

OPINION 6
INDIA'S RELIEF EFFORTS
CAPTIVATES NEPAL

WORLD 9
ISRAEL'S THREAT OF DROPPING
NUKE ON GAZA CRITICISED

MONEY 10
WHOLESALE INFLATION IN NEGATIVE
TERRITORY FOR 7TH MONTH

NEW DELHI, WEDNESDAY NOVEMBER 15, 2023; PAGES 12 ₹3



the pioneer

www.dailypioneer.com



DOMINANCE
OF INDIA VS NZ'S
PERSEVERANCE
12 SPORT

Murkhon Ke Sardar, jeers Modi

PM slams Rahul for claiming 'everyone in India has Chinese phones'

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■
BHOPAL/NEW DELHI

Prime Minister Narendra Modi dubbed Congress leader Rahul Gandhi as the "Murkhon ke Sardar" (chief of fools) during an election campaign rally in Betul in Madhya Pradesh on Tuesday. While addressing the public, Modi criticised the Gandhi scion for falsely claiming that only "made in China" phones are available in India. "Yesterday, I heard that an expert from the Congress party claimed that everyone in India has a 'made in China' cell phone. The expert said that all phones in India are made in China. Murkhon ke Sardar (Lord of Fools), where do these people live in this world? Congress leaders have developed a mental illness of undermining the achievements of the country," Modi lambasted Rahul without explicitly mentioning his name. Modi also took potshots at Rahul's frequent mysterious foreign trips, saying, "I don't know about the foreign spectacles they wear that make them unable to see the development in the country. The truth is that today, India is the second-largest manufacturer of mobile phones in the world. When Congress was at the Centre, mobiles worth less than ₹20,000 crore were manufactured every year in India. Today, mobile phones worth



Prime Minister Narendra Modi being felicitated during a public meeting in Jhabua ahead of the Madhya Pradesh Assembly elections, on Tuesday

₹3.5 lakh crore are made in India," the PM said. The former Congress president, in an election rally, had remarked that the mobile phones in people's pockets were "Made in China" and suggested they should be "Made in Madhya Pradesh". "India exports mobile phones worth approximately ₹1 lakh crore to other countries." The PM stated that those who only remember "Make in India" before the election season do not understand the importance of Swadeshi. In his election campaign speech, Modi also highlighted that people are now "vocal for local" and have purchased India-made products worth ₹4.4 lakh crores during Diwali. "Congress leaders don't know what to say to the people. The Congress has accepted that their fake promises don't stand a chance in front of Modi's guarantees," he said. The PM announced that the Centre will launch a scheme worth ₹24,000 crore for the welfare of tribals in the country on Wednesday, coinciding with the entire nation celebrating Bhagwan Birsa Munda's birth anniversary. Modi noted the significant presence of people on the last day of his campaign for the Madhya Pradesh Assembly elections scheduled for November 17, stating that it is an indication that the BJP's victory is assured in these polls.

Efforts on to drill escape hole in Uttarkashi tunnel

PNS ■ DEHRADUN

Efforts are underway to rescue 40 labourers who have been trapped for two days inside a section of a collapsed under-construction tunnel in Uttarkashi. On Tuesday, rescue workers commenced the operation by inserting broad steel pipes through the debris in an effort to save them. Drilling to insert the pipes has begun with the help of an "auger machine", Uttarkashi District Magistrate Abhishek Ruhela told reporters. "If everything goes as planned, the trapped labourers will be evacuated by Wednesday," he said after visiting the tunnel and taking an update on the operations from officials at the site. Most of the day went into preparing a platform inside the tunnel to position the auger machine for drilling through the rubble. The drilling machine and the pipes arrived at the site early on Tuesday. The plan is to push through both 800 mm and 900mm diameter sections of mild steel pipes, one after the other, into the rubble using drilling equipment and create an escape passage for the workers who, the officials said, are safe and being provided with oxygen, water, food packets and medicines through tubes. There are eight 900-millimetre diameter pipes with a length of six metres each and five pipes of 800 millimetre diameter of



Rescue and relief operations underway after a portion of a tunnel under construction between Silkyara and Dandalgaon on the Brahmakhal-Yamunotri national highway collapsed, in Uttarkashi district, on Tuesday

the same length, the State Emergency Operation Centre said. "According to the latest update, all 40 labourers trapped inside are safe and sound," Superintendent of Police (Uttarkashi) Arpan Yaduvanshi told reporters after a visit to the site. He said some medicines have been supplied as one of the trapped workers was feeling nauseous. The son of Gabbar Singh Negi, one of the trapped labourers, was allowed to speak to his father for a few seconds on Tuesday. "He said they are safe. He asked us not to worry," said Akash Singh Negi.

A local priest was asked to perform a puja for the early and safe evacuation of the trapped workers. A part of the tunnel being built between Silkyara and Dandalgaon on the Brahmakhal-Yamunotri National Highway caved in on Sunday following a landslide. The 30-metre collapsed section is 270 metres from the mouth of the tunnel from the Silkyara side, the State Emergency Operation Centre in Dehradun said. Uttarakhand Chief Minister Pushkar Singh Dhami is constantly taking updates on the progress of rescue operations, the statement said.

Dabur bosses booked in Mahadev app scam

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■
BHOPAL/MUMBAI

The country's top industrialist and household name in FMCG products, Dabur, has been implicated in the multi-crore online Mahadev betting case. The Mumbai Police has registered a case against 32 individuals, including Gaurav Burman, the Director of Dabur, and Mohit Burman, the company chairman, in connection with the Mahadev betting app, citing various sections related to fraud and gambling. Gaurav Burman is the controlling shareholder of Dabur India. According to the FIR, Mohit Burman is listed at number 16, while Gaurav Burman is at number 18 as accused in the case registered at Matunga Police Station. There is an FIR against 31 named individuals, with an unknown person mentioned at number 32. The FIR was filed on November 7 based on a complaint by social activist Prakash Bankar. Actor Sahil Khan's name appears as accused number 26 in the FIR. Sahil Khan is accused of running another

betting app related to Mahadev's online betting app. The FIR states, "Sahil is not only accused of promotion but also of earning substantial profits by operating the app." Sahil Khan was seen in a video from a party of an online betting app in Dubai. This case has been registered for running a betting app named "Khiladi". Despite media reports, a spokesperson for the Burman family has dismissed the accusations as "baseless," noting that they coincided with their bid to acquire Religare Enterprises. "We have not received any formal communication regarding any such FIR. However, we have seen the FIR being circulated to media houses. The FIR is patently false and baseless. Nothing could be further from the truth than what is wrongly stated in the FIR," the Dabur spokesperson stated. The spokesperson also asserted that the FIR was a "step provoked by vested interests in an attempt to block the acquisition of Religare Enterprises Limited by the Burman family." According to the information, social worker Bankar has

claimed that people have been defrauded to the tune of ₹15,000 crore. The police have registered a case under sections 420, 465, 467, 468, 471, and 120 (B) of the IPC. In the FIR, the complaint also mentions that the accused, Saurabh Chandrakar, is associated with several influential personalities and senior political leaders affiliated with the Congress. The FIR mentions that one of the accused, Saurabh Chandrakar, actively participated in match-fixing to earn profits through unofficial means, and the role of the Burmans will be investigated. The Directorate of Enforcement (ED) is investigating the Mahadev Book Online Betting APP syndicate in which the promoters of this betting syndicate are allegedly sitting abroad and remotely running thousands of panels across India with the help of their friends and associates. According to the ED, it has already arrested four accused persons and seized proceeds of crime worth more than ₹450 crore. A prosecution complaint has been filed against 14 accused persons.

On November 2, the ED received intelligence input that a large amount of cash is being moved in Chhattisgarh by the promoters of the Mahadev APP in relation to the Assembly Elections scheduled for November 7 and 17. ED conducted searches at Hotel Triton and another location in Bhilai and intercepted a cash courier, Asim Das, who was sent from the UAE specifically to deliver a large amount of cash for the electioneering expenses of the Congress. The ED claims that from the questioning of Asim Das, and from the forensic examination of the phone recovered from him, and examination of an email sent by one of the high-ranking accused of the Mahadev network, many startling allegations have come forth. Namely, regular payments have allegedly been made in the past, and so far, around ₹508 crore have been paid by Mahadev App promoters to Bhupesh Baghel, Chief Minister of Chhattisgarh. At an election rally on Monday, Prime Minister Narendra Modi attacked the Baghel Government over the scam.

No relief in Delhi pollution

RAJESH KUMAR ■ NEW DELHI

Delhi continues to grapple with toxic air as the air quality remained "severe" across several places in the national Capital on Tuesday. Based on data provided by nine out of the 40 monitoring stations, the Capital's air quality index was recorded at 397 at 4 pm, worsening from 358 on Monday and 218 on Sunday. Rest of the monitoring stations failed to generate enough data for indexing, according to the Central Pollution Control Board's mobile application Sameer. Air pollution levels hit the severe category (AQI above 400) at many places within the city, including Pusa Delhi (501), ITI Jehangirpuri 463, ITO (427), RK Puram (422), Punjabi Bagh (423), Anand Vihar (439) and Nehru Nagar (450). Neighbouring Ghaziabad (356), Gurugram (386), Greater Noida (348), Noida (364) and Faridabad (384) too recorded very poor air quality. According to IQAir, a Swiss company that specialises in air quality monitoring, Delhi was the most polluted city in the world on Tuesday. Mumbai and Kolkata ranked fifth and 10th among the most



Mobile anti-smog guns spray water to curb air pollution after their flag-off by Delhi Environment Minister Gopal Rai at Delhi Secretariat in New Delhi on Tuesday

polluted cities in the world. Even as the people of Delhi reeled under severe air pollution conditions, the AAP and the BJP have accused each other for the current situation in the national Capital. Delhi Environment Minister Gopal Rai reiterated that people associated with the BJP are offering "absurd" justifications

for supporting firecracker bursting during Diwali, which resulted in a sharp spike in pollution levels in the national capital. Leader of Opposition in the Delhi Assembly Ramvir Singh Bidhuri has blamed rise in stubble burning in AAP ruled Punjab for pollution in the national Capital. BJP MP Gautam Gambhir said the dis-

ruption on pollution should not be done only during Diwali but all around the year. The AAP Government has listed a slew of measures including sprinkling of water in all the 70 Assembly constituencies and stepped up monitoring of BS-3 Petrol and BS-4 Diesel vehicles and their entry into Delhi is prohibited.

Officer under fire as lost gold mystery unveiled

RAJESH KUMAR ■ NEW DELHI

A consignment containing gold and other precious metals worth lakhs of rupees, seized from Old Delhi Railway Station in 2014, now has a mysterious story that could potentially implicate a top Delhi Government officer. During the movement of files, the records pertaining to the said seizure caught the attention of the Department of Trade and Taxes. Following this, the officer has been tracked. Initial probes have found that crucial details such as the owner, origin, and the actual quantity of gold and silver remain shrouded in mystery. What is alarming is the "missing" 12 kg of gold, 36 kg of silver, and ₹7 lakh in currency from the bundles.

Surprisingly, these were stored in a conference room at Vyapar Bhawan, instead of being documented in a vault. A lapse ensued as a five-day delay in inventory creation raised eyebrows, leaving the nation in the dark about the magnitude of the seized treasures. Now, nearly a decade later, a DANICS officer may face heat for alleged lapses. There was no justification for why the inventory was not made for five days after its seizure in 2014. It remains a mystery what the actual quantity of gold and silver seized on March 01, 2014, is. Moreover, at one point, the Chief Secretary and Chief Minister recommended disciplinary action. However, things went topsy-turvy when the Deputy Chief Minister recorded that no action could be

taken without knowing the status of the investigation by the Delhi Police. The report of the Principal Secretary (Home) pointed out mistakes on the part of senior officers, ranging from Joint Commissioner to Commissioner. One officer was chargesheeted and subsequently got exonerated. Another officer was given premature retirement under 56(j) (Om Karan, Asst. Commissioner), but he was reinstated by the Representation Committee. Recently, the junior staff put up a file before the bosses to close the case in the absence of an actual complainant. However, a chance discovery of a file noting made the Directorate of Vigilance reexamine the file and recommend disciplinary action against the officer



involved in this case. The vigilance directorate, in an agenda document for the NCCSA meeting (date yet to be announced), has said that a proposal for action against three officers is being sent to the Ministry of Home Affairs after the approval of the Lieutenant Governor, as they are currently posted outside Delhi. According to the Directorate of

Vigilance's (DoV) agenda document, a probe by then-Principal Secretary (Home) Archana Arora revealed "supervisory lapses" on the part of two IAS and one DANICS (Delhi, Andaman and Nicobar Island Civil Services) officers who were serving at the Trade and Taxes department at the time of the theft. Acting on a tip-off, an enforcement team from the Trade and Taxes department seized 16 kg of gold, 200 kg of silver, and currency notes worth ₹33 lakh from two porters at the Old Delhi Railway Station on March 1, 2014. The valuables in 24 bundles were later moved to a temporary safe place and then transferred for safekeeping to a room on the 13th floor of the Trade and Taxes department building on March 9, 2014.

The report also noted that from the date of seizure on March 1, 2014, to March 5, 2014, no inventory of the seized items was prepared. Later, the inventory was completed on March 11, 2014, indicating that approximately 16 kgs of gold, 200 kg of silver, and currency worth ₹33 lakh were seized from the railway station. The total value of the seized items was roughly calculated to be more than ₹8 crore. "On the night of May 9, 2014,

valuables, including 12 kg of gold, 36 kg of silver, besides currency notes worth ₹7.36 lakh, were stolen," said a senior government officer. An FIR was registered for the theft the next day. Later, in June 2014, an inquiry was handed over to the then-Principal Secretary (Home) by the Chief Secretary. It was alleged that the report of the Principal Secretary (Home), which assigned responsibility to the officers concerned and highlighted lapses on their part, was not shown to the Lieutenant Governor, according to officers. It was also reported that no CCTV cameras were installed where the seized valuables were kept, and it was being watched by only two security guards. "Interestingly, a senior officer recorded on the file of the mat-

ter that the seized items could be deposited with the Directorate of Revenue Intelligence or Customs Authorities. Still, this note was subsequently double-pasted, recommending storing the same in the conference hall of the Trade and Taxes Building," the Delhi Government officer said. While there is no clue as to where the gold and silver came from and where they were heading, the vigilance department, which was probing the charges of irregularities by the tax officials, has recommended disciplinary action against the DANICS officer currently serving in the Delhi Government. The officer was serving as a Joint Commissioner at the Trade and Taxes department at the time of the theft."



www.dailypioneer.com

facebook.com/dailypioneer | @TheDailyPioneer | instagram.com/dailypioneer/

PAPER WITH PASSION

Standing together

India, Sri Lanka and Bangladesh ask Canada to tackle hate speech, hate crimes

A group of South Asian countries ticked off Canada at a recent UN meeting, saying that it must rein in rogue elements operating from its soil. Canada was also told that freedom of speech cannot be absolute, so reasonable restrictions must be placed if it hurts the sentiments of others and is hateful. It was unprecedented when two of India's neighbors gave all-out support to India in dealing with recent Canadian diatribes wherein Canada Prime Minister Justin Trudeau has accused India of violating the Vienna convention and expelling Canadian diplomats after the assassination of Hardeep Singh Nijjar. India had urged Canada to strengthen its steps against hate speech, discrimination and attacks on religious places. The recommendations were made during the UN Human Rights Council Review meeting, where representatives from India, Bangladesh and Sri Lanka shared their concerns. And surprisingly they all shared the same sentiment.

Indian diplomat Mohammed Hussain highlighted Canada's legislative achievements, such as the National Housing Strategy Act and the Accessible Canada Act. However, he also underscored the need for Canada to further fortify its domestic framework to prevent the misuse of freedom of expression, especially in instances of inciting violence and activities promoting extremism. He asked his Canadian counterpart to take decisive measures to prevent attacks on places of worship belonging to religious and racial minorities. Additionally, he urged Canada to enhance legislative measures to address hate crimes and hate speech effectively. It is pertinent



to note here that after the Nijjar killing, Indian diaspora in Canada has been facing slur and abuse. The Indian embassy staff even received calls asking them to leave the country or face consequences. But the support rendered by Bangladesh and Sri Lanka at the meeting was most heartening. Bangladeshi diplomat Abdullah Al Forhad emphasised the necessity for Canada to intensify its efforts against racism, hate speech, hate crimes and discrimination faced by migrants and Muslim minorities. Sri Lankan diplomat Thilini Jayasekara urged Canada to accede to the Convention on the Protection of Rights of All Migrant Workers and take steps to combat racial discrimination against immigrants. Jayasekara also emphasised the need for Canada to oppose misinformation against minorities and follow-up on global human rights recommendations. Earlier, the diplomatic tension between India and Canada following Nijjar's killing led to the suspension of visa services in Canada, although they have been partially restored. However, a positive sign is the support that came from Bangladesh and Sri Lanka and it is indeed in the interest of South Asia that all countries of the region speak in one voice as the issues are more or less similar and identifiable.

PICTALK



NCC cadets march past during the Children's Day celebrations, in Thiruvananthapuram

India's relief efforts captivates Nepal



ASHOK K MEHTA

India, by being the first responder to the Jajarkot earthquake, has won many hearts in Nepal. Can Nepal, on its part, allow recruitment under the Agniveer scheme?

My neighbour in Ram Vihar, on seeing me all packed and cheerful over my holiday enquired where I was headed. "To escape Delhi's smog, I am off to Nepal!" I replied. "But Nepal is reverberating with earthquakes" he said, referring to two massive tremors (magnitude 6.3 and below) on 4 and 6 November in Jajarkot and Rukum West which demolished most of the kaccha homes and those that remained developed cracks. Earlier, on 3 October, a 6.3 magnitude earthquake struck Nearby Bhajang even as Nepal has still not fully recovered from the 7.8 magnitude 2015 Gorkha earthquake centred in Barpak which destroyed many parts of Kathmandu valley. The 8.0 earthquake of 1934 is forgotten as there are few of that period living. The Gorkha earthquake caused 3800 fatalities affecting 31 of the 75 districts resulting in a loss of more than USD1 bn. Like in 2015, India's response to the latest tragedy - as I write from Lameahal, Pokhara 250 km east of Jajarkot - is stellar and continuing. In 2015, the Indian Army and Air Force contribution was in the class worthy of a Nobel Peace Prize. Then Nepal Army Chief, Gen Gaurav Rana, publicly acknowledged the lead role played by the Indian Army. India is able to become virtually the first responder due to its elaborate network of pension-paying offices in Kathmandu, Pokhara, Dharan and Butawal (shortly). The commanders of these assets belong to the Gorkha battalions of the Indian Army, familiar with the local language, terrain and culture - enabled by a trekking programme of young Gorkha officers begun in 1970 by Army Chief Gen Sam Manekshaw, better known here as Sam Bahadur. Many of these facilities have been created by the Indian Embassy and Defence Wing Kathmandu like the 28 District Soldiers Board, seasonal pension camps established across the country and visits by senior Indian Army officers. This month alone, Adjutant General, Lt Gen Bansi Ponappa and Director General Recruiting (although Agniveer is suspended



here) Lt Gen Sarna, visited Nepal. Education and medical facilities are growing rapidly with ECHS nodes and Kendriya Vidyalayas. The British who are the pioneers in recruiting Gorkhas, although shrunk in size from 44 Gorkha battalions at the end of World War II to three battalions now, have also helped in the Jajarkot earthquake. China wants to be seen as a friend in need and play a role in disaster mitigation. When I landed on 9 November at China-constructed Pokhara International Airport which, like the Matala airport in Sri Lanka is becoming a white elephant, Inspector Keshav Thapa of Nepal Police said only four international flights, and that too from China (two chartered for tourists and two for Jajarkot earthquake relief) have landed here since the inauguration of the airport six months ago. Pivotal to the Jajarkot assistance programme is Lt Col Prashant Baghel, Pension Paying Officer Pokhara who established a relief headquarters in Jajarkot with his PPO staff and a team of Gorkha ex-servicemen. The government of Nepal's "single route-policy" of disaster assistance (presumably after the shemozzle during the Gorkha earthquake) requires all relief material to be handed over to Nepalese officials, in this case, the Chief District Officer of



THE RELENTLESS GOOD WORK DONE BY INDIA-CREATED FACILITIES FOR GORKHA EX-SERVICEMEN OVER THE YEARS SHOULD INSPIRE THE NEPAL GOVERNMENT TO RECONSIDER ITS DECISION TO SUSPEND OR REJECT AGNIVEER

Jajarkot. Baghel took along with him Rs 15 lakh worth of immediate assistance material and returned on 11 November. His job was to assess the damage and direct relief material. Col Amit Sharma, the Defence Advisor in Kathmandu said on 11 November, that 35 tonnes of relief material had been delivered to Nepal by three IAF aircraft in Nepalgunj airport (some aircraft brought additional supplies to Kathmandu). He said he had employed Gorkha ex-servicemen to assist in various relief activities for the injured and other displaced victims. Fatalities in Jajarkot were 157 with thousands hurt. 10 lakh persons had been provided food and succour. Only four serving Gorkhas were affected by the earthquake as few were recruited from this remote region which was the epicentre of the 10-year-long Maoist insurgency beginning in 1996. The noted columnist of Kathmandu Post, CK Lal, in his 8 November column has written on lessons from Jajarkot advocating that "Government must discourage disaster tourism for domestic and international do-gooders". He does not include India in this category. India's Defence Wing has shown it can rise to the occasion. The relentless good work done by India-created facilities for Gorkha ex-servicemen over

the years should inspire the Nepal government to reconsider its decision to suspend/reject Agniveer's truncated terms of engagement, devoid of pension. Agniveer is indeed deeply flawed but Kathmandu should allow temporary recruitment as a test bed till outcomes fructify. At the rate both governments are silent on breaking the Agniveer impasse, the end of the Gorkha Brigade is not far off. Also, the end will be all assets available for emergency relief. I was informed that when the Nepali Congress leads the alliance government it may take a more positive view of Agniveer. Gen Prabhusharma, the outgoing Nepal Army Chief is reported to have said: "I am not against Gorkha recruitment in the Indian Army. But I am against Agniveer". It is the festive season in Nepal following the week of Dussehra. Today is Tihar (Bhai Tika) after four days of happy pujas venerating the kag (crow), kukur (dog), gai (cow) and of course, Lakshmi puja. The high point is Tika Tihar as Nepal goes delirious playing Bhaailo (dancing) putting aside Jajarkot. (The writer, a retired Major General, was Commander, IPKF South, Sri Lanka, and founder member of the Defence Planning Staff, currently the Integrated Defence Staff. The views expressed are personal)

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

COMBAT RISING AIR POLLUTION

Sir - the critical issue of escalating air pollution, particularly in the aftermath of the recent Diwali festival. Festivals are traditionally a time of joy and relaxation, allowing people to unwind and celebrate. However, the environmental repercussions of such celebrations have become increasingly evident. The air pollution levels, akin to living in a gas chamber, have reached an alarming high, posing severe challenges for individuals with respiratory diseases. Despite the Supreme Court's attempt to regulate the use of firecrackers with a two-hour window, the guidelines were widely disregarded. The aftermath of Diwali witnessed a staggering number of firecrackers being sold, exacerbating the already precarious air quality. Areas like Uttar Pradesh and New Delhi saw a surge in sales, with Anand Vihar experiencing a notable increase, despite stringent orders.

It is disheartening to note that, as a society, we are responsible for this surge in air pollution. The excessive use of firecrackers has created a toxic haze that now blankets our skies post-festivals. We must acknowledge our role in this environmental crisis. The gravity of air pollution demands immediate attention and concerted efforts from all stakeholders. Each one of us needs to make a sincere effort to combat this issue. The government and municipalities must also play their part in implementing effective measures to restore clear skies and a pollution-free environment. It is imperative that we address this menace urgently before it further deteriorates our air quality and, subsequently, our health.

Kirti Wadhawan | Kanpur

INDIA'S QUEST FOR GLORY

Sir - With an impressive nine consecutive victories, the Men in Blue have dominated the World Cup league phase, securing the top spot with 18 points. As India eyes a third World Cup triumph, the

Biden-Xi summit amidst global turmoil



As the United States President Joe Biden and Chinese President Xi Jinping prepare to meet in the San Francisco Bay area, political experts remain cautiously optimistic about the outcomes of this significant summit. The world is currently grappling with complex issues, from the ongoing conflict in South Asia to the Ukraine impasse. Amidst these challenges, the South China Sea remains a pivotal

point of discussion. President Biden must ensure that the United States maintains a steadfast stance on peace in Taiwan, a move seen as countering Beijing's agenda. The agenda for the meeting includes discussions on military cooperation, climate change, and human rights. While expectations for concrete resolutions are modest, the primary focus appears to be on improving communication channels and dispelling existing perceptions. This summit is crucial, given that the leaders have not met since the November 2022 G20 meeting. President Xi has not set foot on U.S. soil since 2017. Striking a balance between assertiveness and diplomacy is crucial, especially when dealing with the elusive Xi. The outcome of this meeting could set the template for future discussions.

Ganapathi Bhat | Akola

semifinals against New Zealand in Mumbai pose a significant challenge. Despite India's current form, the knockout stage has proven tricky in the past, as evidenced by the 2015 edition's semifinal loss. Meanwhile, Australia remains a formidable force in knockout rounds, contrasting with South Africa's historical struggles. However, the tournament's heartening story lies in the growth demonstrated by Afghanistan and the Netherlands. The knockout matches promise excitement when faced with tough contests. As the cricketing world eagerly awaits the outcome, let's brace ourselves for thrilling clashes on the path to World Cup glory.

MT Farooqi | Chennai

COLLEGIUM CONTROVERSY

Sir - the ongoing debate surrounding the Collegium system for the appointment, transfer, and promotion of judges. In an informal discussion, the Chief Justice of India highlighted the multi-stage and

challenging process involved in judge selection. However, the government has expressed its objection to the current Collegium system, advocating for a new memorandum of procedure and the inclusion of a government representative in the search and evaluation committee. The Supreme Court, on the other hand, emphasizes the need to keep government officials at arm's length, fearing interference in the judiciary's independence. The crux of the matter lies in balancing public opinion and the government's role. The Chief Justice emphasized the rigorous process of collecting facts related to appointments and promotions, ensuring the quality of judges' decisions. As this debate continues, it is crucial to strike a delicate balance that preserves both the independence of the judiciary and the accountability of the government.

N Mateeni | Mumbai

Send your feedback to: letterstopioneer@gmail.com

Switching to renewable energy is the only option

Given the ill effects of climate change, the urgency of transitioning to renewable energy sources cannot be overstated



SHIVAM BHARDWAJ

The world is at a critical crossroads when it comes to energy production and consumption. Fossil fuels have powered our civilization for centuries, but the environmental and climate consequences of our dependence on them are now undeniable. The urgency of transitioning to renewable energy sources has never been more apparent. In this article, we will discuss why the world needs to accelerate its transition to renewable energy, highlighting the environmental and climate change consequences of any further delay.



fossil fuels often leads to habitat destruction and water pollution. Fracking, for example, can contaminate groundwater, leading to long-lasting ecological damage. Oil spills are another devastating consequence, causing catastrophic harm to marine ecosystems.

A Global Emergency

The burning of fossil fuels is the primary driver of climate change. Carbon dioxide, released into the atmosphere when we burn these fuels, acts as a greenhouse gas, trapping heat and causing global temperatures to rise. The consequences of a warming planet are profound and far-reaching, including:

- a. Rising Sea Levels: As global temperatures increase, polar ice caps melt, causing sea levels to rise. This poses a severe threat to coastal communities, leading to

increased flooding and displacement. b. Extreme Weather Events: Climate change intensifies extreme weather events, such as hurricanes, wildfires, droughts, and heatwaves, impacting ecosystems, economies, and human lives. c. Disruption of Ecosystems: Climate change disrupts ecosystems and threatens biodiversity, leading to the extinction of numerous species and upsetting the delicate balance of life on Earth.

Renewable Energy Solution Renewable energy sources, such as solar, wind, hydro, and geothermal power, offer a sustainable and environmentally friendly alternative to fossil fuels. Transitioning to renewables is imperative for several reasons:

- a. Reduced Greenhouse Gas Emissions: Renewable energy sources produce little to no greenhouse gas emissions during energy production, making them a key tool in the fight against climate change.
- b. Resource Sustainability: Unlike fossil fuels, which are finite resources, renewable energy sources are practically inexhaustible. The sun will shine and the wind will blow

for millions of years, ensuring a long-term and stable energy supply. c. Improved Air Quality: Renewable energy generation is clean, reducing air pollution and improving public health by minimizing the release of harmful pollutants. **The Cost of Delay** The transition to renewable energy is not without its challenges, including initial investment costs and infrastructure development. However, the cost of delaying this transition is far greater. The longer we rely on fossil fuels, the more damage we do to the planet, the environment, and future generations.

Conclusion The environmental and climate consequences of delaying this transition are already evident in the form of extreme weather events, rising sea levels, and biodiversity loss. The world must accelerate its shift to renewable energy. Indeed, it is an ethical responsibility to safeguard the planet from the consequences of climate change. (The writer is a legal associate of Ampin Energy Transition; views are personal)



FIRST COLUMN

IS IT NECESSARY TO BE SPIRITUAL?

One must strike a balance between the material and spiritual aspects of life



RAJYOGI BRAHMAKUMAR NIKUNJ JI

Spirituality! The word itself creates a lot of inquisitiveness as well as mystery in the minds of people because there is no single, widely agreed definition of spirituality that's available to those who want to seriously pursue it. Traditionally spirituality has been defined as a process of personal transformation by religious ideals. Since the 19th century spirituality is often separated from religion, and has become more oriented on subjective experience and psychological growth. It may refer to almost any kind of meaningful activity or blissful experience but without a single, widely agreed definition. Hence under such a confused scenario, to grow spiritually in a society that is defined by power, money, and influence is almost a herculean task. Today, modern-day electronic equipment, gadgets, and tools as well as entertainment stuff through radio, TV magazines and of course the Internet have seemingly predisposed many of us to confine our attention mostly to our physical needs. As a result, our concepts of self-worth and self-meaning have become muddled and confused.

So the question that arises here is, how can we learn to strike an ideal balance between the material and spiritual aspects of our lives? Indeed a tough question that almost every individual living on this earth has been facing since the time he/she was born!



Usually, when it comes to spirituality, people think of god, religion, rituals etc. For example, a person folding his hands before an idol in a temple thinks he is spiritual, though his mind wanders in several ways, even while he prays to God. That is why the modern generation feels that practicality and spirituality do not go hand in hand. Hence, they consider spirituality as impractical. However, we need to understand that spirituality is a way of sharpening your mind and hence raising your effectiveness to a much higher level. It is knowledge of the self, its relationship with God, the purpose of one's existence and the way to achieve that purpose or goal. But again there is a question that a lot of people raise: why at all does one need to be spiritual? What's so wrong with being materialistic instead of being spiritual? Well, the answer to this is simple, it's a matter of will and one is free to choose how and what he/she wants to be. But we should not forget the fact that at some point in life, everyone tries to be spiritual willingly or circumstantially/incidentally. This happens a lot of times when one wishes to forget all the materialistic things, the physical details of people, the luxuries of the world and everything physical & just wishes to relax and be with oneself in peace, love and harmony.

A spiritual person always remains content with the self and devotes his time not to material pursuits but tends to remain in the company of the divine thereby experiencing true love, peace and happiness which are more lasting than material attainments. Such a person will see everyone as souls; and be full of love for every person in this world regardless of one's religion, country, gender and other physical traits. He would always remain peaceful, no matter how people and situations around him would be because being peaceful is being the true self and being spiritual. When we understand the above definition of a real spiritual being, we will be spiritually awakened and enlightened & get directly connected to the Supreme who will lead us to the path of self-transformation which would further lead to world transformation. So, let's embark on this journey of becoming a 'Spiritual Being' through self-realisation & introspection.

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

Has free ration become a political compulsion?



UTTAM GUPTA

Under 'open-ended' procurement, Govt buys from farmers unlimited quantities at MSP. Apart from high stocks, this adds to the food subsidy bill substantially



Addressing a poll rally in Chhattisgarh, Prime Minister Narendra Modi has announced an extension of the Pradhan Mantri Garib Kalyan Anna Yojana (PMGKAY) free ration scheme for another five years. Launched in April 2020 to deal with the situation triggered by the Covid-19 pandemic, PMGKAY provided 5 kg of rice or wheat per person per month for "free" to 820 million, as well as 1 kg of pulses per family per month to people covered under the National Food Security Act (NFSA). Run for three months initially, the scheme got six extensions till December 31, 2022.

On December 23, 2022, Consumer Affairs, Food and Public Distribution Minister Piyush Goyal announced the merger of the free part of PMGKAY with the regular food security schemes under NFSA. The 'merger' requires explanation. Under the NFSA, the Centre directs the Food Corporation of India (FCI) and other state agencies to procure food from the farmers at MSP and organize its distribution to around 820 million people through a network of fair price shops (FPS) at the subsidized price (issue price) of Rs 2/3/1 per kg for wheat, rice, and coarse cereals. There are two types of beneficiaries.

As part of the Antyodaya Anna Yojana (AAY), the poorest of the poor households get 35 kg of food grains per family. For a family of five, it comes to 7 kg per person each month. The number of families under AAY is 24 million, and persons getting 7 kg cereals per month @ Rs 2/3/1 per kg are 120 million. The rest 700 million get five kg per person a month at the same price. The excess of MSP paid to farmers and handling and distribution costs (HDC) over the issue price is reimbursed to the FCI et al as a subsidy from the Union Budget. Call it regular food subsidy. In addition, under PMGKAY, all 820 million beneficiaries under the NFSA got 5 kg of cereals per month for free. On December 23, 2022, Goyal announced the withdrawal of PMGKAY while making supplies under regular NFSA free for a year from January 1,



NOTHING ELSE COULD HAVE CARRIED A GREATER APPEAL TO VOTERS THAN THE PROMISE OF FREE FOOD TO 820 MILLION OR NEARLY 59 PERCENT OF THE POPULATION THAT TOO FOR FIVE YEARS. BUT, IT COMES AT A COST

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

2023, to December 31, 2023. Modi has extended this arrangement for five years. During the election season, Modi's announcement was a political masterstroke. Nothing else could have carried a greater appeal to voters than the promise of free food to 820 million or nearly 59 per cent of the population that too for five years. But, it comes at a cost. Against Rs 2/3/1 per kg for wheat, rice, and coarse cereals paid earlier, now, the beneficiaries would get these for free. The extra spend on food subsidy would be Rs 2 per kg per person if she takes her ration as wheat (Rs 3 per kg per person if it is rice). This will translate to additional outgo in the range of Rs 10,000 - 15,000 crore per annum (Rs 50,000 - 75,000 crore over five years) depending on which cereal or a combination thereof, the beneficiary opts for. It may be argued that in a total annual food subsidy budget of around Rs 200,000 crore, this is a small 5 - 7.5 per cent and by some tweaking of expenditure and revenue receipts in other heads, the government could avoid any slippage from the desired fiscal trajectory. This is a myopic thought. It distracts attention from the overarching goal of 'rationalising and pruning subsidies to which the then Finance Minister (FM), Arun Jaitley under Modi had vowed in 2015-16. Even today, the NITI Aayog - Union government's think tank - is studying the effectiveness of the food subsidy scheme and examining 'whether, and how, the Scheme can be rationalised or closed'. In sync with this goal, it is possible for the government to take credible steps to reduce food subsidies without compromising its commitments to the welfare of the poor. For instance, the current issue price of Rs 2/3/1 per kg was specified in the NFSA legislation. The law enacted

in 2013 froze these rates for three years. Since 2016, there has been no legal bar on increasing the price. Yet, it remains where it was a decade ago despite a substantial increase in MSP as well as HDC. A hike in the issue price by Rs 1 per kg would yield an annual savings of over Rs 5,000 crore. Second, the existing number of beneficiaries under NFSA at 59 per cent of the country's population is far in excess of the people who actually deserve a subsidy. Even as per the Shanta Kumar Committee (2015), the people eligible for subsidised food shouldn't be more than 40 per cent of the population. The excess of 19 per cent comes to 266 million. By deleting these persons from the beneficiaries list, the government can save about Rs 40,000 crore (25 (27-2)x5x12x266; where 27 is the cost of supplying wheat). Third, other than AAY families and persons, the rest can pay more than Rs 2/3/1 per kg. Deduct 266 million (those who shouldn't be eligible for subsidy) from 700 million, this number comes to 434 million. The Shanta Kumar Committee wanted them should pay at least 50 per cent of the MSP or Rs 10.5 (current MSP is Rs 21). This could yield savings of about Rs 22,000 crore [8.5(10.5-2)x5x12x434]. Fourth, the ridiculously low price at which food is available in the supply chain is an open invitation to dubious operators to siphon off and sell in the open market raking in a moolah. This can be prevented if only the government disbands the existing system and gives subsidies to the beneficiaries under DBT. Under DBT, the state agencies need not buy, store and deliver food to the beneficiary; instead the latter buys from the market paying the full price, say, Rs 27 per kg of wheat.

Of this, Rs 25 comes from the Centre as a subsidy and Rs 2 from her pocket as per the extant NFSA regime. Now, under Modi's prescription of making it free, the entire Rs 27 would come from the Centre. When subsidised food doesn't enter the supply chain, diversion and misuse is completely ruled out. With DBT in place, it is much easier for the Govt to deny subsidies to undeserving persons. It will also save on costs currently incurred on handling of grains by the agencies. Besides, all consumers will benefit from increased supplies and competition in the market.

Currently, the Govt is using state agencies not just to meet food requirements under NFSA but also to extend price support to farmers. Under what has come to be known as 'open-ended' procurement, it buys from farmers unlimited quantities at MSP. Apart from facing a nightmare due to high stocks and high carrying costs, this has added to the food subsidy bill. With the switchover to DBT, the government needs to get out of this price support business.

The only viable way to support farmers is to give them the freedom to sell their produce, open up the market and give them multiple choices to sell. This will require the resurrection of the three farm laws Modi was forced to junk in November 2021 following agitation by farmers from Punjab and Haryana. Sadly, all reforms are held hostage to the politics of populism. Giving food free, continuing with subsidies to the undeserving and open-ended purchases from farmers at MSP are all manifestations of populism. If Modi dares to tinker with any of these, he risks losing at the hustings. So, the status quo continues.

Tackling violence against women in rural India

If morality and tradition are meant to guide society in the right direction, why aren't they strictly applied to men as well?

After six months of marriage, Sakshi, a resident of Ranchi, the capital city of Jharkhand, returned to her home, leaving her husband's residence where she had faced harassment. The video of her return went viral on social media and was later covered by several news channels and newspapers. Why? It was due to the ceremonious way in which her father, Prem Gupta, celebrated her return. He marked his daughter's homecoming with dance, music, and enthusiasm. In an interview, Prem said, "When I could send Sakshi off with such pride at her wedding, why should I bring her back shamefully when she is not at fault?" He aimed to set an example for the



TANIYA

(Taniya is a student in Uttarakhand and writes about gender issues, views are personal. Charkha Features)

many women and their families undergoing a similar situation. "If I had brought my daughter back secretly, everyone would have said, "My daughter was unsuccessful in her marriage; she was the one at fault," he added. Sakshi and Prem made a strong statement against domestic violence. However, not every girl has the support of someone like Prem in their life. Located 315 km from the state capital Dehradun, Charson village in the Garur block of Bageshwar district in the mountainous state of Uttarakhand is an example where the silent screams of girls and women do not find an echo. The total population of Charson village is approximately 4000, with a literacy

rate of about 75%. However, in comparison to men, the literacy rate of women is significantly lower. Due to the lack of education, women in this village are unaware of their rights, making it challenging for them to speak out against any form of abuse. Simran, an 18-year-old, expressed, "When we go out, we have to endure comments and taunts. These experiences affect our physical and mental health, making it difficult for us to focus on our day-to-day life. We are unable to concentrate on our studies as well. Most women in the village face restrictions when going out, and if they do work outside the home, they are closely monitored." Ritika, another girl from the village, added, "Even the



choice of our clothing, like jeans and shorter tops, is restricted, as people not only look at us with judgment but also make comments that affect us mentally. It feels like we have done something wrong, and society blames us without even thinking about the impact of their words."

Sadly, instead of supporting a girl who speaks against violence, society tends to label her negatively. According to a 2023 report conducted by BMC Women's Health, "In the South Asian countries, the prevalence of lifetime and current physical and/or sexual partner violence were highest in India." The report also said, "The increase in prevalence of current violence in India and the higher ratio of current to lifetime violence also suggests that violence continued, once it had started, for more women." Moreover, gender-based violence finds support in the pay disparity between men and women. A recent survey report titled "Women and Men in India 2022" by the

National Statistical Office reveals that market-determined wages for women performing similar work are significantly lower than those of men. The gender wage gap has not only persisted but has widened in rural areas over the past decade, even as it has narrowed in towns, as reported by a leading newspaper. National figures indicate that the average daily rural wage for men is Rs 393, whereas a woman worker receives only Rs 265. Sangita Devi, a 26-year-old, mentioned that this wage disparity is rationalised by the notion that a man can break stones, but a woman cannot. Despite women being capable of the same physical work as men, they receive less pay. Social work-

er Neelam Grundy highlights that even today, many rural women are unaware of their rights. Unlike their urban counterparts, women in villages like Charson lack awareness, leading to a higher incidence of violence against them. Neelam emphasises that women must raise their voices against violence and underscores the need for societal mindset change. She adds, "Society needs to understand that everyone has equal rights according to the constitution. It's time for patriarchal societies to change their thinking." The question that arises is, if morality and tradition are meant to guide society in the right direction, why aren't they strictly applied to men as well?

Uttam to lead India in Junior Hockey World Cup

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

Talented forward Uttam Singh will lead India in the FIH Hockey Men's Junior World Cup, to be held in Kuala Lumpur from December 5 to 16. India, the reigning Asian champions, are placed in Pool C alongside Canada, South Korea and Spain. They will start their tournament campaign against Korea on December 5. In their next fixtures, India will face Spain on December 7 and Canada on December 9. India had finished fourth in the last edition of the tournament, and coach C.R. Kumar said the team is all set to take



their journey much forward. "We have a formidable squad. We draw inspiration from the 2016 Junior World Cup-winning team. We are fortunate to have a bunch of seasoned players, who were part of the last Junior World Cup in Bhubaneswar. "They will shoulder leadership roles and mentor their teammates. Our ultimate priority is to clinch victory in the Junior World Cup, and we are committed to taking measured steps," said Kumar. Pool A boasts of defending champions Argentina, Australia, Chile, and Malaysia. Pool B includes Egypt, France, Germany and South Africa. Pool D sets the stage for fierce competition with Belgium, Netherlands, New Zealand, and Pakistan vying for a quarter-final berth. India squad: Goalkeepers: Mohit HS, Ranvijay Singh Yadav. Defenders: Shardanand Tiwari, Amandeep Lakra, Rohit, Sunil Jojo, Amir Ali. Midfielders: Vishnukant Singh, Poovanna C B, Rajinder Singh, Amandeep, Aditya Singh. Forwards: Uttam Singh (Captain), Aditya Lalage, Arajit Singh Hundal (vice-captain), Sourabh Anand Kushwaha, Sudeep Chirmako, Bobby Singh Dhami. Reserve players: Sukhvinder, Sunit Lakra.



Italy faces showdown with Ukraine in Euro 2024 qualifying

Albania and Slovenia well set to advance

AP ■ GENEVA

The final rounds of European Championship qualifiers see defending champion Italy needing a strong finish to clinch a spot at the tournament, while Albania and Slovenia can secure surprising group victories. Romania is another unlikely team controlling its own Euro 2024 destiny, although Israel still has an outside chance to secure direct advancement from that group. Slovenia tops Group H ahead of Denmark, but could still be overtaken by an even lower-ranked team - Kazakhstan. Twelve teams will secure advancement in the next week to the tournament hosted by Germany. Eight teams already qualified last month: France, England, Spain, Belgium, Portugal, Austria, Scotland and Turkey. The Netherlands, Hungary and Serbia are best placed to confirm their qualification. Three more teams will advance from a 12-team playoff in March. Among those in danger of not qualifying directly are Croatia, a finalist and semi-finalist at the past two World Cups, and Italy, which failed to reach either of those tournaments. Italy faces a high-stakes game against Ukraine on Monday, likely for second place behind England in Group C. Ukraine will host Italy in Germany - at the stadium of Bundesliga leader Bayer Leverkusen - because it cannot play international games at home for security reasons during the military invasion by Russia. Russia was banned from Euro 2024 qualifying. Italy is three points behind Ukraine, but with a game in hand, and hosts North Macedonia on Friday - a fixture that could revive bad memories for the Italians. Italy's second straight failure to reach the World Cup came in a home loss to North Macedonia in a playoff semifinal in March 2022.

ISRAEL'S QUEST Israel has never qualified for the Euros since becoming a full UEFA member in 1994. It was already in a tight, three-way race with Romania and Switzerland in Group I before the war with Hamas led to its two scheduled games in October being postponed. A new program of four games in 10 days started Sunday with a 1-0 loss at Kosovo, making third-place Israel's "home" game Wednesday against Switzerland key. Israel will play that game in a small Hungarian village closely tied to the country's Prime Minister Viktor Orban. Group leader Romania visits on Saturday. The final round is Tuesday, when Romania hosts Switzerland and Israel is at Andorra.

Kahleah of WNBA's Chicago Sky returns to Rutgers as assistant coach

AP ■ WASHINGTON

Kahleah Copper is heading back to Rutgers as an assistant on the women's basketball team, where she played during her college career. The Chicago Sky's star wing will become the Director of Athletic Culture and Professional Development. Copper averaged 14 points and 5.8 rebounds when she competed for the Scarlet Knights from 2012-16 under coach C. Vivian Stringer. "I think it's crazy that I've been having some full circle moments," Copper said in a phone interview. "I'm super excited to be back and pour into the program that molded me into the player and person I am. I'm excited to go back to my roots where it all began for me. Give back to that program and help develop the next generation of pros." Rutgers coach Coquese Washington said when she told her players that Copper would coach them - a player who won the 2021 WNBA title with Chicago - their eyes were "big as saucers." This isn't Copper's first foray into coaching. She was an assistant on the Purdue University Northwest basketball team in 2020-21. She said the experience helped her gain a greater appreciation for coaching. "I appreciate scouts more, being a leader and being a player that is consistent," she said. "You see the difference in what that makes. A leader comes in every day and is consistent."



Copper said she received a call from Washington this summer, asking her if she wanted to return as a coach. "We talked about her journey as she was still playing and her becoming a coach. What inspired her to do that," Copper said. "We talked about what I did at Purdue Northwest and how it made me feel. I got a love for it." Washington said she got into college coaching as an assistant at her alma mater Notre Dame while playing in the WNBA for the New York Liberty, Houston Comets and Indiana Fever. She was recruited for the job by her college coach, Hall of Famer Muffet McGraw. "Talking to Kahleah, I told her I came from the same place. I understand what you're thinking in the offseason," Washington said. "You want to stay in shape, the marketing and business responsibilities. Those were the conversations we had. "She's a finals MVP, a WNBA champion, plays on the national team. This is as good as it gets of what it takes to be an elite level player."

Chess fraternity confident its players will get TOPS support

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

The chess fraternity, following a host of top-notch performances in recent years, is foreseeing the government extending the Target Olympic Podium Scheme (TOPS) to its players despite the sport not being a part of the Games curriculum. R Vaishali and Vidit Gujrathi who recently won the FIDE Grand Swiss women's and open titles in a rare double for India in Isle of Man to qualify for the prestigious Candidates tournament in Toronto next year, felt that it's a matter of time before the government extends the scheme to chess, while All India Chess Federation vice-president Bharat Singh Chauhan said that the sports ministry had "told us we can apply" for TOPS. TOPS is the sports ministry's flagship programme that attempts to assist India's premier athletes in Olympic disciplines. The scheme aims to improve the athletes' training so they can compete for medals in the global showpiece. "TOPS are going to support us. They have told us we can apply and they will support. This discussion has taken place. The government is supporting us on all fronts, no doubt about it," Chauhan told PTI on the sidelines of the announcement of a Rs two crore financial assistance for R Praggnandhaa, Gujrathi and Vaishali to prepare for the Candidates tournament in Toronto in April. The international chess body,



FIDE, organises the Candidates as the final contest to determine the challenger for the World Championship. Gujrathi, who beat Alexandr Predke of Serbia to record his seventh victory in the Grand Swiss event in Isle of Man to take the top spot in the open section last week, said it will be the icing on the cake if chess players also get support under TOPS. "We would be very glad. Of course the government is doing a lot of good things and this (inclusion in TOPS) would be the icing on the cake. I mean we will be getting better facilities, trainers. Because of that, we can train better and achieve our goals, which is not easy. "So if it happens there is nothing like it. I really wish that it does." The 29-year-old also hoped chess becomes a part of the Olympic curriculum. "It's my dream to represent India in the Olympics. There is a huge potential," he added. Vaishali, the elder sister of chess prodigy Praggnandhaa, too felt TOPS will support chess players in the long run. "As a sport, chess is gaining a

lot of popularity. Definitely it will be nice if it's a part of the TOPS. I am sure it will happen in the long run," said Vaishali, who is on the threshold of becoming the third Indian woman to become a Grandmaster. "To become a Grandmaster has always been my dream when I started playing chess. In Isle of Man, I was so close to completing the title. All I had to do was win the last game to join Koneru Humpy and D Harika in the elite club of grandmasters. "But I drew. Now I am just like a few points away. I hope it will come soon. I do keep thinking about it every day. I've planned a tournament in this month-end in Spain. I just confirmed it yesterday. There is a good chance I could become a GM there," she hoped. Vaishali is happy that she will be competing in the prestigious Candidates tournament next year along with younger brother Praggnandhaa, which will be a proud moment for the family. "Our family is very happy that two of us have qualified for the Candidates."

Satwik-Chirag lose in first round of Japan Masters

PTI ■ KUMAMOTO (JAPAN)

Asian Games gold medalists Satwiksairaj Rankireddy and Chirag Shetty faltered in the opening round to make a shocking exit from the Japan Masters Super 500 badminton tournament here on Tuesday. The top-seeded Indian combination went down 21-16 18-21 16-21 to world number 21 Lu Ching Yao and Yang Po Han of Chinese Taipei in a 63-minute match. Satwik and Chirag, ranked world number 5, had defeated Lu and Yang at the French Open final last year but they couldn't get on top of the Taiwanese pair, who dished out a spirited performance to outwit the Indians. The Indians erased an initial 0-3 deficit to grab a 11-7 lead. Lu and Yang clawed back at 13-13 but Satwik and



Chirag managed to keep their nose ahead before taking the opening game with four straight points. The second game was a tough battle as advantage changed hands too frequently with the Taiwanese managing to hold on to 11-9 lead at the interval. Satwik and Chirag kept breathing down their neck but Lu and Yang broke off at 14-14 to take the match to the decider. The third game followed the same script with the two pairs engaging in a slugfest. From 6-6, Lu and Yang won four of the next five points to make it 7-10. Satwik and Chirag drew parity but Lu and Yang were relentless as they dominated the rallies and feasted on the weakness of the Indians to seal the issue without much ado in the end. HS Prannoy, Lakshya Sen and Priyanshu Rajawat will begin their campaign on Wednesday.

Alcaraz loses to Zverev in his ATP Finals debut

Medvedev soundly beats good friend Rublev

AP ■ TURIN

Considering all that he's accomplished over the last two years - two Grand Slam titles and finishing last season as No. 1 - Carlos Alcaraz no doubt belongs among the world's elite. Still, this wouldn't have been the ATP Finals debut the 20-year-old Spaniard was hoping for at the season-ending event for the year's top eight players. After missing the finals last year because of an abdominal injury, Alcaraz was beaten in his opening match on Monday by two-time champion Alexander Zverev 6-7 (3), 6-3, 6-4. In the other red group match, Daniil Medvedev quickly dis-

patched his good friend Andrey Rublev 6-4, 6-2. Zverev also missed last year's edition after tearing ligaments in his right ankle in the French Open semifinals. But the big-serving German clearly likes the fast conditions inside the Pala Alpitour, where he claimed the title two years ago. Zverev served 16 aces to Alcaraz's 11, saved five of six break points, and never really let Alcaraz feel in control. "I had a few break points that I couldn't take, and I think that was the key of the match," Alcaraz said. Added Zverev, "I served very well. That helped." Zverev overcame a scare late in the third set when he was chas-

ing down a forehand from Alcaraz, lost his grip, slipped and fell to the court clutching his left ankle. But Zverev quickly shook it off and held in that game for a 4-2 lead. "I didn't twist my ankle. I just kind of slipped. And kind of maybe pinched my Achilles, my capsule a little bit," Zverev said. "Hopefully it's nothing too major and I can continue playing." Zverev faced a break point while serving for the match and responded with an ace down the middle. Two points later, the match was over. Zverev has also had off-court issues recently after a German court issued a penalty order against him after allegations he caused bodily harm to a woman. Zverev has disputed the allegations and is contesting the penalty order. Alcaraz had trouble adjusting to the court's speed.



"This surface is the fastest on the year, that's for sure," Alcaraz said. "I don't know why they put this kind of surface at the end of the year because all the tournaments that we have played on hard court is so, so slow. Then we come here to the Masters and they put this court so fast." Zverev suggested a slight bit of altitude is a factor, with Turin at an elevation of 784 feet (239 meters). "But generally speaking, the conditions here are very fast," Zverev said. Still, Alcaraz enjoyed the experience of the fancy lighting and the tunnel leading out to the court. "The best walk-out that I've ever done," the Spaniard said. "It was unbelievable experience for me to play my first match... Even if I lost." Alcaraz can still hope to advance from the round-robin, with the top two finishers in each four-man group reaching the semifinals. OVERPOWERING MEDVEDEV Medvedev cranked out 10 aces to Rublev's two to improve to 7-2 in his career against Rublev, who is the godfather of his one-year-old daughter. Medvedev, who won this tournament in 2020 when it was in London, also reached the 2021 final in Turin. Rublev beat Medvedev in a third-set tiebreaker in the opening round-robin match a year ago. Medvedev was so overpowering on Monday that Rublev fell to the ground while at the net late in the second set as he attempted to fend off his friend's heavy groundstrokes - then covered his face with his hands in despair. Novak Djokovic and Jannik Sinner won their opening matches in the green group on Sunday.



India's dominance vs NZ's perseverance

PTI ■ MUMBAI

Ardent India rocketed through their league engagements with nine wins on the bounce but the past record is just a shiny antique in a showcase and the hosts will have to be at their gun-slinging best when they face familiar foes New Zealand in the first World Cup semifinal, here Wednesday.



WC semifinal

On the field. To start with, the Indian team and its legion of fans will hope and pray that Rohit calls it right at the toss. The teams batting second at this venue have invariably lost early wickets in clusters under lights with the new ball moving dangerously in the air and off the deck.

Rohit and Shubman Gill. The Mumbaier has so far made 503 runs and will hope for a continuation, but Gill with a tally of 270 runs from seven matches would like to own the stage with a blistering effort against the Kiwis.

dismissed for one in the 2019 and 2015 edition. India will also be delighted to see their middle-order batters KL Rahul and Shreyas Iyer hitting top form ahead of the semis though the management will welcome some runs from Suryakumar Yadav.

In this World Cup, no other bowling attack has produced a masterclass in bowling on flat wickets than India's. But that said, writing off Kiwis' pace trio of Trent Boult, Tim Southee, Lockie Ferguson and left-arm spinner Mitchell Santner will be naive.

cricket knowing that they really have not much to lose. In batting also, New Zealand have enough depth and experience to counter the marauding India bowlers.

Fortune favours the brave, says Rohit

PTI ■ MUMBAI

Over the past few weeks, his team has transformed into an unstoppable force vanquishing everyone on its path to glory. But, in Wednesday's World Cup semifinal against New Zealand, India skipper Rohit Sharma also wants "luck to favour" his squad.

"Now, the time has come that you need a little bit of luck as well to favour you, go your way. Obviously, we are going to be brave enough. And hopefully, fortune favours the brave," Rohit said on the eve of the big-ticket game.

India have been the most dominant team in this World Cup having won all their nine league matches to finish at the top of the points table and will face the Kiwis at the Wankhede Stadium in the first semifinal.



Williamson fine by 'underdogs' tag

PTI ■ MUMBAI

New Zealand captain Kane Williamson is impressed that India did not let Hardik Pandya's absence hurt them but reminded that they too have done some "good stuff" in the World Cup and "anything can happen" if they play to their potential.

but that is fine, and India have been exceptional," Williamson told the media on the eve of the match at the Wankhede Stadium. However, the New Zealand captain said the semifinals would place every side on an even keel and the Kiwis have as much chance as their opponents.



"Every team has a slightly different balance that they rely on and naturally with the injury to Hardik - it meant that their balance changed a little bit, but certainly did not change the outcome of what they were doing," Williamson said.

They (India) adjusted nicely, and you know our team tends to, or has done in the past anyway, played with a slightly different balance.

that they have, whether that is with the ball or with the bat, and it all goes quite quickly so you are trying to make sure you build on those performances as a team," he said.

Williamson spent a long time on the sidelines after injuring his knee at the start of the Indian Premier League this year and returned only in the World Cup after a long recovery process. He then suffered a fracture to his thumb a few games into the tournament which left him frustrated.

Kiwis skipper will know how to tackle Kuldeep: Gavaskar

PTI ■ MUMBAI

On the rare occasions when India's menacing pace attack could not scythe through opposition line-ups in this World Cup, their spinners did the job in their own ways. However, that may not be the case when Kane Williamson leads New Zealand out in the first semifinal against the in-form hosts here on Wednesday, according to batting great Sunil Gavaskar.

know how to tackle him." Gavaskar said Williamson's cricket in this World Cup has not just been about technical nous and cultured strokeplay, as the affable Kiwi has also shown a propensity to take the aerial route, a far cry from his 2019 avatar.

When Maninder had tears, Azhar didn't know what to do

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

A retiring legend was devastated, an enormously talented spinner never fully found his mojo back, an inspirational captain lost his hot seat while a 14-year-old watching everything from the Wankhede stadium's boundary line must have made a pledge to himself that one day his script will be different from theirs.



Kapil Dev lost his captaincy, one last time. Wankhede Stadium in 1987 was an amphitheatre that had absorbed the trials and tribulations of a very good Indian team.

Murphy's Law hit the Indian team with full force on November 5, 1987. On Wednesday, when Rohit Sharma leads the blue shirts against a quality New Zealand side, the home fans would pray that they do not return from Wankhede with heartache.

final at Wankhede and the second time after losing the 1996 semi-final to Sri Lanka at the Eden Gardens," Mohammed Azharuddin, the only Indian captain to lead the country in three World Cups told PTI.



Beckham to attend India-NZ clash

PTI ■ MUMBAI

England football legend David Beckham will be among the dignitaries present during the first semifinal of the ongoing World Cup between India and New Zealand here on Wednesday.

Children's Day 2023. Earlier this month, the league stage game between World Cup hosts India and Sri Lanka at the Wankhede Stadium on November 2 witnessed the celebration of ICC's initiative 'One Day 4 Children' and promotion of the #BeACHampion campaign.

Judges shun bench in Lanka cricket court case

PTI ■ COLOMBO

At least two judges of the Court of Appeal in Sri Lanka have recused themselves from hearing Sports Minister Roshan Ranasinghe's plea to overturn the writ issued against his action to appoint an interim committee for running cricket in the country.



World Cup winning captain Arjuna Ranatunga. The Appeal Court the next day reinstated the elected SLC administration of Shammi Silva who has his term left until May of 2025.

Silva, in a counter punch, charged that the Minister was obstructing the freedom of SLC management through political interference.