastrophic' risks

AP ■ BLETCHLEY PARK

Delegates from 28 nations, including the US and China, agreed on Wednesday to work together to contain the potentially "catastrophic" risks posed by galloping advances in artificial intelligence. The first international AI Safety Summit, held at a former codebreaking spy base near London, focused on cutting-edge "frontier" AI that some scientists warn could pose a risk to humanity's very existence. British Prime Minister Rishi Sunak said the declaration was "a landmark achievement that sees the world's greatest AI powers agree on the urgency behind understanding the risks of AI – helping ensure the long-term future of our children and grandchildren."

— including through legislation. In a speech at the US Embassy, Harris said the world needs to start acting now to address "the full spectrum" of AI risks, not just existential threats such as massive cyberattacks or AI-formulated bioweapons. "There are additional threats that also demand our action, threats that are currently causing harm and to many people also feel existential," she said, citing a senior citizen kicked off his health care plan because of a faulty AI algorithm or a woman threatened by an abusive partner with deep fake photos. The AI Safety Summit is a labour of love for Sunak, a tech-loving former banker who wants the UK to be a hub for computing innovation and has framed the summit as the start of a global conversation about the safe development of AI. Harris is due to attend the summit on Thursday, joining government officials from more than two dozen countries

including Canada, France, Germany, India, Japan, Saudi Arabia — and China, invited over the protests of some members of Sunak's governing Conservative Party. Getting the nations to sign the agreement, dubbed the Bletchley Declaration, was an achievement, even if it is light on details and does not propose a way to regulate the development of AI. The countries pledged to work toward "shared agreement and responsibility" about AI risks, and hold a series of further meetings. South Korea will hold a mini virtual AI summit in six months, followed by an in-person one in France a year from now. China's Vice Minister of Science and Technology, Wu Zhaohui, said AI technology is "uncertain, unexplainable and lacks transparency." "It brings risks and challenges in ethics, safety, privacy and fairness. Its complexity is emerging," he said, noting that Chinese President Xi Jinping last month launched the country's

Global Initiative for AI Governance. "We call for global collaboration to share knowledge and make AI technologies available to the public under open source terms," he said. Tesla CEO Elon Musk is also scheduled to discuss AI with Sunak in a conversation to be streamed on Thursday night. The tech billionaire was among those who signed a statement earlier this year raising the alarm about the perils that AI poses to humanity. European Commission President Ursula von der Leyen, UN Secretary-General Antonio Guterres and executives from US artificial intelligence companies such as Anthropic, Google's DeepMind and OpenAI and influential computer scientists like Yoshua Bengio, one of the "godfathers" of AI, are also attending the meeting at Bletchley Park, a former top secret base for World War II codebreakers that's seen as a birthplace of modern computing.

## SUNAK WELCOMES KAMALA HARRIS



Britain's Prime Minister Rishi Sunak welcomes US Vice President Kamala Harris to 10 Downing Street in London, Wednesday. Harris is on a two day visit to England to attend the AI Summit at Bletchley Park. AP/PTI

## Sunak hails 'Bletchley Declaration' to tackle risks from AI

London (PTI): Prime Minister Rishi Sunak, who is leading the talks on Thursday at the AI Safety Summit convened by the UK, hailed the Bletchley Declaration as a "landmark" agreement between 28 countries, including India, on the shared responsibility to address the risks associated with artificial intelligence. In the lead up to the two-day AI Safety Summit at Bletchley Park, Buckinghamshire, Sunak had already announced the world's first AI Safety Institute to be set up in Britain to examine, evaluate, and test new types of AI to inform national and international policymaking. The summit is aimed at focussing on international priorities for artificial intelligence. Besides his discussions with government representatives from around the world on day two of the summit, Sunak will also hear from companies at the forefront of AI, academia and civil society, focused on the concrete action needed to ensure AI safety. Those attending include major AI business leaders like OpenAI, Anthropic, Google DeepMind, Microsoft and Meta. Tech billionaire and X chief Elon Musk is scheduled for a special one-on-one session with Sunak. "I believe there will be nothing more transformative to the futures of our children and grandchildren than technological advances like AI. We owe it to them to ensure AI develops in a safe and responsible way, gripping the risks it poses early enough in the process," said Sunak. "The first-ever global AI Safety Summit led by the UK has already seen major AI powers sign up to the landmark Bletchley Declaration, agreeing on the shared responsibility to address the risks and urgently work together on frontier AI safety and research."

# Diplomacy to pause fighting and ease siege intensifies

Rafah (Gaza Strip) (AP) Israeli troops advanced toward Gaza City on Thursday, as the Palestinian death toll rose above 9,000. With no end in sight after weeks of heavy fighting, US and Arab mediators intensified efforts to ease Israel's siege of the Hamas-ruled enclave and called for at least a brief halt to the hostilities in order to aid civilians. US President Joe Biden suggested a humanitarian "pause" the day before, as an apparent agreement among the US, Egypt, Israel and Qatar, which mediates with Hamas, allowed hundreds of Palestinians with foreign passports and dozens of wounded to leave Gaza for the first time. Dozens more left on Thursday. Israel did not immediately respond to Biden's remarks, but Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu has previously ruled out a cease-fire. Arab countries, including those allied with the US and at peace with Israel, have

expressed mounting unease with the war. Jordan recalled its ambassador from Israel and told Israel's envoy to remain out of the country until there's a halt to the war and the "humanitarian catastrophe" it is causing. More than 3,700 Palestinian children have been killed in 25 days of fighting, and bombings have driven more than half the territory's 2.3 million people from their homes, while food, water and fuel run low. Israeli troops pushed into Gaza in larger numbers over the weekend after three weeks of heavy airstrikes that have demolished entire neighbourhoods. The war, the fifth and by far deadliest in Gaza, began when Hamas launched a bloody October 7 rampage into Israel, killing hundreds of men, women and children. Some 240 were taken captive. The US has pledged unwavering support for Israel as it seeks to end Hamas' rule over



A Palestinian man carries a dead child that was found under the rubble of a destroyed building, following Israeli airstrikes in Jabalya refugee camp, northern Gaza Strip, Wednesday. In just 25 days of war, more than 3,600 Palestinian children have been killed in Gaza, according to Gaza's Hamas-run Health Ministry. The advocacy group Save The Children says more children were killed in Gaza in October 2023 than in all conflict zones around the world combined in 2022. AP/PTI

Gaza and crush its military capabilities, even as the two allies seem to have no clear plan for what would come next. White House officials said a pause in fighting would allow for more aid to be sent in and potentially facilitate the release of hostages. US Secretary of State Antony Blinken is expected to return to the region on Friday. The departure of Palestinians through the Rafah crossing into Egypt on Wednesday came after weeks of talks. It was first time people left Gaza other than four hostages released by Hamas and another rescued by Israeli forces. Israel has also allowed more than 260 trucks carrying food and medicine through the crossing, but aid workers say it's not nearly enough. At least 335 foreign passport holders left Wednesday and approximately another 100 left Thursday, according to Wael Abu Omar, a spokesman for the Palestinian Crossings Authority. Seventy-six Palestinian patients, along with

their companions, were also evacuated, he said. The US has said it is trying to evacuate 400 Americans with their families. Egypt has said it will not accept an influx of Palestinian refugees, fearing Israel will not allow them to return to Gaza after the war. Hundreds of thousands of Palestinians remain in the path of the fighting in northern Gaza, despite Israel's repeated calls for them to evacuate to the territory's south, which is also being bombed. Israeli troops appear to be advancing on Gaza City along three main routes: from the northeast, from the northwest along the Mediterranean coast, and from the south after reaching the territory's main north-south highway. Israeli officials have provided only vague statements about troop movements. Airstrikes on Tuesday and Wednesday destroyed apartment buildings in the Jabalya refugee camp near Gaza City, but the number of dead and

wounded remained unknown. Israel said the strikes killed militants and demolished Hamas tunnels. Palestinian militants fired antitank missiles, set off explosive devices and hurled grenades at Israeli troops during an overnight battle, the Israeli military said Thursday. It said soldiers returned fire and called in artillery, as well as strikes. The report could not be independently confirmed. Casualties on both sides are expected to rise as Israeli troops advance toward the dense residential neighborhoods of Gaza City. Israeli officials say Hamas' military infrastructure, including tunnels, is concentrated in the city and accuse Hamas of hiding among civilians. At least 9,061 Palestinians have been killed in the war, mostly women and minors, and more than 32,000 people have been wounded, the Gaza Health Ministry said Thursday, without providing a breakdown between civilians and fighters.

# Chaotic scenes among Afghans returning from Pak

Islamabad (AP): Major international aid agencies on Thursday warned of chaotic and desperate scenes among Afghans who have returned from Pakistan, where security forces are detaining and deporting undocumented or unregistered foreigners. The crackdown on illegal migration mostly affects Afghans because they are the majority of foreigners living in Pakistan, although the government says it is targeting everyone who is in the country illegally. Three aid organizations — the Norwegian Refugee Council, Danish Refugee Council and the International Rescue Committee — said many people fleeing the Pakistani crackdown arrived in Afghanistan in poor condition. "The conditions in which they arrive in Afghanistan are dire, with many having

endured arduous journeys spanning several days, exposed to the elements, and often forced to part with their possessions in exchange for transportation," the agencies said in a statement. Between 9,000 and 10,000 Afghans are crossing the border every day from Pakistan. Previously it was around 300 a day, according to agency teams on the ground. Returning Afghans have nowhere to go and the agencies said they fear for people's survival and reintegration in a country overwhelmed by natural disasters, decades of war, a struggling economy, millions of internally displaced people and a humanitarian crisis. Salma Ben Aissa, the International Rescue Committee's country director in Afghanistan, said returnees face a bleak future, especially if they lived in Pakistan for decades.

# General elections in Pak on Feb 11

PTI ■ ISLAMABAD

Pakistan's general elections will be held on February 11 to elect a new government, the top electoral body on Thursday told the Supreme Court, ending uncertainty over the polls and strengthening the country's position in review talks with the IMF for the release of USD 710 million second tranche of a loan. The Election Commission of Pakistan (ECP) told the Supreme Court about the date during a hearing of a set of petitions calling for holding elections within 90 days after the dissolution of the National Assembly and the provincial legislatures. Last month, the ECP announced that elections would be held in January 2024 but stopped short of announcing a date. A three-judge bench comprising Chief Justice Qazi Faez Ishaq, Justice Amin-ud-Din Khan and Justice Athar Minallah took up the pleas moved by the Supreme Court Bar Association (SCBA), Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf and others. The ECP had announced earlier that 54 days were needed to hold elections

after the completion of the delimitation exercise by November 30, and the apex court bench asked the lawyer of the election body to clearly state the stance on the holding of elections in the country. In response, Sajel Swati said that the final list of constituencies will be published on December 5 and all other arrangements including the drawing of constituencies will be completed by January 29. "Hence we decided that elections will be held on Feb 11, which is the second Sunday," the lawyer said. The ECP also informed the court that the ECP would consult with President Arif Alvi on Thursday. Later, the chief justice in his order stated that the election date given would have to be implemented. "SC wants polls to be held without any arguments," the top judge said. The ECP announcement coincides with the review talks between Pakistan and the International Monetary Fund (IMF) for the release of USD 710 million second tranche of a USD 3 billion loan to the cash-strapped country to stabilise its debt-ridden economy.

'No indication of Imran being poisoned in jail' Islamabad (PTI): Imran Khan's personal physician on Thursday said that there is no apparent indication that Pakistan's jailed former prime minister is being subjected to 'slow poison' in prison. Dr Faisal Sultan made the comments after meeting with 71-year-old Khan in Adiala Jail, where the Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf Imran chairman is being held in connection with the cipher case. The physician told reporters that Khan's health and diet were both satisfactory and the ousted premier voiced no complaints on the issue, the Express Tribune newspaper reported. "Perhaps he (Khan) had expressed some concerns regarding his health earlier and those are now being misquoted," said Dr Sultan, clarifying that no such symptoms were detected in the physical examination now.



Secretary of State Antony Blinken, right, meets with Saudi Arabia's Minister of Defense Khalid bin Salman on Wednesday, at the State Department in Washington. AP/PTI

# King Charles III meets with family of rebel leader hanged by British

AP ■ NAIROBI

King Charles III on Wednesday held a private meeting with the family of the executed leader of the Kenyan rebellion against British colonial rule, a day after the monarch expressed "greatest sorrow and the deepest regret" for the violence of the colonial era. The family of Dedan Kimathi, who was hanged by the British administration, and relatives of other well-known Kenyan freedom fighters didn't immediately comment — a change from their past outspoken calls for an apology

and compensation from Britain, along with any information on the whereabouts of Kimathi's body. The British High Commission said only that the meeting was an "opportunity for the king to hear firsthand about the violence committed against Kenyans during their struggle for independence." Attendees included the chair of the Mau Mau War Veterans Association. The issue remains painful for many Kenyans, and police dispersed a couple dozen people protesting at the foot of a monument to Kimathi in Kenya's capital, Nairobi. "All the land under British should be given back to the Kenyan people," said Juliet Wanjira with the Mathare Social Justice Center, calling also for the British military training mission in Kenya to leave. Charles, who with Queen Camilla arrived on Monday in what is his first state visit to a Commonwealth

country as monarch, on Tuesday cited the "abhorrent and unjustifiable acts of violence" committed against Kenyans as they sought independence. However, he didn't explicitly apologise for Britain's actions in its former colony as many Kenyans wanted. Charles on Wednesday also visited a war cemetery, laying a wreath in honour of those who fought alongside the British in the two world wars. He handed replacement medals to four war veterans who had lost theirs. Among the four was Cpl. Samwel Nthigai Mburia, who claims to be 117. The other three are private John Kavai, Kefa Chagira and Ezekiel Nyamjoni Anyange. Mburia, who fought in Damascus, Cairo and Jerusalem, said he got rid of his medal long ago for fear of being associated with the British colonizers but was now happy to get a replacement from the king. They shook hands with

# Former Chinese premier Li Keqiang cremated

PTI ■ BEIJING

Former Chinese premier Li Keqiang, who died of a sudden heart attack on October 27, was cremated on Thursday here after President Xi Jinping and other senior ruling Communist Party leaders paid homage. The remains of Li, 68, were cremated at the Babaoshan Revolutionary Cemetery in Beijing, the state-run Xinhua news agency reported. China's national flags at Tiananmen Square, the seat of the country's power as well as all government buildings and foreign diplomatic missions, flew half-mast as a mark of respect for the departed leader. President Xi, accompanied by his wife Peng Liyuan and Premier Li Qiang, other leaders of the ruling Communist Party and the government walked slowly up to Li's remains, stood in solemn silence to pay their tributes, and made three bows. They shook hands with



Li's family members, offering their condolences. Former Chinese president Hu Jintao sent a wreath to express his condolences over Li's passing, the report said. Other Communist Party and state leaders either paid their final respects at the cemetery or expressed their condolences through various means. Senior officials from central departments, Li's friends and representatives from his hometown also mourned his passing at the cemetery. Thousands of people visited Li's childhood home in

Hefei in Anhui province to pay their respects. Li, who was once a contender for power against Xi, a decade ago died of a heart attack on October 27 in Shanghai. He retired as premier in March this year. An obituary issued by the ruling Communist Party of China (CPC), the Cabinet and Parliament described Li's death as a huge loss. He was extolled as an "excellent CPC member, a time-tested and loyal communist soldier and an outstanding proletarian revolutionist, statesman and leader of the Party and the state." Earlier reports said the government has asked student bodies of some Chinese universities not to organise private commemoration activities for Li in an apparent bid to avoid social turmoil. Li had a reputation as a moderate reformist and won the admiration of the Chinese people for managing the economy which was in a slowdown

mode during his 10-year tenure. Though ranked number two in the ruling Chinese Communist Party hierarchy, Li was side-lined and mostly spent his years in the government focusing on the management of the economy, while Xi has emerged as the most powerful leader after Party founder Mao Zedong, heading the party, the military and the Presidency. In the past, the Chinese government had reportedly taken precautionary measures to avoid similar student protests at Tiananmen Square in Beijing in 1989, following the death of popular moderate Communist Party chief Hu Yaobang. Thousands were killed during the mass protests. Li is among very few retired Chinese leaders to have died before reaching the age of 70. Most stay healthy and live well beyond 90, or even 100 and their longevity is attributed to the comprehensive medical care and security privileges provided to party and state

leaders even after retirement. The government has ensured that the protocol for Li's mourning was on par with former premier Li Peng who died in 2019. In China's strictly hierarchical system of formalities, only the top leaders — such as former president Jiang Zemin, who was afforded a state funeral in December last year — are entitled to full honours, including a memorial meeting which is televised across the country. Political commentator Chen Daoyin, a former professor at Shanghai University of Political Science and Law, said Beijing is doing everything it can to reign in the potential political risks of Li's unexpected death. "A proper funeral protocol is a key part of addressing the concerns of liberals. So far, it has allowed people to pay tribute to Li Keqiang freely and there has been no apparent censorship while keeping a watchful eye on the universities," Chen said.



# US sanctions more foreign firms

**WASHINGTON**  
The United States on Thursday imposed a new round of sanctions on 130 firms and people from Türkiye, China and the United Arab Emirates in an effort to choke off Russia's access to tools and equipment that support its invasion of Ukraine.  
The sanctions imposed by Treasury Department's Office of Foreign Assets Control target third-party firms and people alleged to assist Moscow in procuring equipment needed on the battlefield, including suppliers and shippers. In addition, the State Department imposed diplomatic sanctions targeting Russian energy production and its metals and mining sector.  
Thursday's sanctions targets include Turkish national Berk Turken and his firms, which are alleged to have ties to Russian intelligence. The Treasury Department said Turken's network arranged payments and shipping details designed to bypass sanctions and move goods from Türkiye to Russia.  
A series of United Arab Emirates firms alleged to have shipped aviation equipment, machines for data reception and more also were sanctioned. And UAE-based ARX Financial Engineering Ltd. was sanctioned for allegedly being involved in

## 2 KILLED AS RUSSIAN ARTILLERY KEEPS ON BATTERING UKRAINE'S KHERSON

**KYIV**: Russian shelling killed an 81-year-old woman in the yard of her home and a 60-year-old man in southern Ukraine's Kherson region on Thursday, local authorities said. The deaths were the latest civilian casualties in Moscow's recent ramped-up bombardment of the front-line area. Kherson is a strategic military region located on the Dnieper River near the mouth of the Black Sea. Unconfirmed reports say attacking Ukrainian troops have gained a foothold on the Russian-held side of the river during Kyiv's months-long counteroffensive. The two civilians died when Russian artillery targeted Kherson region villages, according to Gov. Oleksandr Prokudin.  
Four others were injured in the strikes, which also damaged residential and public buildings, authorities said. On Wednesday, one person died in Russian shelling that caused extensive damage in the Kherson region's capital city of the same name. Prokudin called it "an apocalyptic scene".  
A 91-year-old local woman was killed in her apartment last weekend in what Prokudin described as a "terrifying" nighttime barrage.  
The Kherson region is a key gateway to the Crimean Peninsula, which Russia annexed from Ukraine in 2014 and is now home to a lot of Moscow's war logistics operations and rear supply depots. AP

finding ways for Russian rubles to be sent from sanctioned Russian bank VTB Bank and converted to US dollars.  
Turken and a representative from ARX were not immediately available for comment on Thursday.  
Treasury Secretary Janet Yellen said Russia "is dependent on willing third-country individuals and entities to resup-

# China and Southeast Asia nations to conclude non-aggression pact faster

**MANILA (PHILIPPINES)**  
Chinese and Southeast Asian diplomats renewed a vow to finalise a non-aggression pact for the South China Sea in three years, two regional diplomats said on Thursday.  
The pledge came during a meeting last week in Beijing, where they expressed alarm over recent confrontations in the disputed waters.  
The Philippines has protested what it says are increasingly dangerous and provocative maneuvers by China's coast guard and navy ships in recent months. On October 22, two Chinese ships blocked and separately collided with two Philippine vessels near the disputed Second Thomas Shoal in the South China Sea.  
Following the collisions, the United States renewed a warning that it's obligated to defend the Philippines, a longtime treaty ally, if Filipino forces come under an armed attack anywhere in the contested waters. The Philippine government summoned a Chinese diplomat in Manila for a strongly worded protest.  
Association of Southeast Asian Nations diplomats separately expressed their concerns over the recent confrontations in the three days of talks hosted by Beijing.  
China and the Philippines provided contrasting versions of the high seas encounters in a "tense exchange" and separately showed videos of the standoffs, the two diplomats told The Associated Press. They spoke on condition of anonymity because they were not authorised to discuss the issue.  
The Beijing talks were the latest round of negotiations by China and ASEAN to

forge a "code of conduct" to prevent a larger armed conflict in the South China Sea that could pit China against the United States.  
A July meeting of ASEAN foreign ministers with their Chinese counterpart in the Indonesian capital of Jakarta said the talks, which have dragged on for years and faced delays, could be concluded in three years' time, the two diplomats said.  
China and four of ASEAN's member states — Brunei, Malaysia, the Philippines and Vietnam — along with self-ruled Taiwan have been locked in a decades-long territorial standoff in the disputed waterway, a key passageway for global trade that is believed to be sitting atop vast undersea deposits of oil and gas.  
The contested territory has long been feared as an Asian flashpoint and has become a sensitive front in the US-China rivalry in the region.  
Last week, a Chinese fighter jet came within 10 feet of an American B-52 bomber flying over the South China Sea and put both aircraft in danger of a collision, the US Indo-Pacific Command said. Both countries blamed each other for the alarming incident.  
Washington lays no territorial claims in the South China Sea but has said that freedom of navigation and overflight and the peaceful resolution of the disputes were in the United States' national interest.  
It has challenged China's expansive territorial claims in the region and Beijing has angrily reacted by warning the US to stop meddling in what it calls a purely Asian dispute.

## Putin signs bill revoking Russia's ratification of N-test ban treaty

**MOSCOW (AP)**: President Vladimir Putin on Thursday signed a bill revoking Russia's ratification of a global nuclear test ban, a move that Moscow said was needed to establish parity with the United States.  
Putin has said that rescinding the ratification of the Comprehensive Nuclear Test Ban Treaty, also known as the CTBT, would "mirror" the stand taken by the U.S., which has signed but not ratified the nuclear test ban.  
Both houses of the Russian parliament voted last month to revoke Moscow's ratification of the bill. The CTBT, adopted in 1996, bans all nuclear explosions anywhere in the world, but the treaty was never fully implemented. In addition to the U.S., it has yet to be ratified by China, India, Pakistan, North Korea, Israel, Iran and Egypt. There are widespread concerns that Russia may resume nuclear tests to try to



discourage the West from continuing to offer military support to Ukraine. Many Russian hawks have spoken in favour of a resumption of the tests.  
Putin has noted that some experts argue for the necessity of conducting nuclear tests but said he had not formed an opinion on the issue.  
Russian Deputy Foreign Minister Sergei Ryabkov said last month that Moscow would continue to respect the ban and will only resume nuclear tests if Washington does first.

## North Korea has likely sent missiles and shells to Russia, says Seoul

**SEOUL**  
North Korea has likely supplied several types of missiles to Russia to support its war in Ukraine, along with its widely reported shipments of ammunition and shells, South Korea's military said Thursday. The assessment was released a day after South Korea's spy service told lawmakers that North Korea recently provided more than a million artillery shells to Russia amid deepening military cooperation between the two countries, both key US adversaries.  
In a background briefing for local journalists, South Korea's military said that North Korea is suspected of sending an unspecified number of short-range ballistic missiles, anti-tank missiles and portable anti-air missiles to Russia, in addition to rifles, rocket launchers, mortars and shells.  
The contents of the briefing were shared with The Associated Press.  
Last week, South Korea, the US and Japan strongly condemned what they call North Korea's supply of munitions and military equipment to Russia, saying that such weapons shipments sharply increase the human toll of Russia's war in Ukraine. Any weapons trade with North Korea would be a violation of multiple U.N. Security Council resolutions, which Russia, a permanent U.N. Security Council member, previously endorsed.  
Both Russia and North Korea dismissed the weapons shipment accusations as baseless.  
Outside speculation about North Korean arms shipments flared after North Korean

leader Kim Jong Un traveled to Russia in September to meet President Vladimir Putin and visit key military facilities. The U.S. and its allies accuse North Korea of seeking high-tech Russian technologies to modernize its arsenal of nuclear weapons and missiles in return for its shipments of conventional arms.  
In a private briefing with lawmakers on Wednesday, the National Intelligence Service — South Korea's main spy agency — said that more than a million North Korean artillery shells have been sent to Russia since August via ships and transport planes. The NIS said the shells roughly amounted to two months' worth of supplies for the Russians, according to lawmaker Yoo Sang-bum, who attended the NIS briefing.  
The NIS assessed that North Korea has been operating its munitions factories at full capacity to meet Russian munition demands and has also been mobilizing residents to increase production.  
The NIS said North Korea, for its part, is likely receiving Russian technological assistance over its plan to launch its first military spy satellite into space. North Korea's two recent attempts to launch a spy satellite ended in failure due to technical issues. The North failed to follow through with its vow to make a third launch attempt in October, without giving any reasons.  
South Korea's military said North Korea also seeks to receive nuclear-related technologies, fighter jets or related aircraft equipment and assistance on the establishment of anti-air defense networks from Russia.

## Fukushima nuclear plant starts 3rd release of treated radioactive wastewater

**TOKYO**  
The tsunami-damaged Fukushima Daiichi nuclear power plant began its third release of treated and diluted radioactive wastewater into the sea on Thursday after Japanese officials said the two earlier releases ended smoothly.  
The plant operator discharged 7,800 tons of treated water in each of the first two batches and plans to release the same amount in the current batch through November 20.  
Tokyo Electric Power Company Holdings said its workers activated the first of the two pumps to dilute the treated water with large amounts of seawater, gradually sending the mixture into the Pacific Ocean through an undersea tunnel for an offshore release.  
The plant began the first wastewater release in August and will continue to do so for decades. About 1.33 million tons of radioactive wastewater is stored in about 1,000 tanks at the plant. It has accumulated since the massive earthquake and tsunami that struck northeastern Japan in 2011.  
TEPCO and the government say discharging the water into the sea is unavoidable because the tanks are nearly full and the plan needs to be decommissioned.  
The wastewater discharges have been strongly opposed by fishing groups and neighbouring countries including South Korea, where hundreds of people staged protests. China immediately banned all imports of Japanese seafood, badly hurting Japanese seafood producers and exporters.  
Prime Minister Fumio Kishida told reporters Thursday that Japan has consistently provided transparent and scientific explanations about the discharge and gained understanding from many members of the interna-

## Yellen calls for more US-Latin America trade

**WASHINGTON (AP)**: Treasury Secretary Janet Yellen wants Latin America to trade more with the United States as part of an initiative that so far has failed to disrupt China's dominance in global manufacturing.  
Still, US efforts to diversify supply chains with "trusted partners and allies" including select South American nations have "tremendous potential benefits for fuelling growth in Latin America and the Caribbean", Yellen said in a speech delivered on Thursday.  
Yellen kicked off an Inter-American Development Bank investment event on the sidelines of the inaugural Americas Partnership for Economic Prosperity Leaders' Summit, which will be hosted at the White House on Friday.  
The heads of state of Peru, Chile, Ecuador, Uruguay, the Dominican Republic and Costa Rica were in attendance.  
Yellen, who regularly talks about her friendshoring strategy for increasing supply chain resilience by working primarily with friendly nations as opposed to geopolitical rivals like China, laid out her vision of new US investment in South America at the development bank on Thursday.  
Latin American businesses "will increasingly have the chance to lead in new areas of clean energy, for example, helping create vertical supply chains by using locally extracted lithium in local battery production", Yellen said.  
"Medical equipment and pharmaceutical companies can grow and innovate to meet increased demand," Yellen said, and skilled workers can produce automotive chips necessary for electric vehicles.  
The Inter-American Development Bank, which is the biggest multilateral lender to Latin America, would support new projects through grants, lending and new programs.  
The US is the bank's largest shareholder, with 30 per cent of voting rights.

## Storm Ciaran leaves millions without power

**PARIS**  
Recording-breaking winds in France and across much of Western Europe left at least five people dead and injured several others as Storm Ciaran swept through the continent overnight and into Thursday, plunging vast numbers into darkness, devastating homes and causing travel mayhem in several countries.  
Winds of more than 190 kph (118 mph) slammed the northern tip of France's Atlantic coast, uprooting trees and blowing out windows.  
A truck driver was killed when his vehicle was hit by a tree in northern France's inland Aisne region, Transport Minister Clement Beaune said. Another person has been badly injured at a university in the northern city of Roubaix, and 15 other people were hurt around western and northern France, authorities announced. Seven of the injured were emergency workers.  
Dutch airline KLM scrapped all flights leaving and arriving in the Netherlands from the early afternoon until the end of the day, citing the high sustained wind speeds and powerful gusts expected in the country.  
Huge waves slammed into French ports and shorelines, as wind flattened street signs and ripped off roofing. Felled trees blocked roads around western France, according to Associated Press reporters and images on French media and social networks.  
About 1.2 million French households were left without electricity on Thursday, electrical utility Enedis said in a statement. That includes about half of the homes in Brittany, the Atlantic peninsula hardest hit by Ciaran. Enedis said it would deploy 3,000 workers to restore power when conditions allowed.  
The wind reached up to around 160 kph (nearly 100 mph) on the Normandy coast and up to around 150 kph (90 mph) inland. Fishing crews put their livelihoods on hold and stayed ashore. Local authorities closed forests, parks and beachfronts in some regions. Local trains were cancelled across a swath of western France, and all roads in the Finistère region of Brittany were closed on Thursday morning.  
Beaune urged people to avoid driving and exercise cau-

tion when travelling across areas with weather warnings. "We see how roads can be fatal in these circumstances," he told broadcaster France-Info.  
In Spain, where the storm battered much of the country with heavy rains and gale force winds, emergency services in Madrid said a woman died on Thursday after a tree fell on her.  
Three other people were slightly injured in the incident on a city centre street. Parks in the capital and other cities in Spain were closed, and several trains and flights were cancelled.  
One person died in central Ghent, Belgium, when a tree fell on them in a park. Another person was injured during the same incident.  
Local and national authorities warned residents not to get close to green spaces for fear of falling trees.

## European officials widen ban on Meta's behavioural advertising

**SAN FRANCISCO (AP)**: European officials widened a ban on Meta's "behavioural advertising" practices to most of Europe on Wednesday, setting up a broader conflict between the continent's privacy-conscious institutions and an American technology giant. Behavioural advertising, used by Meta's Facebook and Instagram among many other tech companies, involves observing individual behavior such as browsing habits, mouse clicks and app usage, then using that data to build profiles for targeting ads.  
The decision by the European Data Protection Board represents a sharp escalation of a tussle that began in Norway, where privacy officials imposed a daily fine of 1 million kroner (roughly USD 90,000) on Meta for obtaining that data without adequate consent. Those fines have been piling up since August 14.  
Meta said it has cooperated with regulators and pointed to its announced plans to give Europeans the opportunity to consent to data collection and, later this month, to offer an ad-free subscription service in Europe that will cost 9.99 euros (USD 10.59) a month for access to all its products. The latest decision "unjustifiably ignores that careful and robust regulatory process," the company said in a statement following the European board's action.  
Tobias Judin, head of the international section at the Norwegian Data Protection Authority, said Meta's proposed steps likely won't meet European legal standards. For instance, he said, consent would have to be freely given, which wouldn't be the case if existing users had to choose between giving up their privacy rights or paying a financial penalty in the form of a subscription.

## Quake damages houses in Indonesia, but no casualties

**JAKARTA (AP)**: An earthquake slightly damaged houses and other buildings in southeastern Indonesia early Thursday, causing some panic but no apparent casualties.  
The quake was strongly felt in several cities and villages and caused some to panic, said Daryono, who heads the Earthquake and Tsunami Center at Indonesia's Meteorology, Climatology and Geophysical Agency. It was based on land and had no risk of a tsunami.  
"The quake has caused light damages in several buildings and houses," wrote Daryono, who goes by a single name, on the social media platform X.  
Video circulating on social media showed residents in Kupang, the province's capital and largest city, reacting as houses and buildings swayed just after dawn. Some witnesses said ceilings at the governor's and mayor's offices were damaged.

**RAMPUR FERTILIZERS LTD.**  
CIN: L15136UP1989PLC010084  
Regd. Off.: Judges Boreilly Road, Rampur-244901 U.P.  
**NOTICE OF BOARD MEETING**  
In pursuance of Regulation 47 of SEBI (LODR) 2015, Notice is hereby given that the meeting of the Board of Directors will be held on Thursday, the 9th November, 2023, at 4.00 P.M. at its Regd. Office, Judges Boreilly Road, Rampur-244901 (U.P.), inter alia, to consider, approve and adopt unaudited Financial Results for the quarter ended on September 30, 2023 pursuant to Regulation 33 of LODR. The said information is also available on the Company's website at www.rampurfert.com and the same has been also sent to CSE and MSE to upload on their websites i.e. www.cse-india.com, www.mse.in respectively.  
By order of Board  
Sd/-  
Anshuman Khaitan  
(Managing Director)  
Place: Rampur  
Date: 02.11.2023

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**NOTICE TO GENERAL PUBLIC**  
Due to unavoidable circumstances, it was decided to shift existing lockers of BO: Mehrauli Road, Hauz Khas (309300) to BO: Bihikaji Cama Place (198800), New Delhi. Now, it has been decided to shift these lockers from BO: Bihikaji Cama Place (198800), New Delhi to BO: Mehrauli Road Hauz Khas (309300). All the respected locker holders of BO: Mehrauli Road Hauz Khas (309300) are hereby informed that locker operations w.e.f. 27.11.2023 will be conducted from BO: Mehrauli Road Hauz Khas (309300). Inconvenience caused is regretted.  
Date: 02-11-2023  
Place: New Delhi  
Rekha  
Chief Manager

**NOTICE INVITING TENDER**  
SSA-12020/8/2022-MIS-SSA/323682/2023 Date : 01.11.2023  
Mission Director, Samagra Shiksha Axom, Kahilpara, Guwahati-19, Assam invites bids through GeM portal as below.  
1. Bid Number GEM/2023/B/4136320 dated 26.10.2023 for supply of Kitchen Device  
2. Bid Number GEM/2023/B/4139248 dated : 27-10-2023 for Supply, Installation, Support & Maintenance of IT Equipments.  
Interested bidder may visit GeM portal and submit their bid on GeM portal accordingly. The bid is also available in SSA website : https://ssa.assam.gov.in  
Sd/-Mission Director,  
Samagra Shiksha Axom  
Kahilpara, Guwahati-19

**Office of the Superintending Engineer**  
**3rd Circle, Public Works Department, Pithoragarh**  
Email : sepwdp@rediffmail.com  
Letter No. : 6606(I)/13 P.I.U.-03/2023  
Dated : 01/11/2023  
**National Competitive E-Tender Notice**  
The Superintending Engineer 3rd Circle, Public Works Department Pithoragarh invites tender through E-Tendering (Two Bid System) on behalf of "Hon'ble Governor of Uttarakhand" for following works. All other information will be available online from date 09-11-2023 at 5.00 PM onward on website <http://www.uktenders.gov.in>

Sl. No.	Name of Work	Earnest Money (in Lac)	Cost of Tender (₹)	Validity of Tender (day)	Period of Completion (months)	Contractor's Category of Registration
1	2	3	4	5	6	7
1	Construction of (03 no.), 24.00 mtr. Span R.C.C. Bridges, reconstruction of damaged walls & other protection work in Tanakpur-Jauljivi Motor road along Indo-Nepal Border in District Champawat of Uttarakhand State. (km. 12.000 to 55.000).	68.30	5000.00 +18% G.S.T.	120	12	Category 'A' & higher for Road & Bridge works, in State Govt./ Govt. of India

# Sensex jumps 490 points, snaps 2-day fall amid global rally on US Fed rate decision



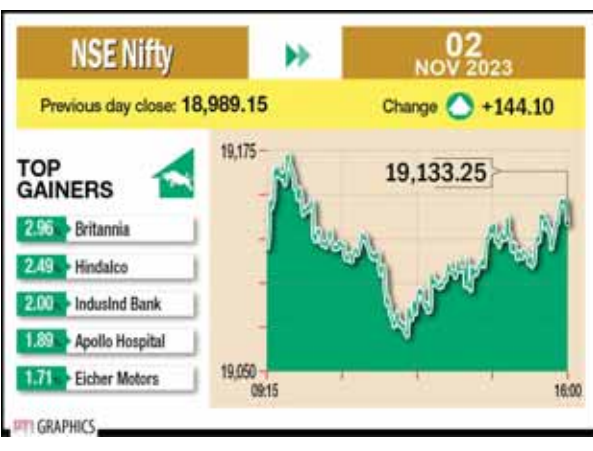
## India, UK negotiations for proposed FTA going on: Official

**PTI ■ NEW DELHI**  
Negotiations between senior officials of India and the UK on the proposed free trade agreement are going on with a view to bridge differences on issues related to goods and services sector, a senior government official said. "Talks on the 13th round is underway virtually. We have not talked about any deadlines to conclude talks," the official said. India and Britain launched the talks for Free-Trade Agreement (FTA) in January 2022, with an aim to conclude talks by Diwali (October 24, 2022), but the deadline was missed due to political developments in the UK. There are 26 chapters in the agreement, which include goods, services, investments, and intellectual property rights.

**Platform for sports enthusiasts**  
New Delhi: BeBeta, the leading free-to-play sports prediction platform, announced a surge in userbase and downloads, solidifying its position as a premier player in the non-RMG gaming sector. In just one month, the app has attracted a staggering 550K users, catapulting it to the number 6 spot on Google Play in India's sports category. It reflects our commitment to providing an engaging and rewarding platform for sports enthusiasts, said Meet Shah, CEO and founder of BeBeta.

**Ranbir new face of Hauser**  
New Delhi: Flair Writing Industries Limited's newest TVC for Hauser pens' campaign "An Extra Ordinary pen for Extra Ordinary you" shows Ranbir Kapoor playing a professor who is instilling confidence to his students to perform better. "In a departure from his on-screen personas, we see Ranbir Kapoor stepping into the shoes of a mentor, guiding students on a journey towards the extraordinary in Hauser pens' latest TVC," said Mohit Rathod, Director, Flair Writing Industries Limited.

The US markets ended with gains on Wednesday. "Global stocks rallied as investors reacted to the possible peak of the Federal Reserve's historic tightening campaign. In Japan, Prime Minister Fumio Kishida announced an economic stimulus package worth about \$113 billion that is meant to cushion the blow to household budgets from rising inflation and timed to counter weakening public support for his government," said Deepak Jasani, Head of Retail Research, HDFC Securities. Global oil benchmark Brent crude jumped 1.67 per cent to USD 86.12 a barrel. Foreign institutional investors (FIIs) offloaded equities worth Rs 1,816.91 crore on Wednesday, according to exchange data. The BSE benchmark declined 283.60 points or 0.44 per cent to settle at 63,591.33 on Wednesday. The Nifty went down by 90.45 points or 0.47 to 19,989.15.



**PTI ■ MUMBAI**  
Benchmark Sensex rebounded by nearly 490 points while broader Nifty closed above the 19,100 level on Thursday, snapping their two days of losses following a rally in global markets after the US Federal Reserve kept interest rates unchanged. The 30-share BSE Sensex jumped 489.57 points or 0.77 per cent to settle at 64,080.90. During the day, it rallied 611.31 points or 0.96 per cent to 64,202.64. The broader Nifty climbed 144.10 points or 0.76 per cent to 19,133.25. In the previous two sessions, Nifty dropped nearly 152 points while Sensex shed 521 points. Among the Sensex firms, IndusInd Bank, Tata Steel, Tata Motors, Sun Pharma, Infosys, Mahindra & Mahindra, Infosys, NTPC, Bharti Airtel, HCL Technologies and Axis Bank were the biggest gainers.

Tech Mahindra and Bajaj Finance were the laggards. "A pause with dovish commentary from the Fed led to a rebound in the global and domestic market sentiment. Further, the fall in US bond yields indicates a prolonged pause in interest rate hikes," Vinod Nair, Head of Research at

Geojit Financial Services said. "Domestic macros are favourable with positive auto numbers, a surge in GST collection, good factory data and better than estimated Q2 quarter earnings," Nair added. Most sectors contributed to the move wherein realty, metal and energy were among the top

performers, Ajit Mishra, SVP - Technical Research, Religare Broking Ltd, said. In the broader market, the BSE midcap gauge jumped 1.20 per cent and smallcap gained 0.97 per cent. All the indices ended with gains, with realty rallying 2.55 per cent, telecommunication jumping 2.42 per cent, metal (1.68 per cent), power (1.60 per cent), capital goods (1.15 per cent), consumer durables (1.13 per cent), commodities (1.10 per cent). In Asian markets, Seoul, Tokyo and Hong Kong ended in the green while Shanghai settled lower. European markets were trading in positive territory.

## Standards should not act as non-tariff barriers: Comm Secy

**PTI ■ NEW DELHI**  
Standards for goods and services should help in promoting global trade and not act as non-tariff barriers, Commerce Secretary Sunil Barthalwal said on Thursday. He said that standards should not be considered as non-tariff barriers but as some kind of non-tariff measures which can help in optimal results for both consumers as well as producers. "If this becomes the right oil for the trade system, I think a lot of trade restrictions will come down in trade and it will help us take the world trade to USD 30 trillion by 2025 and USD 2 trillion by 2030 for India," Barthalwal said here at a G20 standards conclave organised by Bureau of Indian Standards. Calling for harmonization in the standards ecosystem, he said that different countries are setting their own standards and that has a cost for global trade. Many times producers and exporters also face difficulty not because of the standards but "because of how they get implemented," he said adding there is an important need to have coherence in the workings of standard-setting bodies and collaboration in the compliance ecosystem. "Therefore the task before us is how to improve not only standard setting of different products but also how to set up testing ecosystem, how to set up conformity ecosystem and how to see that trade does not suffer because of these standards," the secretary said. In bilateral treaties, India is touching upon these issues because it feels that there should be a conformity assessment of standards-setting bodies. "Another impression being created in the field of trade...Is that if you look at the Global north and global south, you will find that although tariff barriers have come down, trade flows are much easier these days but there is a rise in non-tariff barriers," he said. He added that standards are supposed to be non-tariff measures and should look at the interest of consumers so that they get the right kind of products. "But gradually what we are seeing is that non-tariff measures are becoming non-tariff barriers...We need to discuss among ourselves that how standards should not be seen as non-tariff barriers but some kind of non-tariff measures perhaps which can result in optimal output or results for both con-

## Scoot to start daily flight on Chennai-Singapore route

**PTI ■ CHENNAI**  
Singapore Airlines' budget arm Scoot on Wednesday announced the commencement of its daily flight services between Chennai and Singapore from November 5. The addition of this direct flight, which will be operated by Airbus A320 aircraft will enhance the international accessibility of Chennai and connect domestic business and leisure travellers to the airline's extensive network in Asia-Pacific, the Middle East and Europe, Scoot said. The daily service will also provide convenient access to major cities via Singapore, it said. "We are committed to serving the growing demand for travel in this market and connecting travellers from the capital city of Tamil Nadu to Scoot's extensive network beyond Singapore, such as Melbourne, Hanoi, Bangkok, Seoul and even Guangzhou," Scoot's General Manager for India Brian Torey said addressing the media here. Including Chennai, Scoot now operates to six destinations in India, including Amritsar, Coimbatore, Tiruchirappalli, Trivandrum, and Visakhapatnam. Scoot had a fleet of over 50 aircraft, comprising widebody Boeing 787 Dreamliners and single-aisle Airbus A320 family aircraft and it plans to add the Embraer E190-E2 to its fleet by 2024. The airline currently flies to 66 destinations across 15 countries and territories in Asia-Pacific, the Middle East and Europe.

## Switzerland's Zurich Insurance to buy 51 per cent of Kotak Gen Insurance for ₹4,051 cr

**PTI ■ MUMBAI**  
Switzerland's Zurich Insurance is set to acquire a 51 per cent stake in Kotak General Insurance for Rs 4,051 crore, its parent Kotak Mahindra Bank said on Thursday. The Swiss insurer's investment in the eight-year-old domestic company will be through a combination of fresh growth capital and share purchase, as per a regulatory filing by the listed lender. It will follow up with an additional 19 per cent stake purchase, which will happen within three years of the initial acquisition, the filing said. Kotak General Insurance's market share in the non-life market by premiums stood at 0.52 per cent as of September. Its gross written premium for FY23 stood at Rs 1,148.30 crore, and the share sale values the general insurance company at Rs 7,943 crore on a post-money valuation. "India is one of the world's most important markets with immense potential, and we are pleased to be making a significant commitment with an excellent partner," Tulsi Naidu, Zurich's chief executive for Asia Pacific, said. "The combined expertise and resources of the respective firms will enable us to provide innovative solutions to meet the evolving needs of our customers," Kotak General Insurance's managing director and chief executive Dipak Gupta said. Kotak Mahindra group's physical and digital distribution strength and Zurich's global capabilities in digital assets and both B2C and B2B formats will benefit the company, he added. Naidu exuded confidence that the partnership could bring innovation, know-how, and excellent customer experiences to the Indian general insurance market. Kotak Mahindra Bank and Kotak Mahindra General Insurance Company have entered into a definitive agreement for the stake sale with Zurich Insurance Company. The transaction is subject to regulatory approvals from the Reserve Bank of India (RBI), the Insurance Regulatory and Development Authority of India, and the Competition Commission of India. Kotak Mahindra General Insurance Company's chairman Gaurang Shah said the company has invested to create a multi-product franchise with strong fundamental building blocks, and hoped that Zurich will help Kotak General Insurance grow rapidly.

## Over 80% Indian retailers do not see e-commerce as a threat: Report

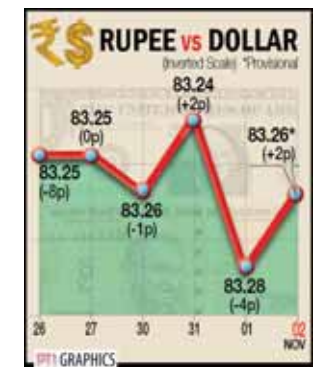
**PTI ■ NEW DELHI**  
A majority of Indian retailers surveyed do not feel e-commerce is threatening their operations, with only 18 per cent saying that their sales have been impacted by online selling platforms, claims a study. The top industries witnessing the highest contribution from offline sales are FMCG & Retail (97 per cent), Food & Beverage (95 per cent), and Consumer Durable & Electronics (93 per cent). MSME-focused digital lender in India NowGrowth surveyed around 3,000 Indian retailers and shoppers across more than 25 top cities in India, wherein it was found that at-home delivery remains a top priority for shoppers, with 60 per cent of offline retailers receiving customer requests to start home delivery services. Physical stores remain the most

## Tata Motors reports consolidated net profit at ₹3,783 crore in Q2

**PTI ■ NEW DELHI**  
Tata Motors on Thursday reported a consolidated net profit of Rs 3,783 crore for the September quarter, riding on robust performance by its British arm Jaguar Land Rover. This is the fourth successive quarter of positive results for the auto major. The Mumbai-based company had posted a consolidated net loss of Rs 1,004 crore in the July-September period last fiscal. Total consolidated revenue from operations stood at Rs 1,05,128 crore, as compared with Rs 79,611 crore in the year-ago period, Tata Motors said in a regulatory filing. On a standalone basis, the company reported a net profit of Rs 1,270 crore for the September quarter, it added. It had reported a net loss of Rs 293 crore during the same period last fiscal. Jaguar Land Rover (JLR) reported a revenue of 6.9 billion pounds in the second quarter, up 30 per cent year-on-year, driven by higher wholesales, better mix, cost reductions and investment in demand generation. Looking ahead, production and wholesale volumes are expected to gradually increase in the second half of the current fiscal, it stated. The EBIT margin for FY24 is expected to improve to about 8 per cent as compared to 6 per cent-plus previously indicated, it added. The British brand continues to expect free cash flow of over 2 billion pounds in FY24 with net debt reducing to less than 1 billion pounds by the end of FY24, it added. "It is pleasing to see all the businesses deliver on their well-differentiated plans this quarter. With a strong product pipeline, a seasonally stronger H2 and continued focus on cash accretive growth, we are confident of sustaining this momentum," Tata Motors Group Chief Financial Officer PB Balaji said. The automaker said it remained optimistic on demand despite external challenges and anticipate a moderate inflationary environment. "We aim to deliver a stronger performance in H2 (April-September period), due to a healthy order book at JLR, strong demand for heavy trucks in the commercial vehicle space and new generation products in the passenger vehicle segment," it added.

## Adani buys remaining 51% stake in BQ-publisher Quintillion Business Media

**PTI ■ NEW DELHI**  
Billionaire Gautam Adani's Bgroup has acquired the remaining 51 per cent stake in Quintillion Business Media Pvt Ltd to take full control of the Raghav Bahl-curated digital business news platform for an undisclosed amount. Adani Enterprises Ltd, the ports-to-energy conglomerate's flagship firm, in a stock exchange filing, said its subsidiary AMG Media Networks Ltd "has executed a share purchase agreement for the acquisition of remaining 51 per cent stake in QBML," the firm which operates the business and financial news digital media platform BQ Prime. It, however, did not disclose the financial details of the transaction. Quintillion was Adani's first bet in the Indian news industry before taking about 65 per cent stake in broadcaster



## Gold rises ₹150; silver jumps ₹600

**PTI ■ NEW DELHI**  
Gold price on Thursday rose Rs 150 to Rs 61,850 per 10 grams in the national capital amid strong cues in overseas markets, according to HDFC Securities. The yellow metal had settled at Rs 61,700 per 10 grams in the previous trade. "Gold prices on Thursday was up Rs 150 following a bullish trade in the overseas markets," Saumil Gandhi, senior analyst of commodities at HDFC Securities, said. Silver also bounced back Rs 600 to Rs 74,900 per kilogram. In the global markets, gold and silver were trading higher at USD 1,984 per ounce and USD 23 per ounce, respectively. Gold traded higher following a drop in US Treasury bond yields and weakness in the dollar after the Federal Open Market Committee (FOMC) policy meeting, Gandhi said.

## Record sales in sight for 2023, Mercedes-Benz India bullish on 2024 outlook

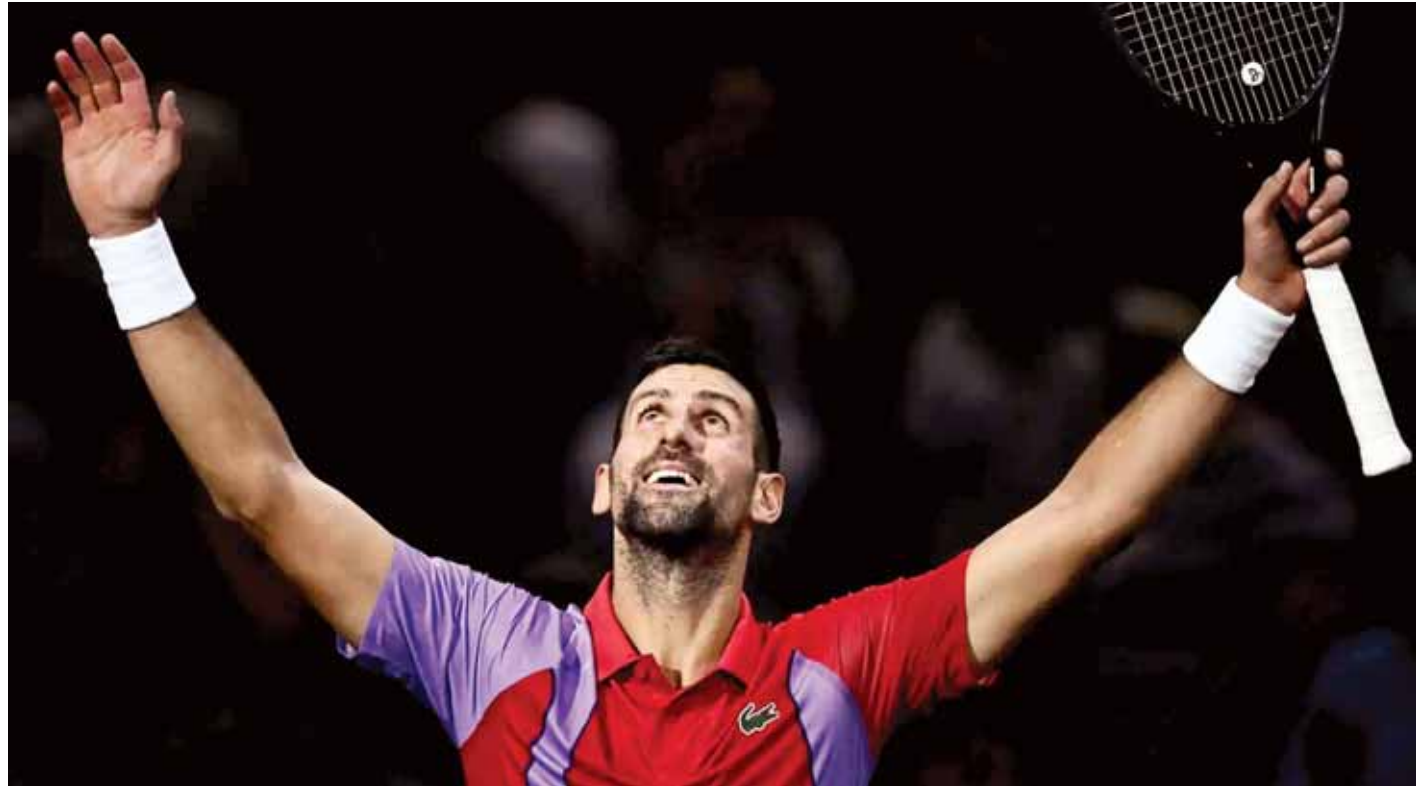
**PTI ■ NEW DELHI**  
Set for another record sales this year, Mercedes-Benz India is confident of carrying forward the momentum to 2024 despite supply concerns, company Managing Director and CEO Santosh Iyer said on Thursday. The company on Thursday launched two fresh products -- new SUV GLE priced between Rs 96.4 lakh to Rs 1.15 crore and AMG C 43 with price starting at Rs 98 lakh, completing its planned launch of ten products for 2023. "Overall yes, another record year for us. We still have two months to go but at this stage from a demand perspective (it is) strong. From the supply side, we have to improve from here on and with that we should end the year on a high note," Iyer told PTI in an interview on the sidelines of the launch here. He was responding to a query on whether the company is set for another record sales in 2023 after witnessing a new high in 2022 when it clocked 15,822 units. In the January-September 2023 period, the company delivered 12,768 units at a growth of 11 per cent over the same period last year. "We have seen growth in order intake for us but we're going through a different challenge in terms of production and supplies. We still have a major issue with our 48-volt battery supplies and most of our cars are mild hybrids and because of that, we are still facing these challenges," Iyer said. He further said, "Therefore, we are not able to deliver the entire bookings that we have, and hopefully the situation improves in the next couple of months." When asked if Mercedes-Benz India could continue with the growth momentum through next year, Iyer said, "From a macroeconomic view, we are completely positive that the growth story should continue." However, he said, "The uncertainty over the supply chain has really made pause a bit right now. We have to get out of the current challenge in terms of manufacturing and producing more cars currently before we have a firm outlook for 2024." The company has an order backlog of over 3,000 cars, Iyer added. On the expected number of product launches for 2024, he said it is a bit premature to comment considering the current challenge. "Even today when we are launching the three variants of the GLE, the delivery of the GLE 450D we are starting only from January next year whereas the other two variants we are able to start now but with limited outlook," Iyer noted.

# NOVAK STAYS ON TRACK FOR YEAR-END NUMBER 1 RANKING

AP ■ PARIS

**N**ovak Djokovic stayed on track for the year-end No. 1 ranking for a record eighth time by beating Tomas Martin Etcheverry 6-3, 6-2 in the second round of the Paris Masters on Wednesday. Djokovic was competing in his first singles match since mid-September when he played for Serbia in the group stage of the Davis Cup. "At the beginning of the match, it was a bit difficult for me to find the rhythm," the top-seeded Djokovic said on court, "but at the end of the second set, it was really good." Djokovic won five straight games to take the opening set with an ace and lead 2-0 in the second set. The Serbian player only faced one break point that he saved with a forehand cross-court winner at 1-0 in the second set. A six-time champion at the Paris Masters, Djokovic increased his lead to 5-1 before converting his third match point when Etcheverry netted a backhand. Djokovic can widen the gap with No. 2 Carlos Alcaraz in the race for the year-end top spot after the Spaniard lost to qualifier Roman Safiullin on Tuesday. Alcaraz is the only player who can overtake Djokovic after Daniil

Medvedev dropped out of contention after he was beaten by Grigor Dimitrov 6-3, 6-7 (4), 7-6 (2) earlier Wednesday. Djokovic had racked up 500 more points than Alcaraz this season before the Paris Masters. Djokovic won't be able to clinch the year-end No. 1 spot in Paris since Alcaraz still gets 10 points for his second-round defeat. There are 1,000 points for the Paris Masters winner and 1,500 points for a perfect run at the ATP Finals. Djokovic holds the men's record with seven year-end No. 1 finishes, one more than Pete Sampras. Women's tennis great Steffi Graf holds the overall record with eight. "Of course, my greatest motivation is still love for the game. I really like competing. So, as simple as that," Djokovic had told a news conference on Saturday. "And then, you know, I always have goals, you know, and to win another slam, to be No. 1 again, to finish the year as No. 1. Those are let's say the big goals." Medvedev was booed off the court after remonstrating with the crowd during the match. The crowd upset Medvedev in the 11th game of the second set, jeering him as he was about to serve after he had thrown his racket. The third-ranked Russian went back to his chair



and complained to the referee before talking directly to the spectators in French. "If there's one who whistles, I don't play," Medvedev told the crowd. "You don't whistle, I play. So, you shut your mouths." From that moment, the crowd overwhelmingly threw its support behind Dimitrov, and Medvedev appeared to make a rude hand gesture toward some spectators as he walked off the court after the loss.

"I play in Bercy much better when there is no crowd at all in attendance," Medvedev joked afterward, referring to winning the Paris Masters title in 2020 during the pandemic in an empty arena. "That's the only time I won the tournament." Meanwhile, Tommy Paul and Casper Ruud can no longer qualify for the ATP Finals. The 12th-seeded Paul lost to qualifier Botic Van de Zandschulp 6-4, 2-6, 6-3, while eighth-seeded Ruud was defeated by Francisco Cerundolo 7-5, 6-4. Stefanos Tsitsipas, Alexander Zverev, Holger Rune, Hubert Hurkacz and Alex de Minaur stayed in contention for the three remaining spots at the eight-man tournament that will be played in Turin, Italy from Nov. 12-19. Before the Paris Masters, Djokovic, Alcaraz, Medvedev, Jannik Sinner and Andrey Rublev had already qualified for the ATP Finals. In a late match that ended at nearly 2:30 a.m. in Paris, fourth-seeded Sinner beat Mackenzie McDonald 6-7 (6), 7-5, 6-1. Seventh-seeded Tsitsipas beat Felix Auger-Aliassime 6-3, 7-6 (4), 10th-seeded Zverev outlasted Ugo Humbert 6-4, 6-7 (3), 7-6 (5) and sixth-seeded Rune defeated Dominic Thiem 6-4, 6-2. Hurkacz, seeded 11th, beat Roberto Bautista Agut 6-3, 6-2 and 13th-seeded De Minaur rallied past Dusan Lajovic 4-6, 6-4, 6-4.



## Female tennis players united as they seek improvements from WTA, says Swiatek

AP ■ CANCUN (MEXICO)

**I**ga Swiatek says she and other women's tennis players are more united than in the past as they seek changes on the WTA Tour, including improvements to prioritize the athletes' well-being. "We are not happy with some things," Swiatek, a three-time Grand Slam champion who was ranked No. 1 until September, said Wednesday after improving to 2-0 at the WTA Finals by beating U.S. Open champion Coco Gauff 6-0, 7-5 in round-robin action. Some players recently outlined various concerns in a letter to WTA CEO Steve Simon and during two meetings with tour leadership. Among the topics were a guaranteed income and coverage for maternity leave and injury absences, along with an objection to a planned change in rules governing mandatory tournament appearances. "I feel like everything is just based on wanting to have more and more, but not really taking care of our well-being and health," said Swiatek, a 22-year-old from Poland. "There are some things that the WTA could change for us without any impact on the tournaments and the things that they already agreed with the tournaments." In a letter Simon wrote back to the players to address some of their concerns - and obtained by The Associated Press - he said working groups with representatives from the WTA Board, tournament council and players' council "are in the process of reviewing scheduling and tournament standards" and recommendations are expected to be made this month. Among the topics, Simon wrote, is late-night matches - a growing source of frustration for players.

He said other areas being looked at include inconsistency in tennis balls over the course of a season; anti-doping and integrity; marketing and social media efforts. Simon wrote that "a great deal is being done and ... There is a great deal of alignment in the areas you have raised and what is being worked on," and promised to provide an update the week of Nov. 13. "I really feel like we - me and the other players, like, Ons (Jabeur), Coco ... And also some players that didn't qualify for the finals - we're really, really united, and we think the same way," Swiatek said. "So most of us, even the young ones, the older ones, we all know that this is kind of not good that we're going to have more mandatory tournaments. And so we want to really, really have an impact." She was asked about the lack of spectators at her victory over Gauff - and Swiatek made clear that she noticed, blaming the late decision to hold the tour's season-ending championship in Cancun (the site wasn't announced until September) and adding that "the marketing should be better." The temporary hard court, set up on a golf course, has been criticized by Swiatek and other players, both for its quality and for only being available for pre-tournament practice right before competition began. After her victory Sunday, No. 1-ranked Aryna Sabalenka called the conditions "another level of disrespect." That's been a common sentiment during the WTA's marquee event, where the sport's leading players have been outspoken. "I feel like we can use our voice now," Wimbledon champion Marketa Vondrousova said Wednesday, "just to show people what's happening here."

# Bayern Munich crash out of German Cup

AP ■ SAARBRUECKEN (GERMANY)

**B**ayern Munich crashed out of the German Cup in a 2-1 loss to third-division Saarbruecken on Wednesday as coach Thomas Tuchel said defender Matthijs de Ligt suffered a "very painful" knee injury ahead of the weekend's "Klassiker" against Borussia Dortmund. Bayern seemed set to cruise through the second-round game when Thomas Müller opened the scoring in the 16th minute but Saarbruecken leveled just before halftime and Marcel Gosau won the game with a deflected shot in the sixth minute of stoppage time. The final whistle sparked jubilation for Saarbruecken, whose substitutes and staff ran onto the field to celebrate in a huddle with the team. Dutch defender de Ligt went off in the 24th minute. The only other specialist center backs in Bayern's first-team squad are Kim Min-jae and Dayot Upamecano, who has missed the last month with a hamstring injury. That meant midfielder Joshua Kimmich dropping back to partner Kim in

defense. Bayern coach Tuchel said it appeared to be a repeat of a knee injury that de Ligt suffered in September which sidelined him for three weeks. "It's the same knee again, the same capsule (in the joint) again. It's very painful but there is currently no diagnosis yet," he said. Kimmich won't be an option for Saturday's "Klassiker" at Dortmund because he's suspended after a red card last week. Forward Serge Gnabry has been out since September, first with a broken arm, then with illness - but played half an hour off the bench Wednesday - while midfielder Leon Goretzka is recovering from hand surgery. Manuel Neuer played the full game in Bayern's goal in his second appearance after more than 10 months out with a broken leg. Ahead of the game, there had been concerns over the state of the field. Saarbruecken's last home game Sunday had been stopped at halftime because the surface was waterlogged, sparking an intensive effort to drain it in time for Bayern's visit.



Bayern has now lost in the second round of the German Cup for three of the last four seasons. It's another cup sensation for Saarbruecken, which reached the semifinals in 2019-20 from the regional fourth tier. League leader Bayer Leverkusen needed a late flurry of goals to make it into the third round. Coach Xabi Alonso made eight changes to his team in a 5-2 win over third-division Sandhausen,

but had to bring key players like Granit Xhaka and Florian Wirtz on from the bench in pursuit of the win. The game was heading for extra time with the score at 2-2 before Adam Hlozek headed Leverkusen back into the lead in the 85th minute. Two goals from Amine Adli then made sure of the win. "It's about progressing and that's what we did today," Leverkusen midfielder

Robert Andrich said. "In two weeks, no one will ask how we did it. It was a tough game." A goal from Marco Reus gave Dortmund a 1-0 win over fellow top-tier team Hoffenheim, which had defender Ozan Kabak sent off in stoppage time for a second yellow card. American midfielder Gio Reyna started and played 70 minutes for Dortmund for his longest appearance for the club since March. Reyna returned to action last month after a long stretch out after fracturing his leg while playing for the United States against Canada in the CONCACAF Nations League final in June. Eintracht Frankfurt beat Viktoria Cologne 2-0. Freiburg, a German Cup semifinalist last season, was upset 3-1 by second-division Paderborn as Filip Bilbija scored twice. Second-division Hertha Berlin won 3-0 against top-tier Mainz whose winless run in all competitions stretched to 10 games. Along with Bayern's defeat, those upsets mean just six teams from the top division will play in the round of 16.

# Newcastle ends Man United's defense of League Cup with 3-0 win in latest blow for Ten Hag

AP ■ MANCHESTER

**M**anchester United's season descended deeper into crisis on Wednesday after a 3-0 home loss against Newcastle ended its defense of the League Cup and heaped more pressure on manager Erik ten Hag. Defeat in the round-of-16 game was United's eighth loss in all competitions this season and the latest blow for English soccer's most storied club. "It is below the standards everyone expects from Manchester United. It is not good enough by far," Ten Hag said. "We have to put it right. I take responsibility for it. It is my team and they are not performing. I have to share it with my players, but I am responsible." It is 10 years since United was last competing for club soccer's biggest prizes when it won the Premier League title in former manager Alex Ferguson's final season. The wait to return to its former glories looks as far away now as at any point since then, with its current form pointing toward another season of disappointment. The League Cup may not be a priority for a club of United's stature, but it provided Ten Hag's finest moment in the job when in February he led the team to the trophy by beating Newcastle at Wembley Stadium and ended its six-year wait for silverware. That is a distant memory as United's season continues to slide. United suffered a 3-0 loss at home to Manchester City in the Premier League on Sunday, and Saudi-backed Newcastle's repeat of that scoreline raises further questions for Ten Hag. The Dutch coach, who won three league



titles with Ajax, was mocked by Newcastle's fans throughout the game as they chanted that he would be fired in the morning. While there has been no suggestion Ten Hag's position is under threat, United's poor form is of growing concern. After the game he described himself as "a fighter," adding he was confident he would overcome a troubled start to the campaign. "At all my clubs I have done it and also last year here I did it as well, but at this moment we are in a bad place," he said. "I see it as a challenge." United had offered little penetration in the first half and went behind in the 28th minute after being caught on the break. Alejandro Garnacho lost possession in Newcastle's half, which gave Tino Livramento the chance to burst forward and find the run of Almiron, who beat Andre Onana from inside the box. The lead was doubled eight minutes later, with United once again guilty of creating problems for itself. Ten Hag made changes at halftime, notably taking off his captain Casemiro. But

Newcastle extended its lead when Willock carried the ball to the edge of the area and swept a low shot past Onana. Newcastle now travels to Chelsea in the quarterfinals. **CHELSEA ADVANCES** Chelsea put its troubles in the league behind it with a 2-0 win against second division Blackburn. Defeat against Brentford over the weekend left the London club in 11th place in the standings and facing a fight to challenge for Champions League qualification. But manager Mauricio Pochettino moved a step closer to his first trophy in charge as goals from Benoit Badiashile and Raheem Sterling secured the win against Blackburn at Stamford Bridge. Everton is also finding joy in this competition. While it looks like being another league battle for survival for the Merseyside club, it saw off Burnley 3-0 at Goodison Park and now faces a home match against Fulham in the quarterfinals. Fulham secured its place in the last eight with a 3-1 win against second division Ipswich. **KLOPP'S CUP?** Darwin Nunez scored a 70th-minute winner as Liverpool won 2-1 at Bournemouth. Jurgen Klopp's team won the competition in 2022 and is back in the hunt for more silverware after ending last season trophyless. Liverpool is the highest-ranked team left in the cup and next hosts West Ham, which beat Arsenal 3-1. **UNDERDOGS** There will be a team from outside of the Premier League in the semifinals after third division Port Vale was drawn against second-tier Middlesbrough.



## Getafe, Real score 12 goals each in wins over sixth-division clubs in Copa del Rey

AP ■ MADRID

**G**etafe and Real Betis both scored 12 goals against lower-division clubs in the first round of the Copa del Rey on Wednesday. Getafe routed sixth-tier Tardienta 12-0, with Mason Greenwood scoring a goal in each half and Oscar Rodríguez getting a hat trick. Betis trounced sixth-tier Hernan Cortes 12-1, with William José finding the net four times and Rodri Sánchez scoring a hat trick. Girona, which shares the lead of the Spanish league with Real Madrid, had a much harder time against fourth-tier club San Roque de Lepe, winning 2-1 with a goal by Sávio deep into second-half stoppage time.

Cadiz went to a penalty shootout against fourth-tier side Badalona Futur, prevailing 4-2 after a 0-0 draw. Fifth-place Real Sociedad needed a second-half goal by Carlos Fernández to defeat sixth-tier Buñol. A total of 41 first-round matches were played throughout Wednesday, a holiday in Spain. Sevilla beat sixth-tier Quinteran 3-0, while Athletic Bilbao overcame sixth-tier Rubi 2-1 with a pair of goals by Adu Ares. Mallorca defeated Boiro 4-0, which was the same score for Celta Vigo's win over Turegano. Rayo Vallecano routed Atletico de Lugones 6-0, with Radamel Falcao scoring twice. The first round is played in single elimination games at the home of the lower-division teams.

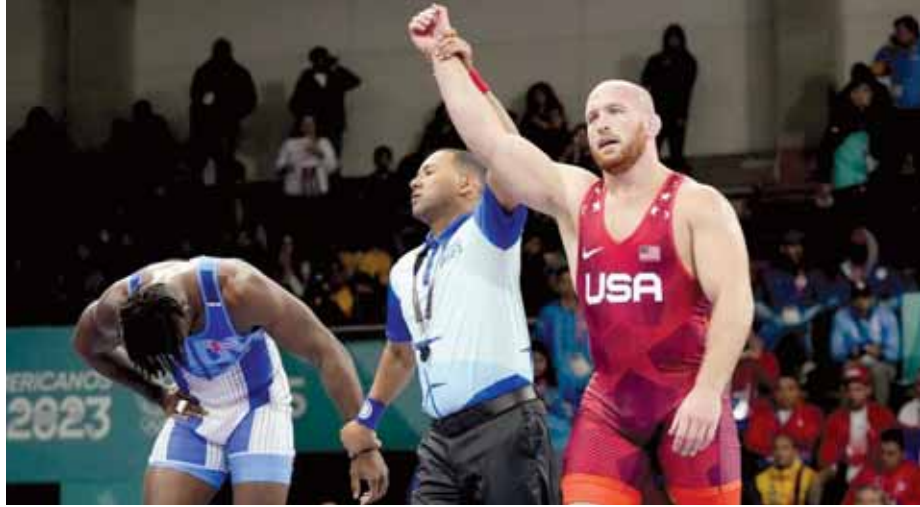
# Snyder leads US wrestlers to gold medal sweep at Pan American Games

AP ■ SANTIAGO

**T**wo-time Olympic medalist Kyle Snyder led the United States wrestling team to four Pan American gold medals on Wednesday, the first day of the event in Santiago. The 27-year-old, one of the top athletes competing in Chile, easily won all his bouts to secure his third consecutive continental title. The star wrestler's teammates came close to dominating just as much, and just like Snyder they are likely to secure a spot in the Paris Olympics next year and fight for medals there, too. The athlete from Maryland was Olympic champion in Rio de Janeiro in 2016 and won sil-

ver in Tokyo in 2021. Snyder later said he had his mind in 2024 as soon as he won the final in Chile. "My next thing is just take a little break and get back on the main train," Snyder told The Associated Press after his title bout. "We've got the holidays, then there's a couple of tournaments, one in January, one February. I need to get ready for the Olympic trials, April 19th and 20th. That's what I'm going to be looking forward to getting ready the most." Snyder has been affected by injuries during the current Olympic cycle, but still won three world championship medals recently. He is cur-

rently riding the longest Olympic and World medal streak in American history; nine in a row since 2015. "I like coming to the Pan Am Games. It gets your mind ready to what the Olympics will be like," Snyder said. "This is a fun team. (Loved) playing card games, hanging out with them." Later, the 24-year-old Mason Parris, a bronze medalist in this year's world championships, beat Venezuela's José Díaz 2-0 in the 125-kilogram category. Despite the tight score, the American faced little risk of losing; his opponent clearly played for a late takedown, but failed. "I was expecting that. He does



some of that cheap stuff," Parris said about his opponent after his win. "He got a little chippy with me, slapped me on the back of my head a few times. I am just here to compete, I am not here to fight." When asked about being teammates with Snyder, Parris' face immediately lit up. "I love wrestling with Kyle. We have a lot of fun, get in really good scrambles. Kyle is a great dude, love talking to him, also talk about his faith. It is great to be closer to him," Parris said. The 29-year-old Zane Richards brought the U.S. Its third gold medal in wrestling with a 10-0 victory over Venezuela's Oscar Tigreros in the 57-kilo-

gram category. The last final of the day had 27-year-old Tyler Berger topping Cuba's Franklin Marén 3-0 in the 74-kilogram category. The U.S. Team finished first in the wrestling medal table in the past two editions of the continent's largest multi-sports event, in Toronto and in Lima. Cuba came out on top in the sport's medal table at the 2011 Pan American Games in Guadalajara. "This tournament helps. The crowd was roudy, not always cheering for us, which makes it fun too. It raises the energy," said U.S. Team coach Joe Russell. "Snyder was a great leader for this team."

