

OPINION 6
CHINA'S AFGHAN PLAN
AGAINST INDIA, US

WORLD 9
RUSSIAN AIRSTRIKES KILL 2, HURTS
3 IN SOUTHERN UKRAINE

MONEY 10
DGTR LAUNCHES SUO-MOTU PROBE INTO
DUMPING OF CHEAP CHINESE GOODS

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YOGI FLAGS OFF RACE TO 2024

DEEPAK KUMAR JHA ■
NOIDA/NEW DELHI

Uttar Pradesh Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath on Sunday said the State has been fast-tracked in terms of holistic development, including infrastructure and economy, turning it into a huge land of opportunities.

Yogi said investment opportunities have multiplied in the State due to several reforms effected in recent years such as ease of doing business and improvement in law and order.

Speaking passionately about the State's commitment to promoting sports and with a focus on the youth population, Yogi said Uttar Pradesh currently has a population of 25 crore, with a significant portion falling within the working-age group.

He also highlighted that, in collaboration with the Central Government, the State is actively working on developing sports facilities at various levels, from the gram to block/panchayat level to the district and State levels.

Yogi reminded that Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Saturday laid the foundation for an international cricket stadium in 'India's cultural and spiritual capital' Varanasi.

By hosting such a large-scale international event soon after the successful G20 Summit followed by a trade fair in UP, Yogi has in way demonstrated that he is unwavering in exploring and capitalising on oppor-

tunities buoyed by the visionary support of the ruling party at the Centre.

The Chief Minister said the UP Government is working with the Centre to develop sports facilities like stadiums and mini-stadiums in every district of the State.

"There are 58,000 gram panchayats in the State and open gyms are being developed where women and youngsters feel encouraged to pursue sporting avenues and our administration is encouraging every single talent," the Chief Minister said to a huge round of applause from the large gathering in at the Grand Prix venue Buddh International Circuit.

The Chief Minister was in the Gautam Budh Nagar district on Sunday to inaugurate the MotoGP event in Greater Noida. This marked his second visit to the area in less than a week, the previous one being when he accompanied President Draupadi Murmu to the trade fair.

In the run up to the 2024 Lok Sabha polls and to counter the competition from the Opposition bloc INDIA, the BJP Government in the State is giving an impetus to the infrastructure growth across the State.

Yogi heading the most populous State with 80 Lok Sabha seats is a key BJP leader in securing the prospects of the party in the Parliamentary polls next year.

Yogi, dubbed as "bulldozer baba" has meticulously pro-



UP Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath and Union Sports Minister Anurag Thakur during the MotoGP Grand Prix of India at the Buddh International Circuit, Greater Noida, on Sunday

jected himself as a tough administrator acting in real time against criminals and gangster on the one hand and pushing mega infrastructure projects to make Uttar Pradesh a USD 1 trillion economy.

Sources in the Government said Yogi is personally monitor-

ing the developmental progress of the region, which holds immense potential and significance due to its proximity to the national Capital.

Additionally, another international airport is slated to be built in Greater Noida.

Christoph Schnellman, the

CEO of Yamuna International Airport Private Limited, a subsidiary of Swiss firm Zurich Airport International AG which is developing the Noida International Airport, said he was overwhelmed by the size and the diversity of the exhibitors.

"I think it's a real testament to the dynamism and the vibrancy of the economy in UP," Schnellman said.

He said he is now convinced that the Noida International Airport will make "a big, big difference" and will contribute massively to the fur-

ther growth and development of this economy across the entire broad cross-section.

"We feel very much at home and a part of this economic growth in the state of UP," he added.

Giving the clarion call to the business community to invest in the State, Yogi said, "Uttar Pradesh is a State of opportunities. There is good infrastructure in terms of connectivity via rail, road, and waterways. There is a good opportunity in logistics as well and junction of two key freight corridors the Eastern and the Western Freight Corridors too falls at this junction."

Early in February 2023, the Yogi Government organised its first global investor summit in Lucknow, with more than a dozen countries, including the UK, Italy, Australia, Japan, Singapore, Denmark, the Netherlands, the UAE, and Mauritius participating as partner countries.

During this event, the State received investment proposals worth ₹36 lakh crore.

"Uttar Pradesh has taken great strides in the field of technology which resulted in investments coming into the State and it is being monitored through the 'Nivesh Mitra' portal," Yogi said.

Several major domestic and multinational companies have participated in the conclave where State's MSME Minister Rakesh Sachan and Industrial, and Exports Development Minister Nand Gopal Gupta

were also in attendance. Yogi took the occasion to offer lucrative schemes to the global automobile industry.

As per the details, more than 275 national and international brands are associated with the MotoGP event which included BMW, Tissot, Michelin, RedBull, Shell, DHL, Oakley, Amazon, Petronas, etc.

The race is the first major motorsport event to be held in India since Formula 1's Indian Grand Prix in 2013, and it is expected to attract a large crowd of fans.

The MotoGP statement comes amid reports that several riders, including six-time MotoGP champion Marc Marquez, and team members, had been struggling to obtain visas for India.

In coordination with the UP Government, the Centre and the MEA, the issue was sorted out last week after direct intervention of the Chief Minister and meeting with the Prime Minister in this regard.

The ongoing Uttar Pradesh's first-ever International Trade Show inaugurated by Murmu at the India Expo Centre and Mart in Greater Noida on September 21 in presence of Yogi has attracted Airport developers and multinational firms.

More than 70,000 business-to-business buyers from 70 countries have registered for the trade show, and over 2,000 exhibitors have put up stalls at the ITS which has witnessed thousands of visitors.

India roars in China

PTI ■ HANGZHOU

In a rollicking start, Indian athletes won a total of five medals, three silver and two bronze on the opening day of the Hangzhou Asian Games on Sunday. Rowers powered their way to two silver and a bronze medal.

On a pleasant morning with the conditions just perfect for rowing at the Fuyang Water Sports Centre, Arjun Lal Jat and Arvind Singh opened the country's account with a silver medal in the men's lightweight doubles sculls event.

The Indian duo clocked 6:28.18s to finish behind China's Junjie Fan and Man Sun, who won gold with 6:23.16s.

Indian shooters also made an impressive start to their Asian Games campaign with the experienced trio of Mehuli Ghosh, Ramita Jindal and Ashi Chouksey's bagged the women's team silver while Ramita also clinched an individual bronze in the 10m air rifle event.

The Indian men's coxed-eight team comprised Neeraj, Naresh Kalwaniya, Neetish Kumar, Charanjeet Singh, Jaswinder Singh, Bheem Singh, Puneet Kumar and Ashish.

Indonesia, who clocked a



Neeraj, Naresh Kalwaniya, Neetish Kumar, Charanjeet Singh, Jaswinder Singh, Bheem Singh, Puneet Kumar and Ashish celebrate at the podium after winning silver medal in Men's Coxed Eight event at the 19th Asian Games, in Hangzhou, China, on Sunday

time of 5:45.51s were third.

The achievement is all the more creditable given that rowers from powerhouse Uzbekistan and Japan finished fourth and fifth respectively.

In the coxless pair event, India Babulal Yadav and Lekh Ram had to settle for a bronze

with a time of 6:50.41 sec, behind gold medalists Hong Kong, China (6:44.20 sec) and Uzbekistan 6:48.11.

Arvind said they were aiming for gold but an injury setback two months back had hampered his training.

"We missed training for 20

to 25 days as I was having lower-back pain two months back. Our aim was to win gold but because of my injury, I wasn't able to push myself as much. Even during the trials, I was battling this injury," said Arvind. "I went to Hyderabad to get treatment and the physio there real-

ly worked on getting me back in good shape. I resumed practice and only because of that have I been able to win this silver medal," he added. "We will now work for the Paris Olympics and then try to win gold at the 2026 Asian Games."

His team-mate Arjun said they had gold medal on their mind. "Gold was the target but we did our best. Our coach told us to just do our best. We could not do our (personal) best of 6:19, which we did at our Army nodal centre in Pune," said Arjun.

On the reason they fell back after taking a sizeable lead around the 500m mark, Arjun said, "We pushed hard and did our best today." Arjun and Arvind have been training together for the last four years and it sowed in the fine coordination the pair forged on Sunday.

"We had been training for this (event) continuously for the past four years. We had made it to the semifinals of the Tokyo Olympics in 2021," said Arjun, crediting the triumph to Rowing Federation of India and the Sports Authority of India, who have provided them with regular training camps and international exposure.



Devotees immerse a Lord Ganesha idol at the Pattinapakkam beach during Ganesh festival in Chennai

TMC, BJP trade barbs over Mamata trip

SAUGAR SENGUPTA ■
KOLKATA



member of Mamata's 12-day mission to Spain and Dubai hit back saying she was "more trustworthy" than (Prime Minister) Narendra Modi alleging how he embarked on foreign trips when Manipur burnt.

Earlier Ghosh had compared the Prime Minister

with Roman emperor Nero.

Adhikari had earlier written on the X (earlier Twitter) that "Those who have tried to make an attempt to draw a parallel between Prime Minister ... Narendra Modi's foreign trips with ... Mamata Banerjee's foreign vacation ... let me tell you the differ-

ence ... his strategic trips was aimed 'to enhance the glory of the country' in the world but the other trip of the Chief Minister was tinged with corruption."

Contrasting the Prime Minister's success in the G20 Summit post which India was being regarded as Viswa Mitra (friend of the world), Adhikari said, Mamata's success was limited to her hobnobbing with the "G420 Group" (apparently the INDIA alliance).

Former BJP State president Dilip Ghosh too attacked Mamata for claiming success saying, "In the past too she had made foreign trips ... but what was the result ... a big zero ... let us see what comes this time round."

Hitting back, TMC spokesperson Ghosh said how the Prime Minister toured

the world when Manipur was burning.

He said, "PM Narendra Modi embarked on foreign trips when Manipur was burning. He jetted out to the United States. France and UAE but didn't bother to visit Manipur even once. Spare us the charade! We all know which leader is trustworthy and who is not!"

Taking a jibe at Adhikari for dropping the word "corruption", TMC leader Bratya Basu said "look who is talking about corruption... the man who was seen accepting cash in the Narada scam... the man whose name figures in FIRs is today lecturing others on corruption."

The Left on the other hand stuck to Mamata's foreign trip asking her to make public the details of her meetings and the number of pro-

posals of investments that she had received.

"Every year she hosts mega business summits attended by a galaxy of businessmen but nothing comes up after that ... this time also there will be nothing because she has been identified with among the investors as a person who drives away industries like the one she did at Singur and Nandigram ...

"People have not forgotten how she used dynamites to blast off the massive shed at Tata Motors... how she thwarted the attempts to make a chemical hub at Nandigram by inciting a false movement ... all to come to power ... and this is the same BJP that allied with her and shared the dais with her then," said CPI(M) Central Committee member Sujana Chakrabarty.

Pulse price may shoot up

RAJESH KUMAR ■ NEW DELHI

The prices of pulses could shoot up further due to the ongoing stand-off between Canada and India and it may affect the availability and price of masur (red lentil) in the coming days.

Prices of masur can see a rise if the supply chain is disturbed as India is a major buyer from Canada.

The rise in prices would add to the inflationary pressure on the economy as output in the country is expected to be hit by lower acreage because of poor rainfall.

As per the data released by the Ministry of

Agriculture, area under pulses declined 5 per cent to 122.57 Lakh Hectare (LH) from 128.49 LH in the year-ago period.

Dal traders are also worried a lot due to the India-Canada tussle despite no retaliatory action was announced on trade sector.

Masur at present is the second cheapest pulse after chana. On an average, masur dal is now retailing in various parts of the country between ₹91-95/kilogram. Chana daal is cheapest at around ₹75-80/kilogram.

Mong and tur daal are on the higher side, retailing between ₹110 and ₹150/kilogram respectively.

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Mounting Debt: Opposition parties target AAP led Punjab Govt

Jakhar, Sidhu, Sukhbir lash out at CM Mann, AAP Govt for pushing Punjab towards financial crisis

PNS ■ CHANDIGARH

The issue of Punjab's escalating debt crisis has intensified as the opposition parties in the State continue to direct sharp criticism at the ruling Aam Aadmi Party (AAP) Government. The controversy erupted following a letter from Punjab Governor Banwarilal Purohit to the Chief Minister Bhagwant Mann, in which he raised concerns about the state's mounting debt and sought clarification on its utilization.

Punjab BJP president Sunil Jakhar on Sunday took aim at the Bhagwant Mann Government, accusing it of pushing the state to the brink of a "financial calamity". Jakhar emphasized that Punjab's debt had surged by a staggering Rs 50,000 crore since the AAP Government came to power a year and a half ago. He argued that the unprecedented increase in debt had raised serious questions about the government's fiscal management.

Also weighing in on the issue, senior Congress leader Navjot Singh Sidhu asserted that Punjab's debt had reached an "unsustainable level". Sidhu attributed the rapid growth in the state's debt to what he described as the "continued corruption and vote bank politics of the AAP". His remarks echoed the sentiment that the state's financial situation had been adversely affected by the government's populist policies.

Only a day before, the Congress Legislative Party (CLP) leader and the Leader of Opposition in Vidhan Sabha Partap Singh Bajwa had hit out at the Bhagwant Mann dispensation demanding a special audit of the borrowings. At the same time, the Shiromani Akali Dal president Sukhbir Singh Badal had also asked if the money was spent only on "self-promotion" and paying the "air travel and hotel bills" of Delhi Chief Minister Arvind Kejriwal.

Notably, Purohit, in a letter to Chief Minister Bhagwant Mann on Friday, had said that he learnt that "the debt of Punjab rose by about Rs 50,000 crore during your regime". "Details of utilization of this huge amount may be furnished so that I will be able to convince the Prime Minister that money has been properly utilized," he wrote in response to the Chief Minister's letter seeking

Purohit's intervention to take up the issue of pending RDF with the Prime Minister and the President.

The continuous critique of the Chief Minister Bhagwant Mann follows his recent appeal to the Governor for assistance in securing pending RDF funds amounting to Rs 5,637 crore from the Centre. The Governor advised patience in the "sub-judice" matter, pending a Supreme Court decision on the matter.

Punjab's mounting debt-to-GDP ratio — nearing 50 per cent, far exceeding the national average — has become a central point of concern for both opposition parties and the public. The state's financial stability has come under scrutiny, with questions raised about the utilization of borrowed funds and the long-term consequences of the debt accumulation.

The controversy surrounding Punjab's rising debt has dominated the political discourse in the State, with opposition parties positioning themselves as guardians of fiscal responsibility. AAP government, which came to power with promises of badlav (change) and transparency, now faces growing pressure to provide a detailed account of how the borrowed funds have been allocated.

As the opposition parties continue their critique and

demands for accountability, Chief Minister Bhagwant Mann and his administration are under increasing scrutiny to navigate the challenging financial landscape and reassure the public about Punjab's economic stability. The issue of Punjab's debt is expected to remain a critical point of contention in the state's political arena, with far-reaching implications for its financial well-being.

Jakhar Warns of 'Financial Calamity'

Slamming the AAP Government, Punjab BJP president Sunil Jakhar on Sunday accused it of pushing the state on the brink of "financial calamity" with an addition of Rs 50,000 crore debt since coming to power year-and-a-half ago.

"In just last four months, from April till July-end this year, the AAP (Aam Aadmi Party) government in Punjab has already taken Rs 11,718 crore as loan," he said, claiming that if unchecked, AAP government's "misrule" would crush Punjab with another burdensome Rs 1.75 lakh crore of debt till the end of its term. The total debt of the state at present stands at Rs 2.82 lakh crore, he said.

Citing a report of the office of the principal accountant-general, he claimed that out of the Rs 11,718 crore, just Rs 900

crore was spent constructively, and the "rest has gone up in smoke at the whims and fancies of the incumbent dispensation".

The present government, Jakhar alleged, "thrives on fake propaganda, advertisements and personal aggrandizement". "I thank Governor Sahib for setting the proverbial cat amongst the pigeon by asking from Bhagwant Mann ji about the utilization details of about Rs 50,000 crore which this present government has burdened Punjabis with," Jakhar said.

"Given the track record, I am not very hopeful of a genuine response by the AAP leadership to very apt queries raised by the Governor," he said, adding that "thanks to the Governor's missive, Punjabis of all hues have started asking — 'where is the money, Mann Sahib?'"

Jakhar alleged that both the Chief Ministers of Delhi and Punjab have fooled the people by their tact of lying unabashedly.

Targeting Delhi Chief Minister and AAP national convener Arvind Kejriwal, the BJP leader asked, "Where are those Rs 40,000 crore additional revenue to be generated from transparent auctioning of sand pits and sale of alcohol which Kejriwal ji used to scream about during the (Punjab) assembly elections."

Sidhu Sounds Alarm, Accuses AAP Govt of Economic Mismanagement

In a scathing critique of the financial state of Punjab, Punjab congress' former president Navjot Singh Sidhu on Sunday raised concerns over the state's growing debt crisis. Sidhu directed his criticism towards Bhagwant Mann, the stand-up comic turned Chief Minister of Punjab, highlighting the key issues in his seven-point assessment.

In his post on 'X', Sidhu pointed out that Punjab's debt-to-GDP ratio has soared to nearly 50 per cent, signaling a perilous economic situation for the state. Citing Governor's letter, he said that the debt is expected to rise by Rs 70,000 crores in two years indicating that "the economic crisis".

Sidhu attributed the mounting debt to systemic corruption and the populist policies of the AAP government, accusing them of promoting freebies. He highlighted the Punjab State Power Corporation Limited's (PSPCL) substantial borrowings from banks, which exceed Rs 18,000 crores, along with significant loans for digital meter installations, amounting Rs 9,641 crore. "In addition to this, arrears of subsidy and outstanding bills from the Punjab Government are at Rs 9,020

crore and Rs 2,548 crore, respectively. PSPCL today is mortgaged and sold out," he said.

The former cricketer also questioned the lack of action against those illegally occupying over 25,000 acres of land around Chandigarh, suggesting a continued monopoly by the cable mafia and other influential figures. He called for accountability and transparency in these matters.

Sidhu also accused the AAP government of undermining revenue generation through its handling of excise policies and sand mining. He alleged that certain individuals had exclusive access to licenses, resulting in rampant illegal mining. Also citing a report from the Comptroller and Auditor General (CAG) in March 2023, which warned of impending financial instability in Punjab if current governance practices persist, Sidhu expressed concern that the situation could deteriorate even further.

Sidhu decried the burden placed on the people of Punjab, with each Punjabi carrying a debt of Rs 1.20 lakhs. He argued that this figure continues to rise daily, placing significant pressure on the state's residents.

The Congress leader challenged the Government's revenue model, questioning whether the state would be sustained through borrowings or income. He emphasized that

the current approach, which seemingly allows revenue to be siphoned off by corrupt individuals, could lead to a catastrophic situation.

CM Lacks Transparency in Utilization of Rs 50k cr Loan: Sukhbir

Meanwhile, SAD president Sukhbir Singh Badal expressed concern over the lack of transparency in the utilization of a Rs 50,000 crore loan taken by the AAP-led Punjab Government in the past 18 months, accusing the Chief Minister and AAP of diverting funds for its nationwide political expansion.

"Pained to see how the State exchequer is being looted to expand the wings of @AamAadmiParty and its leader @ArvindKejriwal across the country. Punjab CM @BhagwantMann should tell why he is not disclosing how the Rs 50,000 crore loan taken by the @AAPPunjab govt in the past 18 months was 'utilised'. Since he has outrightly refused to give the details of the same to the Punjab Governor, it's clear that he doesn't want Punjabis to know how his govt has stopped all development and even stopped social welfare schemes so that it can release hundreds of crores for advertisements in other States," said Sukhbir in his post on 'X'.

Repair of link roads to be Zila Parishads' responsibility in 6 more districts: Haryana CM

PNS ■ CHANDIGARH

To enhance the capabilities of Zila Parishads (ZPs), Haryana Chief Minister Manohar Lal Khattar on Sunday said that the responsibility for the repair of link roads in six additional districts — Sonapat, Kaithal, Mahendergarh, Rohtak, Jhajjar, and Rewari — will be transferred to Zila Parishads by the end of this year. Previously, this responsibility was overseen by the Haryana State Agriculture Marketing Board (HSAMB).

Earlier, the link road repair responsibility had been transferred from HSAMB to Zila Parishads in five districts — Yamunanagar, Karnal, Palwal, Bhiwani, and Fatehabad — with the process of repair work already underway. With the addition of these six districts, ZPs will be responsible for road repair in a total of 11 districts. This move reflects the State Government's commitment to empowering Zila Parishads to undertake rural development projects more efficiently.

Khattar, during a meeting with the chairpersons of Zila Parishads and Chief Executive Officers of Zila Parishads to review various developmental initiatives, directed the CEOs to initiate the tendering process for the pavement of



village phirnis in villages with a population of 5,000 or more by September 30, 2023.

The Chief Minister emphasized the importance of respecting and honoring the ZPs' chairpersons, who play a crucial role as public representatives in the democratic setup. He clearly instructed the CEOs to relocate their offices from district Secretariats to ZP offices. In districts where ZP office buildings have already been erected, this directive should be promptly implemented. However, in cases where such infrastructure is yet to be established, CEOs are instructed to identify suitable land and submit proposals to the Head Office.

He also sought budget estimates for the current fiscal year from the CEOs of ZPs. The Chief Minister under-

Khattar to perform bhumi puja of Shri Guru Teg Bahadur Sahib GMC in Y'nagar

Chandigarh: In another event, Chief Minister Manohar Lal Khattar will perform the bhumi puja ceremony of Shri Guru Teg Bahadur Sahib Government Medical College, Panjupur, in Yamunanagar district on Monday.

The state Health and Medical Education Minister Anil Vij will preside over the event, with the presence of the School Education Minister Kanwar Pal Gujjar to grace the occasion. This milestone event marks a significant step forward in advancing healthcare and education infrastructure within the state, reaffirming the commitment of the Haryana Government to enhance the well-being and educational opportunities for its residents, said the spokesperson..

scored that it falls within the purview of the Zila Parishads' chairman to formulate their budgets; and subsequently forward them to the government after gaining approval within the ZP House. This ensures that sufficient funds will be accessible to drive develop-

mental initiatives in rural areas effectively.

At the same time, he also encouraged them to construct Anganwari buildings wherever necessary and establish a dedicated unit in each district responsible for overseeing Anganwari Centers throughout

the district.

Khattar directed the installation of street lights in 750 villages with the highest population across the state. The budget has already been allocated to Zila Parishads for this initiative. Under this program, the five villages with the highest population in each block will soon receive street lights.

Pointing out that there are 144 blocks in the State, he urged the CEO Zila Parishads to identify the block where even 10 e-libraries have not started. Requests for this purpose have been received through Jan Samvad, and we already have sanction to open 750 e-libraries.

During the review of Chaupals' construction, Khattar instructed the CEOs to conduct need-based surveys in their respective areas. He also directed them to initiate the process of beautifying or constructing walls for village ponds through the Zila Parishads. The Chairman and CEOs of Zila Parishads should collaborate to plan development activities in rural areas.

The state's Development and Panchayats Minister Devender Singh Babli urged the CEOs to monitor the progress of development projects in their respective areas. He also expressed his intention to visit the entire state for this purpose.

12 kg narcotics, Rs 19L cash seized; Two arrested

PNS ■ CHANDIGARH

In a significant operation near the International Border in Punjab's Gurdaspur sector, security agencies have apprehended two individuals suspected of being involved in drug smuggling. The operation led to the discovery and confiscation of 12 kilograms of narcotics and a substantial amount of currency totaling Rs 19.3 lakh.

According to a Border Security Force (BSF) official, the operation began on the morning of September 24 (Sunday) when the BSF detected the intrusion of a drone near Chaura Kalan village in Gurdaspur district. Following this discovery, a joint search operation was conducted by the BSF and Punjab Police in the surrounding area. During the operation, security personnel observed suspicious movements involving two individuals on a motorcycle. Upon realizing they were being pursued, the suspects attempted to flee but were successfully apprehended.

Based on the information provided by the arrested individuals, law enforcement recovered 12 packets of narcotics, weighing approximately 12 kilograms, and Rs 19.30 lakh in cash. It is believed that these items were dropped by the drone and were found near Chaura Kalan village.

In a separate incident, the BSF thwarted another attempt at

smuggling narcotics via a drone near Mahawa village in the Amritsar sector. On the evening of September 23, the BSF detected the movement of a drone and intercepted it by shooting it down. Following the interception, a joint search operation involving the BSF, counter-intelligence

Chandigarh Welfare Trust organizes free mega health camp, over 20k avail benefit



PNS ■ CHANDIGARH:

More than 20,000 people from Chandigarh and its adjacent areas availed the benefit of free medical services provided by Chandigarh Welfare Trust (CWT) during its mega multispecialty health camp organized on Sunday (September 24) at Sector 39 Grain Market in Chandigarh. The camp was a part of CWT's

teams, and the Punjab Police was launched in the surrounding area. The downed drone was subsequently discovered in the paddy fields on the outskirts of the village. Officials have identified the recovered drone as a China-made Quadcopter DJI Mavic-3 Classic series.

'Sewa Pakhwada' which commenced from September 17 — the 73rd birthday of Prime Minister Narendra Modi, espousing his vision of 'self-service' for the welfare of citizens, especially the poor section of the society. During the mega health camp, inaugurated by Punjab Governor and UT Administrator Banwarilal Purohit, needy patients were benefited in large numbers.

Make eye donation a family tradition, says Dr Parul Chawla

“Eyesight checkups should be done in case of any changes in the vision. People must avoid watching screens for a very long time”

Pioneer Interview

MANOJ KUMAR ■ CHANDIGARH

Dr Parul Chawla, Associate Professor, (Cornea, Lens and Refractive Services), Advanced Eye Centre, PGIMER, Chandigarh, says that corneal blindness is a fourth leading cause of blindness globally. It is a visual impairment that occurs from the cornea becoming clouded, scarred or any other infection that ultimately affects the transparency of cornea, making a person blind. Early treatment is critically-important to prevent some common eye diseases from causing permanent vision loss or blindness. Eyesight checkups should be done in case of any changes in the vision. People must avoid watching screens for a very long period of time and also must eat food rich in vitamins that promote eye health, she adds.

Dr Chawla further says that organ donation is the biggest contribution to humanity. It not only saves lives but also touches and changes other lives associated with the one

who receives the organ. Usually brain-dead patients are most suitable for organ donation and if harvested within the critical time. Anybody can donate organs irrespective of caste, religion and medical conditions. However, persons suffering from Metastatic Cancer, HIV, Hepatitis B, Hepatitis C, Syphilis, Rabies, Brain fever can't be a donor, she adds.

In an exclusive interview with 'The Pioneer', Dr Chawla talks about tips for eye care, corneal blindness, who can or can't donate eye, and Eye Donation campaigns at PGIMER, Chandigarh, among others. Excerpts:

What advice would you give to the people to take care of their eyes?

Eyes are one of the most vital organs in the human body and it is very important to take care of them. People should eat a healthy, balanced diet, do regular exercise, wear protective eye wear among others. They must get an eye sight check-up done at least once in six months. Eye strain, dry eyes, and other similar disorders can lead to severe ailments if they aren't cured on time. Early treatment is critically important to prevent some common eye diseases from causing permanent vision loss or blindness.



Dr Parul Chawla, Associate Professor, PGIMER's Advanced Eye Centre

We must get eyesight check-ups done in case of any changes in the vision. We must avoid watching screens for a very long period of time. We must eat food rich in vitamins that promote eye health.

How many minutes should the eyes have breaks when using a computer?

Follow the 20-20-20 rule. One of the most popular tips for minimizing eye strain is to take a break from the screen every 20 minutes and look at an object at least 20 feet away for 20 seconds or longer. People blink less frequently when working on computers and smart devices. Every 20 minutes, blink 10-15 times

slowly.

What is corneal blindness?

Corneal blindness, a condition where the cornea — the clear front part of the eye — becomes damaged or opaque, can severely impair one's vision or even lead to total blindness. One ray of hope for those afflicted by corneal blindness is corneal transplant, a procedure that can restore vision in many cases. However, there lies a significant challenge — the discrepancy between the number of patients in need and the availability of donor corneas.

What are the causes of corneal damage? When to get help right away?

Corneal blindness is a fourth leading cause of blindness globally. It is a visual impairment that occurs from the cornea becoming clouded, scarred, or any other infection that ultimately affects the transparency of cornea, making a person blind. Some of the common causes are deficiency of Vitamin A, some viral, fungal or bacterial infections, congenital disease or any eye trauma. The causes of corneal damage include injuries to the outermost layer of the cornea, damage or scars from other eye

surgeries, infections, hereditary corneal defects, and inflammation from chronic dry eye. One can consult an eye doctor if you have symptoms like intense eye pain; change in vision; blurry vision; very red, watery eyes, an object stuck in eye; a serious eye injury or trauma — like getting hit hard in the eye among others. Eye doctors can check for corneal conditions as part of a comprehensive eye exam. The exam is simple and painless.

Can cornea damage be treated?

Many corneal conditions can be treated with prescription eye drops or pills. If anyone has advanced corneal disease, they may need a different treatment like laser treatment, corneal transplant surgery and artificial cornea.

Who can or can't donate eye?

Anyone can be a donor, irrespective of age, sex, blood group or religion. Anyone with cataract or spectacles can donate eyes. People suffering from hypertension, diabetes can also donate eyes. Eyes should be donated within six-eight hours of death. However, persons suffering from Metastatic Cancer, HIV,

Hepatitis B, Hepatitis C, Syphilis, Rabies, Brain fever can't be a donor. The donated corneas are transplanted to the patient's eye who are on the waiting list in accordance with the priority based on guidelines to avoid malpractices.

Can eye donation be done after death? What happens after eye donation?

Since eye donation is performed after death, people can pledge their eyes and register as a donor before they pass away. If the next of kin was willing for eye donation, a written consent was obtained. Eyes have to be removed within four to six hours after death. The donor need not be taken to the eye bank. The eye bank officials will visit the home of the donor for no extra charges. The age and gender of deceased potential donors, cause and time of death are noted. The entire procedure of eye removal does not delay the funeral, as it takes only 20-30 minutes.

What is the latest data on corneal blindness?

Corneal blindness has emerged as a significant healthcare challenge in India. At present, around 1.2 million people are corneal blind in India and current annual transplant num-

ber in the country is 25000-30000.

What is the current status of gap between demand and supply of cornea at PGIMER?

In PGIMER, around 2200 patients are waiting for their corneal transplantation but the hospital gets only 400-500 corneas every year. At PGIMER, Chandigarh, eye donation campaign is being organized for mass public awareness. Recently, during 38th national eye donation fortnight, a lecture series was organized for eye donation in schools, colleges and public places to promote eye donation. In addition, painting competition, article writing competition and other activities were organized in schools on eye donation and the winners were felicitated at Advanced Eye Centre, PGIMER, Chandigarh. Besides, messages of eye donation were displayed at prominent places including religious places with collaboration of Lions Club Central, Chandigarh, for sensitization of the general public regarding this noble cause.

Do you think myths are a major barrier in eye donation?

Although the organ transplant programme has gained

momentum over the past decade, there remains a lack of awareness among the public. Myths and superstitions are also widespread, posing challenges in obtaining consent from families. A common myth associated with cornea donation is that the deceased will be born blind in their next life.

On an average, how many eyes are donated each year?

While over the years, the number of eye donations has increased steadily, the COVID years saw a sharp decline in donations owing mainly as there were several contraindications involved in the process of both collection and transplantations. In 2022-23, the eye bank collected 440 eyes and transplanted 355. In 2021-22, the eye bank collected 488 eyes and transplanted 333, while the number 132 eyes in 2020-21 against 113 transplants. In 2019-20, the eye bank collected 600 eyes and transplanted 384, in 2018-19, the eye bank collected 806 eyes and transplanted 471. In 2012-13, the eye bank collected 306 eyes and transplanted 251. Eye donations can be enhanced by increasing public awareness or, by understanding and overcoming the barriers to eye donation.

‘India-West Asia corridor pivotal for future trade’

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Sunday emphasised the potential of the India-Middle East-Europe corridor, announced during the New Delhi G20 summit, as a pivotal trade route for the world’s future economic exchanges as he also recalled world recognition to Indian heritage and cited individual examples of enterprise, service and good deeds in the country.

Addressing the 105th episode of his monthly radio programme, ‘Mann Ki Baat’, Prime Minister spoke about the success of India’s Moon mission Chandrayan-3 and New Delhi’s presidency of the prestigious G20 Summit.

Modi emphasised the potential of the India-Middle East-Europe corridor, announced during the New Delhi G20 summit, as a pivotal trade route for the world’s future economic exchanges.

“India-Middle East-Europe Economic corridor proposed during the Summit will become a basis of world trade for hundreds of years,” the Prime Minister said.

He also lauded India’s role

in making the African Union a full member of the G20 bloc, highlighting the country’s commitment to enhancing its global partnerships

“India showcased its leadership by making the African Union a full member of the G20 bloc,” he said.

“Throughout the year, programmes related to G20 were held at numerous universities of the country. Now in this series, another exciting programme is about to take place in Delhi, which is G20 University connect programme,” Modi said.

The Prime Minister expressed “immense pride” in India’s cultural and historical heritage by celebrating two significant achievement

Firstly, he mentioned Santiniketan’s recognition as a World Heritage Site.

Besides, the Prime Minister expressed happiness over the inclusion of the Hoysala Temples of Karnataka in the list of World Heritage Sites.

“It is India’s endeavor that our historical and cultural places get recognized as World Heritage Sites,” he said and underscored the nation’s commitment to preserving and showcasing its diverse heritage



to the world.

The Prime Minister cited cases of individual talent, deeds of kindness and welfare including the one related to a foreign girl. He played a video of a Sanskrit prayer sung by a blind German girl who has never visited India. Modi said the girl Kasmi also sings in Hindi, Malayalam, Tamil, Kannada, Assamese, Bengali, Marathi, Urdu.

Modi shared a Kannada

song also sung by the German girl saying “I wholeheartedly appreciate Germany’s Kasmi’s passion for Indian culture and music. Her efforts are going to overwhelm every Indian.” The Prime Minister, thereafter, mentioned some youth in Nainital district having started unique ‘Ghoda Library’ for children.

“The biggest feature of this library is that books are reaching children even in the

most remote areas and not only this, the service is absolutely free,” he said.

Modi then spoke about a young girl Akarshana Satish in Hyderabad opening a library having 6000 books for children cancer patients as also about

Sukhdev Bhatt of Rajasthan and his team - named ‘Cobra’ -working together to save “30000 venomous snakes” which in turn,

also saved many human lives, he said.

Modi also lauded Auto Driver M Rajendra Prasad who he said “is also doing a unique work” in his Chennai house by saving and serving food, water and health care to 200 pigeons for last 25-30 years.

“He spends quite a lot of money on this, but he is steadfast in his work. Friends, seeing people doing such work with good intentions really gives a lot of satisfaction and a lot of joy. If you also get information about some such unique efforts, do share it”, the Prime Minister said to his listeners.

The Prime Minister while wishing his radio audience on the coming festival season asked them to remember “the mantra of Vocal for Local.”

As far as possible, you should buy goods made in India, use Indian products and gift only Made in India goods. Your little joy will become the cause of immense happiness for someone else’s family. Whatever Indian goods you buy, our laborers, workers, craftspersons and other Vishwakarma brothers and sisters will directly benefit from it”, Modi said.

Rajnath approves hike in funeral expenditure of BRO casual labourers

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI



In a crucial welfare move to benefit casual paid labourers (CPL) of the Border Roads Organisation (BRO), Defence Minister Rajnath Singh has approved the extension of existing provisions of ‘Preservation and Transportation of the Mortal Remains,’ to them and okayed an increase in funeral expenditure to ₹10,000 from ₹1,000. Till now, the benefit was applicable to personnel of the BRO and General Reserve Engineer Force (GREF).

Giving details here on Sunday, defence ministry officials said the funeral expenditure will be borne by the government in the event of a death of any CPL while on government bona fide duty at BRO projects, whose last rites are being performed at the worksite.

The CPLs are employed by the BRO for construction of roads in forward/border areas. They work hand-in-hand with the BRO personnel in adverse climate and tough working

conditions, which sometimes results in casualties.

Until now, the facility of preservation and transportation of mortal remains to the native place at government expense was available only for the GREF personnel. The CPLs working in similar conditions were deprived of this facility. In case of their death, the burden of the transportation falls on the bereaved families.

Due to lack of financial resources, the family of the deceased are unable to bear the expenditure of airfare or even transportation by road in most conditions.

Navy Chief reviews bilateral ties with US during visit

Discussed situation in Indo-Pacific region with US, other countries

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI



Navy chief Admiral R Hari Kumar reviewed the entire gamut of bilateral ties with the US and situation in the strategically important Indo-Pacific region during his visit to US from September 19-23 to attend the 25th International Sea Power Symposium (ISS).

Giving details of his visit, navy officials said here on Sunday the ISS is conducted by the US Navy at US Naval War College, Newport, Rhode Island and provides the opportunity to engage with the Friendly Foreign Countries towards the shared vision of enhancing maritime cooperation in the Indo-Pacific.

Admiral Kumar also held bilateral engagements on the sidelines of the ISS with his

counterparts from various countries including the USA, Australia, Egypt, Fiji, Israel, Italy Japan, Kenya, Peru, Saudi Arabia, Singapore and UK.

The extensive engagements during the visit are a demonstration of the Indian Navy’s steadfastness towards realising the vision for a Free Open and Inclusive Indo-Pacific and International Rules-Based Order.

During the visit extensive deliberations were also held towards exploring greater operational engagements between India and US at bilateral and multilateral exercises such as the Malabar, RIMPAC, Sea Dragon and Tiger Triumph. Regular Subject Matter Expert exchange also

takes place between both the Navies to institutionalise interoperability in various fields.

At the ISS, the Navy chief spoke extensively about the challenges of Human Resource Management, with specific reference to recruitment and retention of trained personnel and India’s initiatives towards addressing these through the Agnipath Scheme, empowering women and driving the Indian Navy into a gender-neutral force.

His visit to the US provided a significant opportunity for Apex Level Navy to Navy engagements for deepening bilateral cooperation as well as engaging with diverse partners across the Indo-Pacific, officials said.

Modi flags off 9 Vande Bharat Express trains

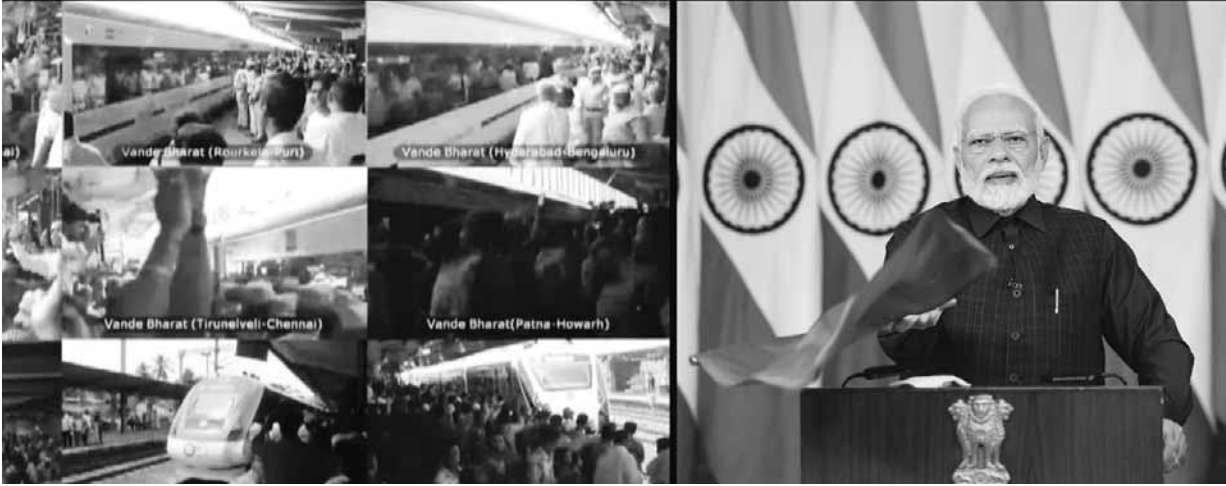
PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Sunday said the speed and scale of infrastructure development matched the aspirations of 140 crore Indians as he flagged off nine Vande Bharat Express trains connecting religious and tourist destinations across 11 States.

Flagging off the Vande Bharat Express trains via video conferencing, Modi also slammed the previous governments for not paying adequate attention for modernisation of railways and assured that the “day is not far when Vande Bharat will connect every part of the country”. Governors, chief ministers, Union ministers and elected representatives were present at the nine railway stations from where the indigenously built semi-high speed trains were flagged off. The trains stopped at various stations where they were welcomed by enthusiastic school children and hoards of people with elected representatives addressing functions en route.

In his address, the prime minister said the popularity of Vande Bharat trains was rising constantly and more than 1.11 crore passengers have already travelled in them.

He said 25 Vande Bharat Express trains were already



functional and nine more were being added on Sunday.

“This speed and scale of infrastructure development in the country is exactly matching the aspirations of 140 crore Indians,” Modi said.

The nine trains will provide faster connectivity across 11 states -- Rajasthan, Tamil Nadu, Telangana, Andhra Pradesh, Karnataka, Bihar, West Bengal, Kerala, Odisha, Jharkhand and Gujarat.

“Indian Railways is the most trusted co-passenger of India’s poor and middle-class people. The number of people who travel in the railways in one day is more than the population of many countries. It is unfortunate that not much

attention was given to modernise Indian Railways. But now our government is working for the transformation of Indian Railways,” Modi said.

“I am confident that the changes taking place at every level in Indian Railways and society will prove to be an important step towards a developed India,” the prime minister said. Indo-Pacific He said that to achieve the goal of a developed India by 2047, the development of every state and the people of every state is necessary.

Modi said that selfish thinking of concentrating railway development in the state of the railway minister has damaged the country a lot and “now

we simply can not afford to keep any state backwards”.

“We have to move ahead with a vision of sabka saath, sabka vikas,” he added.

The new Vande Bharat trains flagged off by the prime minister will run on these routes: Udaipur-Jaipur; Tirunelveli-Madurai-Chennai; Hyderabad-Bengaluru; Vijayawada-Chennai (via Renigunta); Patna-Howrah; K a s a r a g o d - T h i r u v a n a n t h a p u r a m ; Rourkela-Bhubaneswar-Puri; Ranchi-Howrah; and Jamnagar-Ahmedabad.

These trains are a step towards realising the prime minister’s vision of improving connectivity across the country

and providing world-class facilities to rail passengers, according to an official statement. “The Vande Bharat trains will be the fastest train along the routes of their operation and will help save considerable time of the passengers,” it said.

The introduction of these Vande Bharat trains will herald a new standard of rail service in the country, the statement said. These trains, equipped with world-class amenities and advanced safety features, including Kavach technology, will be a key step towards providing modern, speedy and comfortable means of travel to common people, professionals, businessmen, student community and tourists, it added.

INDIA fight is to save idea of India: Rahul

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI



fighting for the soul of India”.

On the issue of certain differences in some states, he said in bulk of places there are no differences and in some places where these exist, the differences are being ironed out.

The former Congress president expressed confidence that his party was certain to win the forthcoming assembly elections in all the four states including Telangana, Madhya Pradesh, Chhattisgarh and Rajasthan. There is no way that we are not going to win in all these states, he asserted, while adding, even the BJP believed it internally that the Congress was winning all in these states.

He said the opposition was up against the financial and media power as the BJP had created a single monopoly in Adani who not only owns media, but controls huge wealth as it had been concentrated in one gentleman. But, he added, the Congress has now learnt its lessons and it does not get distracted by the BJP’s distracting and diversionary tactics.

Replying to a question at the media conclave from Assam, Rahul said there was a great deal of flexibility among the opposition leaders and he was very much impressed with it.

“The opposition is thinking about this election in a fundamentally different way than it thought about any other election before”, he said, while adding, opposition believes that the idea of India is under attack, concept of India is under attack, concept of free election, concept of free speech are now under mortal threat as far as BJP is concerned”.

Maintaining that this was something that was unanimous, Rahul said, “which means our behaviour has to change and our flexibility has to increase and that we are now

India-US ‘Yudh Abhyas’ to be held in Alaska from today



PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

The 19th edition of “Exercise Yudh Abhyas” will be conducted from September 25-October 8 in Fort Wainwright, Alaska, USA. It is an annual exercise conducted jointly by the Indian Army and the United States Army. The previous edition of the Exercise was conducted in Auli, Uttarakhand, India in November 2022.

Indian Army contingent comprising of 350 personnel will participate in this edition of the exercise. The lead battalion from Indian side is affiliated to Maratha Light Infantry Regiment. 1-24 Infantry Battalion of 1st Brigade Combat Team will participate from the US side, army officials

said here on Sunday.

Both sides will practice a series of tactical drills to enhance interoperability in conducting UN peacekeeping operations. Personnel from both sides will also hold detailed discussions to share their experiences and best practices.

The theme of the Exercise is ‘Employment of an Integrated Battle Group in Mountain/ Extreme Climatic Conditions’ under Chapter VII of United Nations mandate.

A Command Post Exercise and Expert Academic Discussions on selected topics will also form part of the schedule.

The scope of the Field Training Exercise includes validation of Integrated Battle Groups against hostile forces at

the Brigade level, Integrated Surveillance Grid at the Brigade/ Battalion level, employment of Heliborne/ Airborne elements and Force Multipliers, validation of logistics and casualty management during operations, evacuation and combat medical aid and other aspects as applicable to High Altitude Areas and Extreme Climatic Conditions.

The Exercise will also involve exchange of views and best practices in drills on a wide spectrum of combat skills including combat engineering, obstruction clearance, mine and Improvised Explosive Devices warfare.

“EX YUDH ABHYAS-23” will facilitate both Armies to mutually learn from each other and further strengthen the bonds between the two armies.

3 proposed criminal laws people-centric, says Shah

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI



Union Home Minister Amit Shah on Sunday said the three proposed criminal laws are people-centric, have the flavour of Indian soil and their main purpose is to protect the constitutional, human and personal rights of citizens. Addressing the International Lawyers’ Conference organised by the Bar Council of India here, Shah also said the approach of the three bills is also to provide justice rather than mete out punishment.

He appealed to all lawyers in the country to provide their suggestions to the Bharatiya Nyaya Sanhita (BNS-2023), Bharatiya Nagarik Suraksha Sanhita (BNSS-2023) and the Bharatiya Sakshya Adhinyam (BSA-2023) so that the country can have the best laws that benefit all. The three bills, which were introduced in the Lok Sabha on August 11, will replace the Indian Penal Code, 1860, Criminal Procedure Act, 1898, and the Indian Evidence Act, 1872 respectively.

“India’s criminal justice system was imprinted with colonial law. All three new bills do not have colonial imprint but have the flavour of Indian soil. The central point of these three proposed laws is to protect the constitutional and human rights of citizens as well as their personal rights,” he said, adding that the initiative

has been taken to comprehensively change the criminal laws keeping in mind the present-day demands.

“These laws are coming after almost 160 years with a completely new approach and new system. Along with new initiatives, three initiatives have also been taken by the government to create a law-friendly ecosystem,” he said. The first is e-courts, the second interoperable Criminal Justice System (ICJS) and the third is adding new technology to these three proposed laws, Shah said.

“With the introduction of three laws and three systems, we will be able to remove the delays in our criminal justice system in less than a decade,” he said. Shah said the basic objective of the old laws was to strengthen the British rule and the purpose was to punish, not to do justice. “The purpose of these three new laws is to provide justice, not punishment. Here is a step to deliver criminal justice.”

He said many changes have been made in the new laws to promote technology and the definition of documents has been greatly expanded. “Legal recognition has been given to electronic and digital records, messages available on digital devices have been recognised and summons will also be considered valid in all types of electronic modes — from SMS to email,” he said.

The Home Minister said a new provision has been added with regard to mob lynching and the section related to sedition has been abolished and legalising the community service will also be done under these new laws. “I want to make an appeal to all the lawyers across the country to look at all these bills in detail. Your suggestions are very valuable. Send your suggestions to the Union Home Secretary and we will definitely consider those suggestions before finalising the laws,” he said.

Global Maritime India Summit: Roadshow in Varanasi today

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ VARANASI

The Ministry of Ports, Shipping and Waterways (MoPSW) announced a roadshow in Varanasi, paving the way for the highly-anticipated 3rd Global Maritime India Summit 2023 (GMIS). The event is scheduled on Monday at the Trade Facilitation Centre (TFC) here to bring together government officials, bureaucrats, industry players to discuss and deliberate on various facets of maritime infrastructure, trade, and development.

The Union Minister of Ports, Shipping and Waterways and Ministry of Ayush Sarbananda Sonowal will grace the occasion, joined by representatives from Governments of Uttar Pradesh, Bihar, Jharkhand and West Bengal.

Anchored by the Inland Waterways Authority of India (IWAI), the Varanasi roadshow will be a platform to explore the maritime sector's growth, foster collaboration and unlock opportunities for stakeholders in this vital sector.

The event is also expected to witness presence of Prakash Jwala, Minister, Ministry of Physical Infrastructure & Transport, Nepal, Daya Shankar Singh, Minister of Transport, Govt of UP, Lakko Venkateshwarlu, Principal Secretary, Transport, Govt of UP, Kripa Nand Jha, Secretary (Transport), Government of Jharkhand, Dr Saumitra Mohan, Secretary (Transport), Government of West Bengal, and Sanjay Kumar Agarwal, Secretary (Transport), Government of Bihar.

Sarbananda Sonowal expressed his enthusiasm for the roadshow by stating, "With an unwavering commitment to fortify our logistics framework and the visionary leadership of Prime Minister Narendra Modi, India is poised for remarkable transformation." He further added, "Our focus on waterways, from the Gati Shakti Initiative to the ambitious Jal Marg Vikas Project, signifies a resolute dedication to unlocking the vast potential of

our maritime sector. This transformative era is not only about strengthening our industry but also about embracing sustainability and environmental stewardship. The GMIS-2023 is where these aspirations will converge, partnerships will flourish, and our shared vision will materialise." Sanjay Bandopadhyay, IWAI Chairman, stated, "As we look ahead to the GMIS-2023, we envision a future where waterways are not just lifelines but also the catalysts for sustainable growth, innovation, and prosperity. Our commitment to harnessing the potential of waterways goes beyond mere trade; it is about building a future where hinterland communities thrive, where environmental preservation and cultural heritage are safeguarded, and where economic opportunities abound." He further added, "At the GMIS-2023, we will converge to explore groundbreaking ideas, forge collaborations and chart a course towards a brighter

future. Together, we will create a legacy that transcends generations, one that defines a new era of waterway development in India and beyond. Join us on this transformative journey, and let's shape a future where waterways are not just a source of life and culture but also the driving force behind a thriving and sustainable nation."

GMIS-2023 is a premier maritime sector focused event to bring together pivotal figures from the industry to explore opportunities, understand challenges, and stimulate investment within India's maritime sector. Building upon the legacy of its preceding editions of 2016 and 2021, this third edition of the summit aims to unveil broader prospects for domestic and international maritime stakeholders and investors. More than 100 countries and several delegates from them are expected to participate in the Summit with exhibitors and investors from various domains of the maritime sector.

Businessman's 13-yr-old son, kidnapped, murdered

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ PRAYAGRAJ

In a shocking incident, a 13-year-old son of a businessman was kidnapped and murdered in Shankargarh area here. His body was found in the forest of Chitrakoot on Sunday morning. On Saturday evening five hours after the kidnapping of his child a call from miscreants came on the father's mobile and the caller demanded ₹15 lakh from him and asked him to come to the forest of Dabhura of Rewa otherwise he would shoot his son. The father gave this information to the police. The police started the investigation by putting the number on surveillance. However, before the police reached the kidnappers, the body of the child was found in the forest around 8 am on Sunday. Prayagraj Commissioner Ramit Sharma in a press conference about four hours after the child's body was found said that a police encounter took place in Shankargarh with the miscreants. A constable was also injured. The commissioner said the accused knew the family of the child. The accused Sukhdev's brother Loknath used to drive the truck of the child's father.

About 40 km from Prayagraj district headquarters, Pushpraj Kesarwani alias Vicky family lives in Shakargarh. He has a transport business. Apart from his wife there was a 13-year-old son Shubh and 11-year-old daughter Shubhi in the family. According to family members, Shubh was playing around the shop in Shankargarh at 4 pm on Saturday and suddenly went missing from there. When he was not seen for a long time, the family searched for him but

could not be trace him. Father Pushpraj informed the Shankargarh police about his son being being missing.

About five hours after complaining to the police, the call was received on father's mobile phone at 9 pm which said "come to the forest with ₹15 lakh, otherwise we will shoot your son". Tension prevailed in the house as soon as the ransom call was received. The father informed the relatives about it. Then they told Shankargarh police about the ransom call.

The police then filed a kidnapping report against unknown persons. The police swung into action and the number from which the ransom call came in was put on surveillance.

DCP Yamunanagar Abhinav Tyagi took details from family members. The police team was despatched on the basis of mobile location. On the other hand, a child's body was found in the forest of Arwara Mod on Sunday morning and people informed the police. When the police reached the spot, the body was identified as that of Shubh. The forest in which the body has been found is about 250 metres from the Jhansi-Mirzapur national highway.

The body of the child was tied and his mouth was gagged with some cloth. The Bargarh police station incharge Anjani Kumar Singh said on the basis of initial investigation, it seems that the child has been killed by hitting heavy stone on his head. There are serious injury marks on the head and ears. The body has been sent for postmortem. Police Commissioner Ramit Sharma told mediapersons that Shubh was murdered by Sukhdev and

Sanjay. Loknath drives Pushparaj's truck. Sukhdev is the brother of Loknath and had to come to his house. Shubh knew Loknath and Sukhdev. Shubh was playing at the shop at 4 pm on Saturday. Then Sukhdev went to Pushparaj's shop with his friend Sanjay. There he asked Shubh if he wanted to see rabbits in the forest. Since Shubh knew Sukhdev he went with him.

Sukhdev made a call on Pushpraj's phone around quarter to 9 which call was not received. After about 15 minutes, Pushpraj saw the missed call from unknown number and called back. The call receiver said that his son was kidnapped and asked him to come to the forest with ₹15 lakh. Pushpraj informed the Shankargarh police. When the police started calling on that number, it was found switched off. On checking its WhatsApp number the photo of Sukhdev was found which was recognised by Pushpraj. After this, the numbers were put on surveillance. Sharma claimed that Sukhdev, along with Sanjay and Ganesh, had hatched a conspiracy of kidnapping. When the police put the numbers on surveillance, the third person Ganesh, nephew of Sukhdev, was found Ganesh. When the police picked up Ganesh, he said Shubh has been taken to the forest of Bargarh and murdered. He told the police that Sukhdev and Sanjay were hiding in the Shankargarh forests. After the force of several police stations and SOG teams surrounded Sukhdev and Sanjay in the forest of Shankargarh, both of them opened fire on the police team. Both were shot in the leg. A constable was also

injured in the firing. All of them had been admitted to Swaroop Rani Nehru Hospital. Ganesh, Sukhdev and Sanjay are being questioned to find out the reasons behind the kidnapping. The reason behind the kidnapping is not clear.

COMPLAINT: UP Board secretary Dibyakant Shukla lodged a complaint with the Prayagraj police after a fake appointment letter issued for the post of clerk at Public Inter College in Kerakat of Jaunpur bearing his forged signature came to light. Shukla clarified that Secondary Education Board, commonly known as UP Board, does not appoint clerks or any other post in the schools of the state of its own and asked all to be vary of such unscrupulous elements who issue such fake letters.

The letter, shared by the secretary, was issued in the name of Rajeev Ratan Singh of Virampur village of Jaunpur.

The fraudster had used the scanned signature of the secretary on a fake letter head of the Secondary Education Council Board. "The appointment letter that has been printed on the letterhead of the Secondary Education Council Board, Uttar Pradesh is fake as this is not one used by the office. Also, the letter number, UPS 821 printed in the appointment letter, is not the letter number of the council's office," Shukla said. He added that some unscrupulous elements are tarnishing the image of the council and the state government by misleading the public and are giving rise to a cognizable crime in the society. He has sent an application to the Civil Lines police incharge to immediately file a first information report (FIR) and initiate legal action.

18th UPRTOU convocation tomorrow

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ PRAYAGRAJ

The 18th convocation of Uttar Pradesh Rajarshi Tandon Open University (UPRTOU), will be held on September 26 at 10 am in the Atal auditorium located in Saraswati campus. The convocation will be presided over by Governor and Chancellor Anandiben Patel.

Chief guest Professor Shashi Kala Vanjari, Vice-Chancellor, National Institute of Educational Planning and Administration (NIEPA), New Delhi, will deliver the convocation address. UP Minister of Higher Education Yogendra Upadhyay and UP Minister of State of Higher Education, Rajni Tiwari, will attend the convocation as a special guest.

At the convocation 26 gold medals will be given to students, of these nine gold medals will given to male students and 17 gold medals to female students. Besides, 20,734 students who have passed the session December 2022 and June 2023 will be awarded degrees. This information was given by Vice-Chancellor Prof Seema Singh in a press conference held on Sunday. Prof Singh said all necessary preparations have been completed for organising the convocation in the Atal auditorium. The convocation will be held in Indian traditional dress. In the convocation Chancellor Gold Medal will be given to Neelam, a student of Baba Sadhav Ram College



Azamgarh Studies Centre. Neelam passed the MA Home Science examination in first class. The Vice-Chancellor said that this time on the instructions of the governor programmes of the 'Dikshatsav' were organised before the convocation in which seminars, poetry writing, patriotic songs, essay writing, speech competition, traditional sports, women conference, health awareness programme and sports competition were held. On the occasion of the convocation 10 Anganwadi centres will be presented a kit by the Chancellor on behalf of the university. In addition, 30 other Anganwadi centres will also be provided kits. On the occasion the Chancellor will also honour outstanding teachers of the university and group dances will be performed by visually-impaired children of special school. Registrar Colonel Vinay Kumar, Professor Satyapal Tiwari, Dr Satish Chandra Jaisai and Dr. Prabhat Chandra

Mishra etc. were present in the press conference.

PREPARATIONS BEGIN: As 'pitra paksh' is starting from September 29, people have started making preparations for rituals for peace and salvation of their ancestors' souls. While many have planned trips to Prayagraj, Varanasi and Gaya, there are many others, especially those from abroad, who could not visit India to perform 'pind daan' of their loved ones. For these people, priests of the city are offering to perform the rituals in an online mode after bookings. In the Hindu culture, every year during the 'pitra paksh' period, people perform 'shraddh' and offer prayers for the peace of departed souls. But some cities are considered important and ideal for these rituals, like Prayagraj, Varanasi and Gaya. In Prayagraj, the ritual begins with performing 'pind daan' and 'shraddh' of ancestors with Kshar Karma. Because of the importance the

city holds in terms of these rituals, every year, large numbers of people visit Sangam during 'pitru paksha'. This year, the priests are anticipating an increase in the number of people after a lull of two years because of the pandemic. Their 'jajman' (customers) abroad are making online bookings through websites and applications. According to Shambhunath Tripathi Anshul, former principal of Triveni Sanskrit college, three duties of man have been specifically mentioned in the scriptures—duty towards Dev (God), Rishi (seer) and Pitra (parents).

"During 'pitra paksh', gratitude is expressed towards parents, ancestors and elders of the family as if one is not free from ancestral debt, his birth is considered meaningless," explained Tripathi. "Therefore, during 'pitra paksh', reverence is paid to ancestors by doing 'pind daan' in Sangam. It is believed that Lord Vishnu and all gods and goddesses residing in Tirthraj Prayag free the soul from the cycle of birth and death by providing salvation," he added. Abhishek Pandey, a priest, said that people from America, Holland, Canada, Australia, Nepal, Indonesia and Mauritius have made bookings for 'pind daan'. Online booking facility is available on social platforms too. Around 200 priests of Prayagraj are active on such platforms and have made arrangements to perform rituals online.

Week-long Ganeshotsav ends

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ VARANASI

The 115th week-long Ganeshotsav celebrated under the auspices of Nutan Balak Ganeshotsav Samaj Seva Mandal ended with the 'aarti' amidst the chanting of mantras here on Sunday. Respecting the High Court's decision not to immerse the idols in Ganga river and in view of the Supreme Court's orders not to immerse idols in ponds, a resolution was taken to keep the festival idol safe in view of conducting regular worship of the same. Before this a procession of Lord Ganesha was taken out in a 'palki' (palanquin) accompanied by musical instruments, which started from Ganesh Bhawan and reached Panchganga Ghat via Dudhvinayak, Phatak Rangiladas, Thatheri Bazar, Sudia, Bulanala, Golghar, Bhairavnath, Jatanbar, Bibhatiya, Rajmandir, Brahmaghat and Durga Ghat. The students were walking on the route singing the traditional verse 'Nutan Balak



Nutan Mandal members taking our procession of Lord Ganesha's idol on last day of festival in Varanasi on Sunday.

Mel Chalo Hai, Mag Mein Roko Mat Bhai... On the way devotees performed 'aarti' of Lord Ganesha at various places. The morning Ganesh Atharvashirsha Sahastravartan took place under the guidance of Vedomurthy Veereshwar Narayan Datar in which Pandit Praveen Vasant Patwardhan, Pt Soumitra Prabhakar Shukla, Pt Sanidhya Srinidhi Bapat, Pt Amit Nath Tiwari, Pt Abhishek Pandey, Pt

Hemant Joshi, Pt Gaurav Gopal Ratate, Pt Sudarshan Pathak, Pt Utkarsh Madhav Ratate, Pt Lakshit Vikas Hoshing etc were present. Sahastranamarchan of Lord Ganesha was also done with Sahastrana modaks, raisins and makhanas. The main hosts were Purushottam Mahajan, Prakhhar Praveen Patwardhan and Lakshit Vikas Hoshing. On the occasion Lord Ganesha was beautifully

decorated with kamini leaves, bela, rose and juhi flowers. Earlier on the penultimate day, the swing and waterfall of Lord Ganesha were decorated. On the occasion the festival venue was decorated with attractive flowers and leaves. Under the guidance of Veereshwar Narayan Datar, Ritwik Ramkrishna Bapat performed Sahastrana march with cashew nuts. Shodashopachara worship of Lord Ganesha was done under the guidance of Ved Murti Hemant Joshi. The chief host was Narsingh Jagannath Telang. The award distribution programme was held under the chairmanship of Shruti Deshpande. The chief guest was Devendra Pandya in which Vedic scholar Srinivas Laxmikant Puranik was honoured in the programme. The participants of various competitions were also awarded in the programme. At night in the music conference in memory of Pt Pundalik Krishna Bhagwat, the artistes presented shehna.

BJP workers listen to 'Mann Ki Baat' at 30,386 booths

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ VARANASI

The 105th episode of Prime Minister Narendra Modi's monthly radio programme 'Mann Ki Baat' was heard by BJP workers at 30,286 booths of all 16 organisational districts of Kashi region, including Varanasi district and city units on Sunday. They resolved to imbibe the message given by the PM in his programme during the day. This time in the episode, the PM started by congratulating the live-streaming video of Chandrayaan-3's successful 'soft landing' on the Moon's south pole for achieving more than 80 lakh views. The prime minister also mentioned the two-day G20 Leaders' Summit organised by India. In his address the PM also spoke on India-Middle East-East Europe Economic Corridor, World Tourism Day on September 27, some youth in Nainital district created a unique horse library for children, a unique effort for animal conservation in Pushkar, Rajasthan, a 21-year-old girl from Germany Qasmi's passion for Indian music and her successful effort to revive a river named 'Soat' which was flowing decades ago and set a wonderful example of public participation and collectivity in Sambhal, UP, were explained in detail. The PM also spoke in detail about the special cleanliness campaign to be run on



Regional BJP chief DS Patel and others listening to PM's 'Mann Ki Baat' in Varanasi on Sunday.

Sunday (October 1) and Gandhi Jayanti (October 2). In this sequence, regional president (Kashi Region) Dilip Singh Patel listened to PM Modi's 'Mann Ki Baat' programme at booth number 113 of Ravidas Mandal under Varanasi Cantt assembly constituency. After the programme, Patel, while addressing the workers, said that the successful organisation of G20 and the successful landing of Chandrayaan-3 on the Moon have increased India's respect and pride in the world under the leadership of PM Narendra Modi. "Today, the PM is known all over the world as a global leader," he said, adding that not only the BJP workers but the entire countryside wait for PM's 'Mann Ki Baat' programme to be aired on the last Sunday of every month. This is

an encyclopedia, especially for the youth. Through this programme, he said that information not only increases but we also come face to face with every important work going on in the country and the world. Anil Srivastava, Nagendra, Mandal president Shatrughan Patel, Surendra Patel, regional in-charge Navratan Rath, Santosh Solapurkar etc were prominently present among those who listened to 'Mann Ki Baat'. Elsewhere, Mahila Morcha's regional president Namrata Chaurasia listened to the prime minister's event with the party's women workers of the minority community at booth number 399 in the Cantonment area. Uzma, Shabia Bano, Taslima, Muskaan, Rabia and others were also present on the occasion.

2-day seminar from today

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ PRAYAGRAJ

The GB Pant Social Science Institute (GBPSSI), Jhansi, is organising a two-day national seminar titled, 'Political economy of India's development challenges: Celebrating 75 years of India's Independence'. Sponsored by Indian Council of Social Science Research (ICSSR), New Delhi, the seminar will commence on September 25.

According to director of the institute, Prof Badri Narayan, "The seminar aims to shed light on the relationship between politics and economics in India's developmental journey. It promises to be a gathering of some of the brightest minds in the field of social sciences, economics, and political studies". He said the seminar will encompass a wide range of themes, including economic reforms, social sector performance, India's developmental challenges, employment and labour issues, geopolitical conflicts and its implications among others. Scholars, researchers, policymakers and experts from various domains will present their research paper and insights during the event. The inaugural session and plenary session will be held on September 25 wherein eminent economists like Prof Praveen Jha of the Jawaharlal Nehru University, New Delhi, Prof Arup Mitra of South Asian University, New Delhi, Prof Minaketan Behra of JNU, and other academicians will deliver lectures.

CORRESPONDENT ■ MIRZAPUR

In view of the festivals the Peace committee meeting was held at all police stations on Saturday. Circle Officer (CO/city) Anjay Singh, CO (Sadar) Shailendra Tripathi, CO (Chunar) Uma Shankar Singh, CO (Lalganj) Manjary Rao and CO (Operation) Anil Kumar Pandey held the meetings in their respective circle at every police station. The people were requested to cooperate with the administration. The administration was committed to conduct the programmes peacefully. The police officers appealed to people to inform the police directly in case of any confusion but not to take the law into their own hands.

DIRECTIVE: District Magistrate Priyanka Niranjan has asked the officials concerned to take a clear stand based on facts instead of uploading ambiguous reports in cases registered on Jansunvai portal. Such direction was issued by her in view of the serious attitude of the government on the issue of the people's problems. She directed the officials that in cases related to measurement of land disputes should be dispose on merit and signature of two independent witnesses should be done and uploaded. She directed for regular review by

tehsil and block level officials, COs and SOs related to the Jansunvai portal. She directed the officials to sit in their offices from 10 am to 12 noon and solve the problems of people on merit. The officials were directed to upload the disposal report only after the satisfaction of the aggrieved and in the closed cases supervising officers were directed to examine them on a random basis. Moreover, in a month minimum 30 cases are to be examined. She warned to take action against those who were found guilty of false reporting. Moreover, those officials will be punished whose related cases were brought for disposal repeatedly. Regarding public land as well as government land the officials were directed to take strict action against encroachers. She directed the officials to dispose of cases on merit and without inordinate delay.

ELECTION: State secretary of Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) and district incharge of the party affairs Anamika Chaudhary told the party workers that strengthening of the polling booths is the best way to win the election. These views were expressed by her while addressing the party workers on Saturday. Giving tips to the workers to win the 2024 election she said the ongoing drive will prove to be

the factor for victory so no laxity was acceptable at all. She said that the Ayushman Bhav drive launched by the government was an effective way to connect people with the party so it was the need of the hour that we cooperate with the government machinery for its grand success. She asked the workers to find out eligible persons for different welfare schemes and make them available properly. She said under the drive each worker should be connected with the people directly whether the person is a beneficiary or not. To strengthen the booth she asked the workers to hold meetings, be well acquainted with each worker and train them so that they can effectively publicise the achievements of the government. The meeting was also attended by Brij Bhushan Singh, Uttam Maurya, Gyan Prakash Dubey and others.

PROGRAMME: Renowned literature and lecturer in GD Binani PG College Dr Dhruvji Pandey while delivering the welcome speech in a cultural programme organised under the aegis of Vindhya Kalakar Manch Trust Mirzapur on Saturday said Kajali was not merely a song but an art which can teach the society. He threw light over the journey of the song which was first sung as prayer of


Goddess Vindhyaivasini. Now the folk song has become so popular that Kajali programmes are being organised abroad too, he added. Veteran Kajali singer Urmila Srivastava said as the guest of honour that it is the time to promote the art for the next generation. The evening started with the lighting of the ceremonial lamp and garlanding of the portrait of goddess Vindhyaivasini by Urmila Srivastava and a prayer of the goddess was presented with a Kajali song. Thereafter Mantoo Mishra who mesmerised the gathering. The other performers were Shiv Lal Gupta, Umesh Kanauiya, Sanjay Sureela, Suresh Maurya and Samrat who regaled the gathering throughout the night. Proposing vote of thanks the president of the organisation Amar Nath Shukla thanked the family members of former minister late Bhagwat Pal who made available most of the arrangements for the programme and other members of the organisation whose hard labour led to the success of the event. Prominent among those present were veteran journalist Bhola Nath Pandey, DIO Om Prakash Upadhyay, Assistant Tourism Officer Rajesh Bharti, Vijay, Hukum Maurya, Umesh Kanauiya, Pancham Ram, Ajit Upadhyay and Bankelal.

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FIRST COLUMN

ZEN BUDDHISM: LAW OF ATTRACTION

A robust mind can develop the qualities to manifest the ‘Law of Attraction’



RAVI VALLURI

AEONS ago a strapping youngster gained admission into an estimable Temple of Knowledge. He was fortunate to be imparted precious pearls of wisdom of Zen Buddhism by sagacious and knowledgeable masters. Over some time, he attained a reasonable degree of compassion and insight into the human mind. During his tutelage what struck him most was the simplicity, humility and truthfulness of his teachers who practiced Zen Buddhism.


What is Zen Buddhism?

As per Norman Fischer Zen Buddhism is:
*“A special transmission outside the scriptures.
No dependency on words and letters.
Pointing directly to the human mind.
Seeing into one’s nature and attaining Buddhahood.”*

The cornerstone of the practice is that over some time, through unflinching practice of the appropriate techniques, a postulant becomes aware and awakened. The mind of such a person becomes pristine and gains clarity in the thought process. However, it is well-nigh impossible to effectuate such a state without the grace of a Guru, who can be thought of as the doorway to the ambrosia of divinity. The young monk was directed by the Masters of the monastery to spread the knowledge of Zen Buddhism. Significantly, the now more spiritually aware monk uttered only the truth and never denounced anyone.

Powers of the Human Mind

Exhausted and weary after relentless travel, one day he sat under a majestic blossoming tree. The monk was feeling ravenous and wished that his hunger would be satiated. Quite unexpectedly a maiden walking that way offered him a bowl filled with food, and no sooner did the monk express his desire. He was taken aback at the turn of events and expressed his gratitude to the damsel.



After the hearty meal, the monk felt extremely thirsty. He pined for a glass of water and sure enough, a stripling youngster offered him juices to quench his thirst. The monk was extremely beholden and appreciative of this serendipitous act of kindness. The mind of the monk was now suffused with joy as his twin desires of food and liquid were satiated with remarkable ease. He now wished to sleep. Suddenly it darkened and there was a cloud cover across the sky. The weather which was arid and hot turned salubrious. After sleeping for hours together he felt reinvigorated. The monk, when hungry was satiated with food, when thirsty was provided with drinks and was comforted by angels when he felt worn out.

The Law of Attraction

His thoughts and words were resonating in the universe and the mind became a unique springboard wherein whatever he wished for, eventuated. Once trained, the mind develops a few qualities. It becomes luminous and radiant, light as a feather and not weighed down by the baggage of negative thoughts. The monk was hungry, thirsty and deprived of rest. He meant it; there was no dubiety or incertitude in his mind. The mind was not wavering and his desires did not oscillate between “hope to be fed” or “if provided will partake of food.” A robust and radiant mind that can authentically develop the qualities of the Law of Attraction knows the art of letting go, dropping all affectation. The unique mantra of this success is when an individual genuinely believes in the production of dreams and corals thoughts to be efficacious ones. Pre-eminently for an individual blessed with these attributes, the Law of Attraction operates and resounds quite amazingly. “All that we are is a result of what we have thought,” said Gautama Buddha the Enlightened One.

(The writer is the CEO of Chhattisgarh East Railway Ltd. and Chhattisgarh East West Railway Ltd and a faculty of the Art of Living; views are personal)

Simultaneous polls are the way forward



UTTAM GUPTA

Frequent elections impose enormous social and economic costs on the nation, which leads to corruption and disruption

THE Union Government has set up a committee under the chairmanship of the former President of India, Ramnath Govind to examine holding simultaneous elections to the Lok Sabha (LS), state assemblies, panchayats and other local bodies. Even as the committee has kicked off the deliberations (its first meeting is scheduled for September 23, 2023) the idea is being staunchly opposed by many political parties. The opposition isn’t new as in 2019 when Prime Minister Narendra Modi convened a meeting on June 19 that year to discuss ‘One Nation, One Election’ (ONOE), it was boycotted by about 50 per cent of the parties who were invited.

What are the grounds for opposition?

A major ground for their opposition is that this will be an onslaught on the federal polity, hence, unconstitutional. The parties argue that in a scenario of simultaneous poll to both the LS and all the state assemblies, the national issues will dominate over the state-specific subjects. This may yield fortuitous benefits to the dominant national party as the voter won’t be able to clearly articulate his/her choice while casting a vote for electing members of the assembly.

The national party getting a clear majority in the LS who does not enjoy the confidence of the state subjects on local issues will thus get to rule the states as well. Most opposition parties fear that BJP which enjoys a clear edge at the national level will be able to install its governments across the country. This will violate the federal character of the constitution which envisages running the affairs of the state in sync with local needs and aspirations.

The above line of argument is completely flawed. It presumes that while voting at the same time for the Parliament and the Assembly, the choice of the voter will get obliterated to favour the dominant national party (read: BJP). How could a mere act of asking her to press the button for choosing candidates for two entirely different elections - one for the LS and the other for the state Assembly - around the same time lead to obliteration? It grossly underestimates the ability of the voter to make ‘educated’ and ‘informed’ choices on national and local issues. That this isn’t the case; that the voter is intelligent enough to make the right choice is amply corroborated by the results of LS polls in 2019 when elections to some State Assemblies, viz Andhra Pradesh and Odisha, were held co-terminus.

Despite an overriding national narrative favouring Prime Minister Modi, voters in these States showed clear preference for regional parties, namely the YSR Congress and the Biju Janata Dal, who got an absolute majority in the assembly. Just because the voters exercised franchise at the same time for both the LS and the State did not deter them from giving overriding importance to local issues. The fallacy of the opposition’s argument may be seen from another angle.

In the above example, apart from securing a clear majority in the state Assembly, the YSR Congress and the Biju Janata Dal also cornered a major chunk of seats from the state in the LS. Now, if one were to believe opposition that vot-



THE MOST DEVASTATING IMPACT HAS TO DO WITH ALMOST EVERY POLITICAL PARTY PROMISING MORE AND MORE SOPS TO WIN ELECTIONS

(The writer is a policy analyst)

ers’ choice gets distorted (courtesy, the same timing) then are we to say ‘local issues are dominating over the national issues’?

The crux of the matter is: that the voter is intelligent enough to make a distinction. While voting for a candidate in the LS election, she is guided by national issues whereas, in the Assembly election local issues dominate her mind. She won’t mix up things just because she has to press the relevant buttons around the same time. There is nothing unconstitutional in holding simultaneous elections.

The founding fathers of the Indian constitution had contemplated simultaneous elections only. Indeed, things were on the right track till the mid-60s, when the then ruling dispensation disturbed the apple-cart by the ‘premature’ dissolution of some state assemblies (1968/1969) and LS (1970). Over time, the mismatch got aggravated with the dissolution of many more assemblies. If, during the initial phase (from 1952 to 1967) when elections to both the LS and state assemblies were held concurrently, everything was hunky dory, how come now, restoration of that very dispensation be construed as an assault on federalism.

The existing system wherein a State Assembly goes to polls almost every other year imposes unprecedented social and economic costs on the nation. It is not just the official expense of conducting elections (in a big state like Maharashtra, it can go up to Rs 1,000 crores) but also

several thousand crores being spent by political parties. In turn, this gives a boost to corruption and other unethical practices even as parties seek to raise funds to support the mammoth expenditure.

Then, there is a continuous distraction from issues of governance even as the imposition of the Model Code of Conduct (MCC) - each time an election exercise is taken up - leads to the stoppage of all major policy decisions that impede development work. The delay in project implementation and resulting cost escalation (a case in point, the delay in completion of the dedicated freight corridor’ project) imposes an unsustainable fiscal burden.

A third indeed the most devastating impact has to do with almost every political party promising more and more sops to win elections. After the five guarantees promised by the grand old party in Karnataka did the trick, it is giving guarantees in almost all state elections due this year. Others such as AAP are following suit. Such sops have the potential of denuding the state exchequer.

Finally, given the political parties in election mode year after year, no incumbent Government at the Centre has the gumption to implement hard reforms, particularly considering that the party at the helm has stakes in the states as well. A case in point is fertilizer subsidy which the then finance minister Arun Jaitley promised to prune drastically; yet


fertiliser subsidy not only continues but has increased by leaps and bounds (during 2022-23, it was Rs 255,000 crore). To end these maladies, the subsisting system has to go and the ONOE restored in sync with the intent of the authors of the Indian Constitution. This will enable both the Centre and States to focus on governance for a full five years without any distraction. This will help save thousands of crores in election expenses, ensure continuity of policy decisions enabling unhindered project execution and development work, drastically curtail election-oriented populist sops and give a boost to the implementation of hard reforms. Opposition parties have pointed towards uncertainties that could arise if the ruling party loses the vote of confidence before its mandated term. But they need to recognise that this can at best be a rare situation and not a matter of routine (the public gives a mandate to a government to run its full-term and all stakeholders should ensure that this is honoured). Still, such a scenario (albeit rare) can be addressed by either electing a new leader (who enjoys the confidence of the House) or holding a fresh election for the “residual” term.

Apart from required constitutional amendments, the switchover to ONOE will entail some increase in expenses on procuring extra EVM and VVPAT. But that is a very small price for achieving monumental socio-economic gains.

Tap water for parched villages: An incredible turnaround

Clean drinking water through taps has brought about a radical change in the lives of the residents of Bundelkhand, but challenges remain

BUNDELKHAND has been traditionally a drought-prone area with frequent droughts; the people had to work hard, and travel several kilometres in some cases to get clean drinking water. The Bundelkhand region of India grapples with several issues, including heavy reliance on rainfall, inadequate irrigation, and susceptibility to climate change and droughts. This area, encompassing thirteen economically disadvantaged and less-developed districts, heavily depends on agriculture for both employment and economic progress. While agriculture is pivotal for the region’s economic advancement, it frequently faces disruptions due to recurring droughts. In this situation, clean drinking water is nothing short of a luxury.



MANEESHA SHUKLA

(The writer is a social activist, based in Uttar Pradesh; views are personal)

Access to clean drinking water is a fundamental right that has long eluded many rural households in India. Recognising this dire need, the ‘Jal Jeevan Mission’ scheme was launched with a singular goal: to provide clean drinking water to every rural family through taps. In Uttar Pradesh, the ‘Har Ghar Jal Yojana’, a part of the ‘Jal Jeevan Mission’, has witnessed remarkable success in the Bundelkhand region, fundamentally changing the lives of its residents. The Jal Jeevan Mission has transformed the Bundelkhand and Vindhya regions, which have suffered from water scarcity for decades. It has turned the dream of having pure drinking water in every household into a reality. The mission has saved these regions from major

drinking water crises, providing clean water to thousands of villages.

The mission has involved laying pipelines, constructing water tanks, establishing water treatment plants, increasing water sources, and providing tap water connections at an impressive pace. This initiative has prioritized drought-affected areas, villages with water quality issues, aspirational districts, and those affected by diseases like Japanese Encephalitis and Encephalitis Syndrome.

The Jal Jeevan Mission aimed to provide ‘domestic tap connections’ to 2,62,29,815 families by 2024 in Uttar Pradesh. Under the ‘Har Ghar Jal Yojana’, a daily supply of 55 litres of water per villager was promised. As of September 14,

2023, this mission has already made significant strides, with tap water facilities reaching 1,60,20,616 families and benefiting approximately 9,61,23,696 people.

The Jal Jeevan Mission is not just about providing clean drinking water but also about creating employment opportunities. Training programs have been initiated, with 13 youths being trained under each Gram Panchayat. These efforts have empowered rural youth by providing training in various trades, including plumbing, electrical work, motor mechanics, fitting, masonry, and pump operation. “We wish to ensure people’s participation so that they become aware and stakeholders. After ten years it is the people who would be managing and oper-

ating these facilities” says Anurag Srivastava, the principal secretary of Uttar Pradesh.

In addition to employment opportunities, the mission focuses on making rural women self-reliant by training five women from each village in water testing for clean drinking water. These women use field test kits to check the water quality in their villages, assessing 11 different parameters in sources such as taps, wells, hand pumps, and tube wells. So far, more than 4,87,955 women have been trained in water testing, ensuring the quality of water supplied. The provision of clean drinking water has had a profound impact on public health. It has reduced the prevalence of waterborne diseases such as diarrhoea, cholera, typhoid,

and malaria. “There has been a marked fall in diseases in our village after the water plant started operating six months back,” says Has Mukh Parihar, Gram Pradhan.

The Bundelkhand region has seen remarkable progress under the Har Ghar Jal Yojana. As of now, 1,280,292 functional household tap connections (FHTCs) have been provided out of a total of 1,419,730 FHTCs in the region. This means that 7,681,752 villagers in Bundelkhand have access to clean drinking water through taps.

The Bundelkhand Piped Drinking Water Project is a significant part of the Jal Jeevan Mission. Work on this project is underway in seven cities: Jhansi, Lalitpur, Jalaun, Hamirpur, Banda, Chitrakoot,

and Mahoba. There are a total of 71 schemes operating under 35 projects in the Bundelkhand region. These projects include intake wells, water treatment plants, clear water reservoirs, and overhead tanks, all aimed at ensuring a steady supply of clean drinking water. Indeed, Har Ghar Jal Yojana is changing lives but there is a long way to go till total coverage is secured. Besides, issues of the quality of water and its perennial supply must be ensured. While the project is providing the drinking water it has yet to seep into the psyche of the people as a lot of it is still wasted and often people do not use it at all for different reasons. Thus creating awareness must be an integral part of the project and be given priority.

US provided Canada intelligence on Nijjar’s killing: NYT

PTI ■ WASHINGTON

The US provided Canada with intelligence after the killing of Sikh separatist Hardeep Singh Nijjar, but communications intercepted by Ottawa were more definitive and led it to accuse India of orchestrating the plot, The New York Times has reported citing sources.

The report came on Saturday as the top US diplomat in Canada confirmed that there was “shared intelligence among Five Eyes partners” that had prompted Canadian Prime Minister Justin Trudeau’s offensive allegation against India in the killing of a Khalistani extremist on Canadian soil.

The allegations have infuriated India, which rejected the allegations as “absurd” and “motivated” and expelled a senior Canadian diplomat in a tit-for-tat move to Ottawa’s expulsion of an Indian official over the case. India also accused Canada of being a safe



haven for terrorists.

Nijjar, the chief of the banned Khalistan Tiger Force (KTF), was killed in Surrey in British Columbia on June 18. India had designated Nijjar as a terrorist in 2020.

The United States has urged India to cooperate with Canada in its investigations.

“In the aftermath of the killing, US intelligence agencies offered their Canadian counterparts context that helped Canada conclude that India had been involved,” the NYT reported, quoting unnamed allied officials as saying.

Yet what appears to be the “smoking gun,” intercepted communications of Indian diplomats in Canada indicating involvement in the plot, was gathered by Canadian officials, allied officials said.

David Cohen, US Ambassador to Canada, in an interview with CTV News said that “shared intelligence among Five Eyes partners” had informed Trudeau of the

possible involvement of Indian agents in the murder of a Canadian citizen in June.

“I will say this was a matter of shared intelligence information. There was a lot of communication between Canada and the United States about this, and I think that’s as far as I’m comfortable going,” Cohen told CTV News.

After Nijjar’s death, American officials told their Canadian counterparts that Washington had not had any advance information about the plot, and that if US officials had they would have immediately informed Ottawa under the intelligence agencies’ “duty to warn” doctrine, according to two allied officials, the newspaper reported.

The officials, who spoke on the condition of anonymity to discuss what has become a diplomatic firestorm, said Canadian officials had offered a general warning to Nijjar but had not told him that he was the target of an Indian government plot, according to the

report.

Cohen told CTV that said that the US takes very seriously these allegations. “And, you know, if they prove to be true, it is a potentially very serious breach of the rules-based international order in which we like to function,” he said in response to a question.

While Secretary of State Antony Blinken has called on India to cooperate with the Canadian investigation, American officials have largely tried to avoid triggering any diplomatic blowback from India, the paper said.

But the disclosure of the involvement of US intelligence risks ensnaring Washington in the diplomatic battle between Canada and India at a time when it is keen to develop New Delhi as a closer partner, it said.

Blinken said the US is “deeply concerned” about the allegations raised by Canadian Prime Minister Trudeau against India and Washington was “closely coordinating”

with Ottawa on the issue and wants to see “accountability” in the case.

Speaking at a press conference in New York on Friday, Blinken said the US has engaged directly with the Indian government on the issue and the most productive thing would be the completion of this investigation.

Trudeau on Friday said that Canada shared with India “many weeks ago” evidence on the killing of Nijjar and wants New Delhi to commit constructively with Ottawa to establish the facts in the “very serious matter.”

When asked about Canada sharing any information in the case with India, the Ministry of External Affairs (MEA) in New Delhi said: “No specific information has been shared by Canada on this case, either then or before or after. We have, you know, as we have said, or I think we have made very clear, we are willing to look at any specific information.”

Taiwanese factory fire death toll rises to 10

Taipei (Taiwan): Search teams found the bodies of the last three missing people on Sunday at the site of a golf ball factory fire in southern Taiwan, bringing the death toll to 10, according to Taiwanese media reports. Launch Technologies, the operator of the plant, is a major global supplier of golf balls.

Four of the victims were firefighters. Taiwan’s Central News Agency, quoting a Pingtung County fire official, said an explosion caused part of the building to collapse about 6:10 pm on Friday, trapping firefighters and workers under rubble. A second explosion followed 20 minutes later.

Two bodies were found on Sunday morning and the final one was recovered in the afternoon. About 100 people were injured in the blaze at Pingtung Technology Industrial Park. The fire was not extinguished until the next day. The cause remained unclear. Taiwan is a major manufacturer of golf balls with factories supplying major brands including Callaway, TaylorMade, Bridgestone, Mizuno and Wilson, according to the 2021 annual report of Launch Technologies Co.

Launch Technologies, which is listed on the Taipei Exchange, shipped about 260 million golf balls last year, accounting for one-fifth of the global total, the Central News Agency said. About 80 per cent of its sales are in the United States. The Ministry of Labour said on Saturday it would open an occupational safety investigation into Launch Technologies and its parent company. The factory, which is in an export processing zone, has been fined in the past for violations found during inspections, the Central News Agency said.

Biden admn poised to allow Israeli citizens US travel without visa

AP ■ WASHINGTON

The Biden administration is poised to admit Israel this week into an exclusive club that will allow its citizens to travel to the United States without a U.S. visa despite Washington’s ongoing concerns about the Israeli government’s treatment of Palestinian Americans. US officials say an announcement of Israel’s entry into the Visa Waiver Program is planned for late in the week, just before the end of the federal budget year on Saturday, which is the deadline for Israel’s admission without having to requalify for eligibility next year.

The Department of Homeland Security administers the program, which currently allows citizens of 40 mostly European and Asian countries to travel to the U.S. for three months without visas.

Homeland Security Secretary Alejandro Mayorkas is set to make the announcement Thursday, shortly after receiving a recommendation from Secretary of State Antony Blinken that Israel be admitted, according to five officials familiar with the matter who spoke on condition of anonymity because the decision has not yet been publicly announced.

Blinken’s recommendation is expected to be delivered no later than Tuesday, the officials said, and the final announcement will come just eight days after President Joe Biden met with Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu in New York on the sidelines of the U.N. General Assembly. The leaders did not raise the issue in their brief remarks to reporters at that meeting but it has been a subject of intense negotiation and debate for months. Israel’s admission into the program has been a priority for successive Israeli leaders and will be a major accomplishment for Netanyahu, who has sparred frequently with the Biden administration over Iran, the Palestinian conflict and most recently a proposed remake of Israel’s judicial system that crit-

ics say will make the country less democratic.

Netanyahu’s far-right government has drawn repeated US criticism over its treatment of Palestinians, including its aggressive construction of West Bank settlements, its opposition to Palestinian statehood and incendiary anti-Palestinian comments by senior Cabinet ministers.

The US move will give a welcome boost at home to Netanyahu. He has faced months of mass protests against his judicial plan and is likely to come under criticism from the Palestinians, who say the U.S. should not be rewarding the Israeli government at a time when peace efforts are at a standstill.

Israel met two of the three most critical criteria over the past two years — a low percentage of visa application rejections and a low visa overstay rate — to join the U.S. program. It had struggled to meet the third, which is a requirement for reciprocity that means all U.S. citizens, including Palestinian Americans, must be treated equally when traveling to or through Israel.

Claiming national security reasons, Israel has long had separate entry requirements and screening processes for Palestinian Americans. Many complained that the procedures were onerous and discriminatory.

Americans with Palestinian residency documents in the West Bank and Gaza Strip were largely barred from using Israel’s international airport. Instead, like other Palestinians, they were forced to travel through either Jordan or Egypt to reach their destinations. In recent months, Israel has moved to adjust its entry requirements for Palestinian Americans, including allowing them to fly in and out of Ben Gurion International Airport in Tel Aviv and going directly to the West Bank and Israel proper, according to the officials. Israel also has pledged to ease movement for Palestinian Americans traveling in and out of the Hamas-ruled Gaza Strip.

Israeli military raid kills 2 Palestinians

AP ■ NOUR SHAMS REFUGEE BANK CAMP

Two Palestinians were killed during an Israeli military raid on Sunday in the northern West Bank, Palestinian health officials said, the latest bloodshed in a surge of violence during a sensitive Jewish holiday period.

The Israeli military said it moved into the Nour Shams refugee camp, near the town of Tulkarem, to destroy what it described as a militant command centre and bomb-storage facility in a building.

It said that engineering units detonated a number of bombs planted under roads and that militants opened fire and hurled explosives, as troops responded with live fire.

The Palestinian Health

Ministry said two men — Asid Abu Ali, 21, and Abdulrahman Abu Daghash, 32 — were killed by Israeli fire.

The raid caused heavy damage to the camp’s main road, severing water pipes and flooding parts of the street. The ground floor of the targeted building was heavily damaged, while part of the exterior wall of the second floor collapsed.

Elsewhere in the West Bank, Birzeit University, a major Palestinian institution, said the Israeli army carried out a rare raid on its campus near the city of Ramallah and arrested nine students, including the head of the student council.

It said the students were all supporters of the Hamas militant group. The university denounced the raid, which it

said caused damage to university property.

The Israeli military claimed the suspects were plotting an attack on Israeli targets.

Israel has been carrying out stepped-up military raids, primarily in the northern West Bank, for the past year and a half in what it says is a campaign to root out Palestinian militants and thwart future attacks.

But Palestinians say the raids entrench Israel’s 56-year occupation over the West Bank. The raids have shown little sign of slowing the fighting and contributed to the weakening of the Palestinian Authority, the self-rule government that administers parts of the Israeli-occupied West Bank.

Some 190 Palestinians have been killed in the West Bank

since the start of the year, according to a tally by The Associated Press. Israel says most of those killed have been militants, but youths protesting the incursions and others not involved in the confrontations have also been killed.

At least 31 people have been killed in Palestinian attacks against Israelis this year.

The tensions have begun to spread over the past week to the Gaza Strip, where hundreds of Palestinians have been holding daily demonstrations along the fence separating the territory from Israel.

On Saturday, Israeli airstrikes hit a militant site for the second time in as many days, after Palestinians sent incendiary balloons into Israeli farmland and Palestinian protesters threw stones and explo-

sives at soldiers at the separation fence

The spike in violence comes during the Jewish New Year holiday season. Jews are set to mark Yom Kippur, the holiest day on their calendar, on Sunday night followed by the weekend Sukkot festival later in the month.

During Sukkot, large numbers of Jews are expected to visit Jerusalem’s most sensitive holy site, revered by Jews as the Temple Mount and Muslims as the Noble Sanctuary. The compound, home to the Al-Aqsa Mosque, is often a focal point for violence.

Israel captured the West Bank, east Jerusalem and the Gaza Strip in the 1967 Mideast war. The Palestinians seek those territories for their hoped-for independent state.

US prez hosts a Pacific leaders summit

AP ■ WASHINGTON

President Joe Biden is set to announce the opening of new US embassies on Cook Islands and Niue on Monday as the Democratic administration aims to demonstrate to Pacific Island leaders that it remains committed to increasing American presence in the region.

The announcement about the new diplomatic missions in the South Pacific comes as Biden prepares to welcome leaders to Washington for the two-day US-Pacific Island Forum Summit. Talks are expected to heavily focus on the impact of climate change in the region. Biden has put a premium on improving relations in the Pacific amid rising US concern about China’s growing military and economic influence. Plans about the embassies were confirmed by two senior administration officials who briefed reporters on the condition of anonymity before the formal announcement.

White House press secretary Karine Jean-Pierre said Biden would use the summit to strengthen “ties with the Pacific Islands and discuss how we address complex global challenges, like tackling the existential threat of climate change,



advancing economic growth, and promoting sustainable development”.

The leaders were scheduled to be feted on Sunday at a Baltimore Ravens football game and to visit a Coast Guard cutter in Baltimore Harbour for a briefing by the commandant of the US Coast Guard on combatting illegal fishing and other maritime issues.

Pacific Island leaders have been critical of rich countries for not doing enough to control climate change despite being responsible for much of the problem, and for profiting from loans provided to vulnerable nations to mitigate the effects.

At last year’s summit, the White House unveiled its

Pacific strategy, an outline of its plan to assist the region’s leaders on pressing issues like climate change, maritime security and protecting the region from overfishing.

The administration pledged the US would add USD 810 million in new aid for Pacific Island nations over the next decade, including USD 130 million on efforts to stymie the impacts of climate change. The forum includes Australia, Cook Islands, Micronesia, Fiji, French Polynesia, Kiribati, Nauru, New Caledonia, New Zealand, Niue, Palau, Papua New Guinea, Republic of Marshall Islands, Samoa, Solomon Islands, Tonga, Tuvalu, and Vanuatu.

Biden will welcome the leaders to the White House on

Monday morning for talks and a working lunch. They also will meet on Monday with Biden’s special envoy on climate, John Kerry, for talks focused on climate change. Secretary of State Antony Blinken and UN Ambassador Linda Thomas-Greenfield will host the leaders at the State Department for a dinner.

Kerry and USAID administrator Samantha Power will host the leaders on Tuesday for climate talks with members of the philanthropic community. The leaders also are slated to meet with members of Congress and Treasury Secretary Janet Yellen is to host a roundtable with the leaders and members of the business community.

Power last month travelled to Fiji to open a new USAID mission that will manage agency programs in nine Pacific Island countries: Fiji, Kiribati, Nauru, Samoa, Tonga, Tuvalu, Republic of the Marshall Islands, Federated States of Micronesia, and Palau.

The US this year has opened embassies in Solomon Islands and Tonga, and is on track to open an embassy in Vanuatu early next year.

The White House said most members of the 18-member forum were dispatching

their top elected official or foreign minister to the summit.

But the administration was “very disappointed” that Solomon Islands Prime Minister Manasseh Sogavare, who was in New York last week for the UN General Assembly, opted not to stick around for the White House summit, according to an administration official. The Solomon Islands last year signed a security pact with China.

Prime Minister Meltek Sato Kilman Livtuvanu of Vanuatu also is expected to miss the summit. He was elected by lawmakers earlier this month to replace Ishmael Kalsakau, who lost a no-confidence vote in parliament.

Biden earlier this year had to cut short a planned visit to the Indo-Pacific, scrapping what was to be a historic stop in Papua New Guinea, as well as a visit to Australia for a gathering with fellow leaders of the so-called Quad partnership so he could focus on debt limit talks in Washington. He would have been the first sitting US president to visit Papua new Guinea.

The US President is set to honour Australian Prime Minister Anthony Albanese with a state visit next month.



A giant image of Pope Francis is lifted as Pope Francis arrives at the "Velodrome Stadium", in Marseille, France, to celebrate mass, Saturday. Francis, during a two-day visit, will join Catholic bishops from the Mediterranean region on discussions that will largely focus on migration. AP/PTI

Some UK cops put down guns after an officer gets charged with Black man’s murder

AP ■ LONDON

London’s police force said on Sunday that some officers are refusing to conduct armed patrols after a colleague was charged with murder in the fatal shooting of an unarmed Black man. A Metropolitan Police marksman was charged on Wednesday over the September 2022 death of Chris Kaba, 24.

Kaba was killed after officers in an unmarked vehicle pursued and stopped the car he was driving. He was struck by a single bullet fired through the windshield as he sat in the Audi car.

The case renewed allegations of institutional racism within the London police department. Kaba’s family welcomed the murder charge against the officer, who has not



been publicly named.

He was granted conditional bail and is expected to stand trial next year.

Only about one in 10 of London’s police officers carry firearms, and the ones that do undergo special training.

The Metropolitan Police force said on Sunday that “a number of officers have taken the decision to step back from armed duties while they consider their position.”

It said officers were concerned that the murder charge “signals a shift in the way the decisions they make in the

most challenging circumstances will be judged.”

The BBC said more than 100 officers had turned in their firearm permits and that police from neighbouring forces were called in to help patrol London on Saturday night.

Home Secretary Suella Braverman, who is in charge of policing for the UK’s Conservative government, said she would review armed policing to ensure that armed officers “have the confidence to do their jobs.”

“In the interest of public safety, they have to make split-second decisions under extraordinary pressures,” Braverman posted on X, formerly known as Twitter. “They mustn’t fear ending up in the dock for carrying out their duties. Officers risking their lives to keep us safe have my full backing, and

I will do everything in my power to support them.”

Fatal shootings by police in the UK are rare. In the year to March 2022, armed officers in England and Wales fired weapons at people four times, according to official statistics.

It is also extremely rare for British police officers to be charged with murder or manslaughter over actions performed while they were on duty.

In one of the few cases in recent years, a police constable was sentenced in 2021 to eight years in prison for the killing of Dalian Atkinson, a former professional soccer player who died after being shot by a stun gun and kicked in the head during an altercation. The officer, Benjamin Monk, was cleared of murder but convicted of manslaughter.

Russian airstrikes kill 2, hurts 3 in southern Ukraine

War enters 20th month

AP ■ KYIV

Russian airstrikes on Sunday killed two people and wounded three others in southern Ukraine's Kherson province, the region's governor reported on Sunday as the war in Ukraine entered a 20th month. According to Gov. Oleksandr Prokudin, Russian forces struck the city of Beryslav, destroying an unspecified number of private houses. A woman was killed and three people were wounded, including a police officer, he said.

Another airstrike also killed a 67-year-old man in the village of Ilove, Prokudin said without specifying the type of weapons used in the attack.

The communities hit both are located in the Ukrainian-controlled part of the Kherson region, where the Dnieper River that bisects the province has marked a battle line since Russian troops withdrew across it in November 2022, a retreat that boosted the invaded country's morale.

The Russians regrouped on the river's eastern bank and regularly shell cities and villages across the river, including the city of Kherson, the regional capital that was occupied early on in the war but retaken by Ukrainian forces more than 10 months ago.

In Russia, a Ukrainian drone hit an administrative building in the city of Kursk and "insignificantly damaged" the roof, regional Gov. Roman Starovoit reported. He didn't report any casualties or say what the building housed.

Unconfirmed media reports both in Russia and Ukraine said it was the offices of the Kursk branch of Russia's main security agency, the Federal Security Service, also known as the FSB.

The Kursk region of Russia borders Ukraine and also is a frequent target of attacks. The drone strike on Sunday took place as residents commemo-

rated the anniversary of the regional capital's founding.

There was no immediate comment from the Ukrainian authorities, who usually don't acknowledge responsibility for attacks on Russian territory.

Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy was traveling home from North America, where he addressed the UN General Assembly and paid his first wartime visit to Canada.

In a social media statement on Saturday, Zelenskyy said he stopped in Poland on his way back to Ukraine to give state awards to two Polish volunteers.

Zelenskyy apparently didn't meet with any Polish officials, but in a post on X, previously known as Twitter, he thanked Poland for "its invaluable support and solidarity that helps defend freedom of our entire Europe".

Poland has taken in large numbers of Ukrainian refugees and been a fierce supporter of neighbouring Ukraine since Russian President Vladimir Putin sent troops into the country on February 24, 2022.

However, a trade dispute has recently tested the relationship between Kyiv and Warsaw.

The Ukrainian government this month filed a complaint with the World Trade Organisation against Poland, Hungary and Slovakia for banning imports of Ukrainian farm products, which are important for the war-weary country's battered economy.

The three European Union member nations bristled at the move.

Polish Prime Minister Mateusz Morawiecki responded by saying his country was "no longer transferring any weapons to Ukraine because we are now arming ourselves with the most modern weapons".

His remarks left many wondering if the Western resolve to support Ukraine in the war with Russia is waning.

Russian foreign min lambasts West

AP ■ UNITED NATIONS

Russia's top diplomat denounced the United States and the West on Saturday as self-interested defenders of a fading international power structure, but he didn't discuss his country's war in Ukraine in his speech to the UN General Assembly.

"The US and its subordinate Western collective are continuing to fuel conflicts which artificially divide humanity into hostile blocks and hamper the achievement of overall aims. They're doing everything they can to prevent the formation of a genuine multipolar world order," Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov said.

"They are trying to force the world to play according to their own self-centered rules," he said.

As for the 19-month war in Ukraine, he recapped some historical complaints going back to the 1991 breakup of the Soviet Union, and alluded to the billions of dollars that the US and Western allies have spent in supporting Ukraine. But he didn't delve into the current fighting.

For a second year in a row,

the General Assembly is taking place with no end to the war in sight. A three-month-long Ukrainian counteroffensive has gone slower than Kyiv hoped, making modest advances but no major breakthroughs.

Ukraine's seats in the assembly hall were empty for at least part of Lavrov's speech. An American diplomat wrote on a notepad in her country's section of the audience during Lavrov's speech.

The speech accused the US of, among other things, "whipping up hysteria on the Korean Peninsula." North Korean leader Kim Jong Un made a rare foray out of his country last week by train to meet Russian President Vladimir Putin, an unsettling development for South Korea and allies including the United States.

Later, in a press conference, Lavrov said the U.S. was "effectively engaged in hostilities with us, using the Ukrainians as fodder."

"You can call this whatever you want to call this, but they are directly at war with us," he said. "We call this a hybrid war. But that doesn't

change the reality."

Under assembly procedures that give the microphone to presidents ahead of cabinet-level officials, Lavrov spoke four days after Ukrainian President Volodomyr Zelenskyy and U.S. President Joe Biden.

Zelenskyy accused Russia of "weaponising" food, energy and even children against Ukraine and "the international rules-based order" at large.

Biden sounded a similar note in pressing world leaders to keep up support for Ukraine: "If we allow Ukraine to be carved up, is the independence of any nation secure?" On North Korea, he reiterated criticism of the North's violations of Security Council resolutions regarding its nuclear and ballistic missile programs but said Washington is "committed to diplomacy that would bring about the denuclearization of the Korean Peninsula."

Since invading Ukraine in February 2022, Russia has offered a number of explanations for what it calls the "special military operation" in Ukraine.

Among them: claims that

Death toll from Somalia bombing rises to 21

Mogadishu (AP): The death toll from a bombing attack at a government checkpoint in central Somalia has reached 21, authorities said Sunday.

The number of wounded in Saturday's truck bombing in Beledweyne stood at 52, said Abdifatah Mohamed Yusuf, director general of the Hirshabelle ministry of humanitarian and disaster management.

He told The Associated Press that 17 of those critically wounded were airlifted to the capital, Mogadishu, for treatment.

There has been no immediate claim of responsibility. East Africa's al-Qaeda affiliate al-Shabab often carries out such attacks in Somalia.

31 hurt as train collides in Pak's Punjab province

AP ■ LAHORE

At least 31 people were injured when a passenger train collided on Sunday with a freight train parked on the main railway line in Pakistan's Punjab province, according to a media report.

The accident took place near the Qila Sattar Shah Station in Sheikhupura district. The Lahore-bound passenger train coming from Mianwali was travelling on the same track where a freight train was already parked, resulting in the crash, Geo News reported. The train driver attempted to avoid the crash but to no avail, it said.

According to the rescue personnel, 31 passengers were injured in the accident. Five injured passengers have been transferred to the district headquarters hospital, they added.

The railway officials said an investigation into the crash had been launched. A railways spokesperson said in a statement

that train operations are running smoothly in the Lahore division following the crash. The track was cleared after the accident, the spokesperson added.

According to the spokesperson, four railways officials including train driver Imran Sarwar and his assistant Muhammad Bilal have been suspended. An inquiry commission led by a deputy principal officer has been formed, which will submit its report on the incident in 24 hours, the spokesperson added.

The railways chairman said legal action will be taken against those responsible for the incident. CEO Railways Shahid Aziz said no compromise will be made on the safety of passengers. Former prime minister and Pakistan Muslim League Nawaz (PML-N) President Shehbaz Sharif expressed sorrow over the incident and demanded action against those responsible for the crash.

Kyiv was oppressing Russian speakers in Ukraine's east and so Moscow had to help them, that Ukraine's growing ties with the West in recent years pose a risk to Russia, and that it's also threatened by NATO's eastward expansion over the decades.

Lavrov hammered on those themes in his General Assembly speech last year, and he alluded again Saturday to what Russia perceives as NATO's improper encroachment.

But his address looked at it through a wide-angle lens, surveying a landscape, as Russia sees it, of Western countries' efforts to cling to outsized influence in global affairs. He portrayed the effort as doomed. The rest of the planet is sick of it, Lavrov argued: "They don't want to live under anybody's yoke anymore." That shows, he said, in the growth of such groups as BRICS - the developing-economies coalition that currently includes Brazil, Russia, India, China and South Africa and recently invited Argentina, Egypt, Ethiopia, Iran, Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates to join next year.

"Our future is being shaped by a struggle, a struggle between the global majority in favor of a fairer distribution of global benefits and civilized diversity and between the few who wield neocolonial methods of subjugation in order to maintain their domination which is slipping through their hands," Lavrov said, adding that the United Nations needs to change to have "a fair balance of interests. Both Lavrov and Zelenskyy also addressed the UN Security Council on Wednesday but didn't actually face off. Zelenskyy left the room before Lavrov came in. Lavrov also sat out Zelenskyy's speech at the General Assembly, but rejected the Ukrainian president's 10-point peace plan as "not feasible" and "not realistic" during the press conference following his speech. "I had my own affairs to attend to. We know what he's going to say. Why waste time?" the Russian said to explain his absence. Nonetheless, he said he'd watched video of the Ukrainian president's remarks there and in the Security Council and thought "he seemed rather grim."

Jailed Kremlin critic transferred to Siberia prison

Tallinn (Estonia) (AP) An imprisoned Russian opposition figure has been transferred to a maximum security prison in Siberia and placed in a tiny "punishment cell," his lawyer said on Sunday.

Vladimir Kara-Murza Jr., 42, earlier this year was convicted of treason for publicly denouncing Russia's war in Ukraine and sentenced to 25 years in prison as part of the Kremlin's relentless crackdown on critics. On Thursday, he arrived at IK-6 — a maximum security penal colony in the Siberian city of Omsk, his lawyer Vadim Prokhorov said in a Facebook post on Sunday.

Prokhorov said the transfer from a detention centre in Moscow, where Kara-Murza was being held pending trial and appeals, took less than three weeks. Russian prison transfers, usually done by train, are notorious for taking a long time, sometimes weeks, during which there's no access to prisoners, and information about their whereabouts is limited.

Kara-Murza, a journalist and an opposition activist, was jailed in April 2022. The charges against him stemmed from a speech he gave weeks prior to the arrest to the Arizona House of Representatives in which he denounced Russia's invasion of Ukraine. An associate of opposition leader Boris Nemtsov, who was killed near the Kremlin in 2015, Kara-Murza survived poisonings in 2015 and 2017 that he blamed on the Kremlin. Russian officials have denied responsibility. Kara-Murza rejected the charges against him and called them punishment for standing up to President Vladimir Putin. He likened the proceedings to the show trials under Soviet dictator Josef Stalin. Prokhorov said on Sunday that upon arrival to the penal colony in Omsk, Kara-Murza was immediately placed in a "punishment cell" — a tiny concrete cell where convicts are held in isolation for violating prison regulations. Prison authorities have regularly sent imprisoned dissidents to such cells in recent months over alleged minor infractions, a practice that is widely considered designed to put additional pressure on Kremlin critics behind bars.

Masked gunmen attack Kosovo police, 1 killed

Tensions with Serbia escalate

AP ■ PRISTINA

Kosovo's prime minister on Sunday said one police officer was killed and another wounded in an attack he blamed on support from neighbouring Serbia, increasing tensions between the two former war foes at a delicate moment in their European Union-facilitated dialogue to normalize ties.

Prime Minister Albin Kurti said "masked professionals armed with heavy weapons" opened fire on a police patrol in the village of Banjska, in Leposavic municipality, 55 kilometers (35 miles) north of the capital Pristina at 3 am (01:00 GMT).

Kosovo police said two trucks without license plates blocked a bridge at the entrance to the village. Three police units were sent to unblock it but came under fire from different positions with various weapons, including hand grenades and bombs.

Police managed to push back the attack and take two injured police officers to the hospital in southern Mitrovica.

One of them was dead on arrival, doctors said. The condition of the other is not life-threatening.

Kosovo Police said on Facebook that one of the attackers was killed.

More than 12 hours after the attack began, police say there are still sporadic exchanges of gunfire and local roads remain closed, including two border crossings with Serbia.

The temple of the Serbian Orthodox monastery in Banjska is currently locked down. A group of pilgrims from the city of Novi Sad, in northern Serbia, is inside, along with an abbot, the Rev. Danilo.

In a statement, the Kosovo Diocese of the Serbian

Orthodox Church — which oversees the monasteries in the former Serbian province — said a group of masked men in an armored vehicle stormed the monastery, breaking down the locked gate.

"Armed, masked men move around the courtyard and occasional gunshots are heard," the diocese said.

Serbia and its former province, Kosovo, have been at odds for decades. Their 1998-99 war left more than 10,000 people dead, mostly Kosovo Albanians. Kosovo unilaterally declared independence in 2008 but Belgrade has refused to recognize the move.

Speaking after a meeting of the country's Security Council Sunday, Kurti said it was a "sad day" for Kosovo and named the dead police officer as Afrim Bunjaku.

The prime minister displayed a set of photos which showed a number of four-wheel drive vehicles without license plates and an armoured personnel carrier "which does not belong to the Kosovo police," near the monastery in Banjska.

There was ongoing gunfire from what he described as a group of at least 30 military professionals, masked and heavily armed.

"It is clear that these uniformed persons, at least 30, are an organized professional unit who have come to fight in Kosovo," he said, calling on them to hand themselves over to the Kosovar authorities.

Most of Kosovo's ethnic Serb minority lives in four municipalities around Mitrovica, in the north. Reports in Kosovo Serb media said residents of Banjska were woken by shootings and explosions in the night.

"It was a real little war: first some gunfire, then silence, shootings, detonations," Serbian Kossev news agency

quoted an unidentified resident as saying.

Serbian media said both local roads and crossings with Serbia were blocked.

"Organized crime, which is politically, financially and logistically supported from Belgrade, is attacking our state," Kurti wrote on his Facebook page.

Kosovar President Vjosa Osmani, who is in New York at the United Nations General Assembly, denounced the killing.

"Such attacks testify once again to the destabilizing power of the criminal bands organized from Serbia which for a long time ... are destabilizing Kosovo and the region," she said. EU's foreign policy chief Josep Borrell condemned "the hideous attack by an armed gang against Kosovo Police officers" and asked that "all facts about the attack need to be established. The responsible perpetrators must face justice."

He added that "these attacks must stop immediately," adding that the EU's rule of law mission, or EULEX, as second security responder, is on the ground and in close contact with the authorities and KFOR. Miroslav Lajcak, EU's envoy for the talks, also condemned the "horrific attack" and repeated the call "to return to dialogue immediately." In a statement, the US ambassador in Pristina "strongly" condemned the orchestrated, violent attacks on the Kosovo Police this morning," adding that "the Kosovo Police has full and legitimate responsibility for enforcing the rule of law according to the constitution and laws of Kosovo."

Serbia's parliamentary speaker Vladimir Orlic said Kurti "was quick to blame the Serbs," adding that Kurti was the one who wanted an "escalation."



An activist from the climate protection group "Last Generation" is carried away by police officers during a protest prior to the start of the Berlin marathon, in Berlin, Sunday. **AP/PTI**

Largest Hindu temple to be inaugurated in New Jersey on Oct 8

Robbinsville (New Jersey) (PTI): The world's largest Hindu temple constructed outside India in the modern era is all set to be inaugurated in New Jersey on October 8.

About 60 miles (90 km) south of Times Square, New York, or about 180 miles (289 km) north of Washington DC, the BAPS Swaminarayan Akshardham in the little Robbinsville Township of New Jersey has been built by an army of more than 12,500 volunteers from across the US in over 12 years from 2011 to 2023. Being currently visited by thousands of Hindus and people of other faiths every day from across the country ahead of its formal inauguration, the temple popular as Akshardham measures 255 ft x 345 ft x 191 ft and spans over 183 acres. It has been designed according to ancient Hindu

scriptures and includes design elements from ancient Indian culture including 10,000 statues and statuettes, carvings of Indian musical instruments and dance forms. The temple is possibly the second largest after Angkor Wat in Cambodia.

The 12th-century Angkor Wat Temple Complex, the largest Hindu temple in the World, is spread over 500 acres and is now a UNESCO World Heritage site. The Akshardham temple in New Delhi which was opened for the public in November 2005 is spread over 100 acres. "Our spiritual leader (Pramukh Swami Maharaj) had a vision that in the Western hemisphere there should be a place which can be a place for all people of the world, not only for Hindus, Aksharvatsaldas Swami told PTI in an interview.

NASA's asteroid samples land on Earth after release from spacecraft

AP ■ WASHINGTON

NASA's first asteroid samples fetched from deep space parachuted into the Utah desert Sunday to cap a seven-year journey. In a flyby of Earth, the Osiris-Rex spacecraft released the sample capsule from 63,000 miles (100,000 kilometers) out. The small capsule landed four hours later on a remote expanse of military land, as the mothership set off after another asteroid.

Scientists estimate the capsule holds at least a cup of rubble from the carbon-rich asteroid known as Bennu, but won't know for sure until the container is opened. Some spilled and floated away when the spacecraft scooped up too much and rocks jammed the container's lid during collection three years ago.

Japan, the only other country to bring back asteroid samples, gathered about a tea-

spoon in a pair of asteroid missions.

The pebbles and dust delivered Sunday represent the biggest haul from beyond the moon. Preserved building blocks from the dawn of our solar system 4.5 billion years ago, the samples will help scientists better understand how Earth and life formed.

Osiris-Rex, the mothership, rocketed away on the \$1 billion mission in 2016. It reached Bennu two years later and, using a long stick vacuum, grabbed rubble from the small roundish space rock in 2020. By the time it returned, the spacecraft had logged 4 billion miles (6.2 billion kilometers).

NASA's recovery effort in Utah included helicopters as well as a temporary clean room set up at the Defense Department's Utah Test and Training Range. The samples will be flown Monday morning to a new lab at NASA's Johnson

Space Center in Houston. The building already houses the hundreds of pounds (kilograms) of moon rocks gathered by the Apollo astronauts more than a half-century ago.

The mission's lead scientist, Dante Lauretta of the University of Arizona, will accompany the samples to Texas. The opening of the container in Houston in the next day or two will be "the real moment of truth," given the uncertainty over the amount inside, he said ahead of the landing.

Engineers estimate the canister holds 250 grams (8.82 ounces) of material from Bennu, plus or minus 100 grams (plus or minus 3.53 ounces). Even at the low end, it will easily surpass the minimum requirement of the mission, Lauretta said. It will take a few weeks to get a precise measurement, said NASA's lead curator Nicole Lunning.

Probe against dumping of cheap Chinese goods

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

The Commerce Ministry's investigation arm DGTR has "suo-motu" initiated probes against alleged dumping of three products, including unframed glass mirrors and fasteners, by Chinese companies as the authority seeks to guard MSME units against cheap imports from the neighbouring country. Usually, anti-dumping investigations are initiated based on an application filed by domestic producers, but since the fragmented industries did not have the know-how of the procedures involved in the trade remedy probe, the Directorate General of Trade Remedies (DGTR) has undertaken the exercise to investigate the matter on its own initiative. According to three separate notifications, the DGTR said that it is probing alleged dumping of telescopic channel drawer, unframed glass mirror and

fasteners.

The move is aimed at granting much-needed protection to the MSME (micro, small and medium enterprises) producers against dumped goods from China. "This is a giant leap forward from DGTR's first suo-motu investigation in 2000 on dry batteries from China wherein the duties were imposed for five years. This is also the first occasion where India's anti-dumping watchdog has initiated three suo-motu investigations at one go against China," a senior government official said. The directorate had received information that Indian producers of these three products were facing stiff competition from unfairly priced Chinese imports. According to one of the notifications, a representation was received from Highhope Furniture Fittings Manufacturers Associates Pvt Ltd consisting of 25 manufactur-



ers of telescopic channel drawer stating that there has been a steep decline in Indian production due to a significant increase in dumped imports from China. It has been estimated that the import value is Rs 356 crore. On unframed glass mirror, representation was received from All India Mirror Manufacturers Association. The maximum producers of unframed glass mirrors are

cent of Indian demand with the import value of Rs 183 crore. Similarly, Apt Tools and Machinery along with Northern Screw Association filed a representation before the DGTR requesting anti-dumping duty on the imports of nuts, bolts, screws from China. The imports of these nuts and bolts were Rs 137 crore during the last financial year. The producers of the product are SME which is estimated to be around 179 with an investment of more than Rs 1,200 crore catering to an employment of more than 15,000 people. The imports from China in the last financial year for this product has been around 16,168 metric tonnes. In 2022-23, India had imported close to USD 100 billion worth of merchandise from China. India's merchandise trade deficit with China stood at USD 83 billion in that fiscal. To help fragmented industries avail benefits of trade reme-

dies like antidumping and countervailing duties, earlier the DGTR had simplified procedural requirements to facilitate their participation in seeking protection against unfair trade practices of imports. DGTR had issued trade notices allowing for a sampled analysis of the condition of these industries. This has made remedies against unfairly priced imports more accessible to domestic producers. If it is established that the dumping of these products has caused material injury to domestic players, DGTR would recommend the imposition of anti-dumping duty on these imports. The finance ministry takes the final decision to impose duties. Anti-dumping probes are conducted by countries to determine whether domestic industries have been hurt because of a surge in cheap imports.



Everyone wants a pie of India's largest renewable power sector

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

French energy giant TotalEnergies SE's USD 300 million investment in clean energy projects of Adani Green Energy Ltd has taken the total investments poured in by global investors in India's largest renewable power producer to USD 1.63 billion or about Rs 14,000 crore, sources close to the company said. This has made Adani the largest solar power producer in India as well as one of the lowest cost renewable power producers in the world. Average portfolio tariff is as low as Rs 3.02 per unit as against average procurement price of the country of Rs 3.75 per unit. It already has a portfolio of 20.4 GW across operational, under-construction, awarded and acquired assets. Sources said the firm has given a capex guidance of Rs 14,000 crore for this year for around 3 GW of projects. Next year, it is likely to do at least 5 GW, which would mean another Rs 23,000-24,000 crore. The management attributes its ability to produce lowest cost power to its execution, which includes site identification acquisition, concession and regulatory agreements, investment case development, engineering and design, sourcing and quality checks, equity and debt funding for the project and highly tech-enabled O&M. The company has built most of the portfolio during the post-Covid era and has a track record of delivering each of its projects before time. As against, 18 months period permitted from the effective scheduling of the PPA to commissioning, the company has a track record of executing this in less than a year, sources said. With its capacity target to reach 45 GW, it has the potential to deliver 6x growth from FY23 and FY30, they said, adding around 40 GW worth resource assessment has already been done - sites, geotechnical studies, sourcing equipment etc. With constantly upgrading technology, there are chances that there could be an upside surprise in terms of output.

Last week, Total announced it will hold a 50 per cent stake in the new joint venture firm where Adani Green Energy Ltd (AGEL) will hold the rest. The joint venture will hold a portfolio of 1,050 MW, including 300 MW of already operational capacity, 500 MW under construction and 250 MW under-development assets with a blend of solar and wind power. Total already has a 19.7 per cent stake in AGEL. It also has an equal joint venture with AGEL, called AGE23L that holds a portfolio of 2,353 MW. The USD 300 million investment Total is making in the joint venture is the first since the Hindenburg report in January highlighted Adani Group's debt pile and alleged accounting fraud and stock manipulation, which Adani denies. Sources said AGEL is one company within the Adani Portfolio, which has attracted a range of investors over the past few months including repeat strategic investor Total, one of the largest emerging market funds GQG Capital Partners and one of the world's largest sovereign funds Qatar Investment Authority. Together these three investors have invested USD 1.63 billion or close to Rs 14,000 crore over the past few months, taking advantage of the attractive valuations post the short-seller report, they said. GQG Partners has taken a 6.8 per cent stake in AGEL while QIA picked up 2.7 per cent. IHC International Holding Company has another 1.3 per cent stake. Explaining the rationale of the investments,

'G20 declaration should spur Government to give big push to MSMEs'

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

The declaration of G20 nations under India's presidency should spur the Government to give a big push to the MSME sector by simplifying the regulatory process and enhancing their access to affordable capital, say experts. The commitments made in the G20's New Delhi declaration with regard to the MSMEs ought to be followed by the member nations as the sector has the potential to generate employment and promote sustained growth. The New Delhi Declaration adopted early this month said the G20 recognise that startups and Micro, Small and Medium Enterprises (MSMEs) are natural engines of growth. They are key to socio-economic transformation by driving innovation and creating employment. "We welcome the establishment of the Start-up 20 Engagement Group during India's G20 Presidency and its continuation," it said. Chairman of CII Delhi State Council and MD and CEO of Samtel Avionics Limited Puneet Kaura said the MSME is considered important the world over and the G20 declaration has

once again underlined the need for extending financial and non-financial support by the governments to this sector. "It was heartening for the MSME to have received the due recognition by the G20 under India's presidency. These promises, however, should not remain on paper but must result in action on the ground as the sector has immense potential to generate quality employment across the country and contribute to the country's exports which have been suffering on account of global problems," he said. Bhagyashree Bhansali, CEO of The Disposal Company (TDC), said that to further promote startups/MSMEs, the government should simplify regulatory processes, enhance access to affordable capital, foster industry-academia collaborations for innovation, and provide targeted skill development programmes. "Startup/MSMEs are at the forefront of promoting digital technology and sustainable growth. They drive innovation in AI adoption, enhancing efficiency and reducing environmental footprints. By creating tech-driven solutions, they enable businesses to operate sustainably."

RBI likely to keep interest rate unchanged as retail inflation high

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

The Reserve Bank is likely to maintain status quo on policy rates for the fourth time in a row at its bi-monthly monetary policy review meeting early next month, as retail inflation continues to remain high and the US Federal Reserve has decided to keep a hawkish stance for some more time, according to experts. The Reserve Bank had raised the benchmark repo rate to 6.5 per cent on February 8, 2023 and since then it has retained the rates at the same level in view of the stubbornly high retail inflation and certain global factors including elevated crude oil prices in the international market. The Reserve Bank Governor-headed six-member Monetary Policy Committee (MPC) meeting is scheduled for October 4-6, 2023. The last meeting of the MPC, the highest rating-setting panel, was in August. "We do expect the RBI to hold on to a status quo position this time as inflation is still high and liquidity tight. In fact, going by RBI forecast on infla-

tion, it would be above 5 per cent in Q3 too, which will ensure that the status quo prevails for the calendar year for sure and probably Q4 too," said Madan Sabnavis, Chief Economist, Bank of Baroda. Sabnavis further said there are uncertainties relating to Kharif crop, especially on pulses, which can increase prices. "The comfort is that there is less concern on growth which is on target," he added. Although the Consumer Price Index (CPI)-based retail inflation eased a bit to 6.83 per cent in August from 7.44 per

cent in the preceding month in July, it remained above the Reserve Bank's comfort level of 6 per cent. It may be mentioned that the government has mandated the RBI to keep inflation at 4 per cent with 2 per cent margin on either side. Aditi Nayar, Chief Economist, ICRA Limited said the headline CPI inflation is expected to ease to 5.3-5.5 per cent in September 2023 from 6.8 per cent in August 2023, benefitting from the halving of the average price of tomatoes as well as a favourable base.

FPIs outflow in equities crosses ₹10,000 cr

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

Foreign Portfolio Investors (FPIs) have pulled out over Rs 10,000 crore from Indian equities in the first three weeks of September, primarily due to rising US interest rates, recessionary fears, and overvalued domestic stocks. Before the outflow, FPIs were incessantly buying Indian equities in the last six months from March to August and brought in Rs 1.74 lakh crore during the period. Mayank Mehra, smallcase, manager and principal partner at Craving Alpha, believes that



strong economic growth prospects, attractive valuations, and government reforms could support foreign investment flows in the next month. "Since valuations remain high even after the recent pull-

back and US bond yields are attractive (the US 10-year bond yield is around 4.49 per cent) FPIs are likely to press sales so long as this trend persists," V K Vijayakumar, Chief Investment Strategist at Geojit Financial Services, said. According to the data with depositories, in the 15 trading days, so far in September, FPIs were sellers in 11 days with a net withdrawal of Rs 10,164 crore. This figure includes bulk deals and investments through the primary market. Of the total pullout of Rs 10,164 crore so far this month (till September 22), over Rs

4,700 crore was withdrawn in the last week alone. The latest outflow came after FPI investment in equities hit a four-month low of Rs 12,262 crore in August. FPI flows have displayed a subdued pattern over the past few weeks. This hesitancy among investors can be attributed to growing apprehensions about inflation. and the interest rate landscape, particularly in the US, coupled with uncertainties regarding global economic growth, Himanshu Srivastava, Associate Director - Manager Research, Morningstar India, said.

412 infra projects show cost overruns of ₹4.77 lakh crore in August

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

As many as 412 infrastructure projects, each entailing an investment of Rs 150 crore or more, have been hit by cost overruns of more than Rs 4.77 lakh crore in August this year, an official report said. According to the Ministry of Statistics and Programme Implementation, which monitors infrastructure projects

worth Rs 150 crore and above, out of 1,762 projects, 412 reported cost overruns and as many as 830 projects were delayed. "The total original cost of implementation of the 1,762 projects was Rs 25,01,400.62 crore and their anticipated completion cost is likely to be Rs 29,78,681.31 crore, which reflects overall cost overruns of Rs 4,77,280.69 crore (19.08 per cent of original cost)," the ministry's latest report for August 2023 said. According to the report, the expenditure incurred on these projects till August 2023, is Rs 15,57,188.10 crore, which is 52.28 per cent of the anticipated cost of the projects. However, it stated that the number of delayed projects decreased to 624, if delay is calculated on the basis of the latest schedule of completion.

Further, it stated that for 339 projects, neither the year of commissioning nor the tentative gestation period has been reported. Out of the 830 delayed projects, 194 have overall delays in the range of 1-12 months, 190 have been delayed for 13-24 months, 323 projects for 25-60 months and 123 projects have been delayed for more than 60 months. The average time overrun in these 830 delayed projects is 36.96 months. Reasons for time overruns as reported by various project implementing agencies include delay in land acquisition, delay in obtaining forest and environmental clearances, and lack of infrastructure support and linkages. Delay in tie-up for project financing, finalisation of detailed

engineering, change in scope, tendering, ordering and equipment supply, and law and order problems were among the other reasons. The report also cited state-wise lockdowns due to COVID-19 (imposed in 2020 and 2021) as a reason for the delay in implementation of these projects. It has also been observed that project executing agencies are not reporting revised cost estimates.

KRIBHCO investing ₹1,100 cr to set up 3 grain-based ethanol plants in Gujarat, Telangana, Andhra

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

Fertiliser cooperative Krishak Bharati Cooperative Ltd (KRIBHCO) is investing around Rs 1,100 crore to set up three ethanol manufacturing plants using maize and broken rice as feedstock. These three plants are being set up in Gujarat, Telangana and Andhra Pradesh with a capacity of 250 kilo litre per day. "We are setting up three bio ethanol plants as part of our diversification plan," KRIBHCO's Chairman Chandrapal Singh said. Rajan Chowdhry, Managing Director, KRIBHCO, said these plants are expected to be operational by end of the next year. "We are investing around Rs 1,100 crore on setting up these three plants. We will be using grains like maize and broken rice as feedstock," Chowdhry told PTI. The investment is being met through a combination of internal accruals and debt, he said. Chowdhry said the cooperative will supply ethanol to oil marketing companies (OMCs) for blending with petrol. At present, the ethanol

blending with petrol is at 12 per cent and the target is to reach 20 per cent by 2025. KRIBHCO has formed a 100 per cent owned Special Purpose Vehicle (SPV) 'KRIBHCO Green Energy Private Limited' for setting up three bio ethanol projects at Hazira in Gujarat, Nellore in Andhra Pradesh and Jagtial in Telangana. According to its latest annual report, the SPV has received environment clearance as well as in principle approval from Department of Food and Public Distribution for interest subvention scheme for all the three projects. The SPV has awarded the Lump Sum Turn Key (LSTK) contracts for all the three bio ethanol projects to Excel Engineers and Consultants. KRIBHCO's total income jumped 95 per cent to Rs 25,715.07 crore during last fiscal on better sales, and it declared a dividend of 20 per cent. Total income stood at Rs 13,194.50 crore in the previous year. Addressing its 43rd annual general meeting (AGM) here recently, KRIBHCO's Chairman Singh said the cooperative earned a pre-tax profit of Rs 763.16 crore in 2022-23.

After BPCL, ONGC signs up HPCL for sale of oil from Mumbai offshore fields

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

State-owned Oil and Natural Gas Corporation (ONGC) has signed an agreement to sell crude oil it produces from Mumbai offshore fields to HPCL — the second such agreement in as many months, as India's top oil and gas producer prefers term contracts over auctions where refiners hammer deep discounts. In a post on X, formerly known as Twitter, ONGC said it has inked "term agreement with HPCL for sale of crude oil from Mumbai offshore." While it did not give details, sources aware of the matter said the pact for sale of about 4.5 million tonnes per annum of



crude oil to Hindustan Petroleum Corporation Ltd's (HPCL) Mumbai refinery. "This is the second term agreement sealed for sale of Mumbai Offshore crude oil post marketing freedom," ONGC said. Last month, ONGC had signed a similar pact to sell 4 million tonnes per annum plus an optional 0.5 million tonnes of crude oil to Bharat Petroleum Corporation Ltd (BPCL). ONGC produces 13-14 million tonnes per annum of crude oil from its fields in the Arabian

Sea, off the Mumbai coast. In June last year, the government abolished a rule that said oil from blocks awarded prior to 1999 must be sold to government-nominated customers, mostly state refiners. The old rule had led to producers such as ONGC and Oil India not getting the best market price. Subsequent to that rule change, ONGC started quarterly auctions of crude oil produced from Mumbai High and Panna/Mukta fields in the western offshore. Both will play on the mass segment and therefore, we do not expect the mass segment really to do well," Nandi told PTI. The appliance and consumer electronics industry is expected to cross Rs 70,000 crore sales this year and the festive season sales, which start from Onam in the south and cover Ganesh Chaturthi, Durga Puja and Deepawali, contribute around 25-27 per cent. Companies also expect pent-up demand for airconditioners which faced challenged due to weather-related uncertainties this summer. "There is demand even during the monsoon as there has been lesser rainfall. Therefore, temperatures were high. We see that trend very clearly in the southern, northern and parts of western and eastern markets also. In the north temperatures are high and with little rainfall, humidity levels are also high. So AC demand will be there," he said.

Appliances, electronics sales to grow 20 per cent in festivals backed by cricket

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

Boyed by a good start with Festivals in the southern markets, the appliances and consumer electronics industry expects around 18-20 per cent value-driven growth this festive season which is coinciding with the ICC Men's Cricket World Cup. The cricket World Cup tournament is coinciding with the festival season in India for the first time after 1987, and the industry expects the country's most popular sport to act as a catalyst, leading to growth in sales of TV, especially with bigger screen sizes as well as audio products such as battery-powered party speakers, soundbars, wireless headphones and ear buds. TV makers, including LG Electronic, Panasonic and Thomson, expect increased number of replacements of conventional and small-size TV screens with large-size smart TV

panels above 55 inch screen size. Premium and ultra-premium ranges of QLED and OLED TVs are also expected to be in much demand during the World Cup from October 5 to November 19. The industry expects overall sales growth of 18 to 20 per cent, and in continuation of the previous year a higher growth of over 30 per cent from premium products such as large screen TVs, higher capacity refrigerators and washing machines.



Like in earlier season, the industry is gearing up with offers and interest-free finance schemes to woo customers with new launches along with high-decibel 360 degree campaigns. However, there are also concerns about sales of value-based opening price point (OPP) mass segment products. Godrej Appliances Business Head and Executive Vice President Kamal Nandi said again this festive season would be price-led, where the volume

would be similar to last year but high-priced premium products would grow over 30 per cent. "Mass segment will be under pressure, as we have been experiencing throughout this year right from Q1 because the inflationary trend is still continuing and as a result, there is pressure on the discretionary spends. Moreover, variation in monsoon, with some states not getting adequate rains, could impact agricultural income. So, I think this

both will play on the mass segment and therefore, we do not expect the mass segment really to do well," Nandi told PTI. The appliance and consumer electronics industry is expected to cross Rs 70,000 crore sales this year and the festive season sales, which start from Onam in the south and cover Ganesh Chaturthi, Durga Puja and Deepawali, contribute around 25-27 per cent. Companies also expect pent-up demand for airconditioners which faced challenged due to weather-related uncertainties this summer. "There is demand even during the monsoon as there has been lesser rainfall. Therefore, temperatures were high. We see that trend very clearly in the southern, northern and parts of western and eastern markets also. In the north temperatures are high and with little rainfall, humidity levels are also high. So AC demand will be there," he said.

5 WINS IN A ROW

Liverpool beat West Ham 3-1 to go 2nd in Premier League

AP ■ LIVERPOOL

Son Heung-min's double earned Tottenham a point from a pulsating 2-2 draw against Arsenal, as Liverpool moved into second in the Premier League with a 3-1 win over West Ham on Sunday.

Brighton climb up to third after beating Bournemouth 3-1, but Chelsea still cannot buy a goal as Mauricio Pochettino's men lost 1-0 at home to Aston Villa.

Spurs have still won just once in their last 31 away league meetings with Arsenal, but the optimism garnered under Ange Postecoglou's early weeks in charge was not punctured at the Emirates despite twice falling behind in the north London derby.

Arsenal's bright start was rewarded when Bukayo Saka's strike was deflected into his own net by Cristian Romero.

But for the fifth time in seven games under Postecoglou, Tottenham fought back from a goal down.

David Raya has displaced Aaron Ramsdale as Arsenal's number one goalkeeper as he was selected for the third consecutive game by Mikel Arteta.

The Spaniard justified that decision with a stunning save to deny Brennan Johnson his



first Tottenham goal.

However, the visitors were not denied for long as James Maddison's cross was swept home by Son at the near post three minutes before half-time.

Romero's afternoon went from bad to worse when he was harshly penalised for handball and Saka stroked home the resulting penalty to restore Arsenal's lead.

But the Gunners lost record signing Declan Rice at half-time to injury and that

proved costly as an error from his replacement Jorginho gifted Tottenham an equaliser just a minute later.

Maddison was again the creator as he robbed the Italian midfielder and teed up Son for a cool finish into the far corner.

Liverpool cut Manchester City's lead at the top to two points as Jurgen Klopp's men showed more promising signs of getting back to their best.

The Reds sank to fifth last season, but have the firepower



Rashford unhurt in car crash

AP ■ MANCHESTER

Manchester United forward Marcus Rashford escaped unhurt after being involved in a car crash following his participation in a 1-0 win at Burnley on Saturday.

The incident happened when Rashford had left

United's Carrington training ground in his white Rolls Royce.

Erik ten Hag's squad had returned on the team coach from Burnley before leaving the training base in their personal cars.

Pictures and video emerged online showing the aftermath of the incident.

that could make them the biggest threat to City's throne as champions.

Mohamed Salah opened the scoring from the penalty spot after he was upended in the box by Nayef Aguerd.

West Ham's only previous defeat this season came at home to City last weekend and they bounced back to fully merit their equaliser before half-time when Jarrod Bowen's diving header found the far corner.

However, the Hammers were undone by a moment of magic when Alexis Mac Allister's inch-perfect chip picked out Darwin Nunez, who volleyed into the far corner. Diogo Jota then came off the bench to make it 3-1 five minutes from time.

Brighton took advantage of dropped points for both north London sides to move up to third after coming from behind to beat Bournemouth 3-1.

Roberto De Zerbi made nine changes from the side that started the Seagulls' first ever European game in a 3-2 defeat by AEK Athens and paid the price in a slow start.

Chelsea's disastrous start to Pochettino's reign goes on as the toothless Blues failed to score for a third consecutive game.



Man Utd secure 1-0 win over Burnley

AP ■ MANCHESTER

Erik ten Hag believes Manchester United's 1-0 win at Burnley can prove a turning point in a troubled season as Bruno Fernandes' stunning strike snapped a three-game losing streak on Saturday.

The United captain produced a match-winning moment of quality when he connected sweetly on the volley from Jonny Evans' long pass just before half-time.

Victory hauls the Red Devils up to eighth in the Premier League table and eases the mounting pressure on manager Ten Hag.

"This is only one win but

what we have seen is that there is togetherness and fight - a real good spirit in the dressing room," said Ten Hag.

"What we have seen is when you have to defend with 11 and do it together, it is very difficult to play against this Manchester United."

Zeki Amdouni hit the post for Burnley and forced the under-fire Andre Onana into a fine save in the first-half, but the Clarets remain without a win on their return to the Premier League and sink to the bottom of the table.

"We're very calm. We knew we had a very tough start in terms of the fixtures," said Burnley boss Vincent Kompany.



Team World one win away from Laver Cup title

AP ■ VANCOUVER

Francois Tiafoe powered past Hubert Hurkacz and Taylor Fritz beat Andrey Rublev in straight sets on Saturday as defending champions Team World built a commanding 10-2 lead over Team Europe in the Laver Cup.

Felix Auger-Aliassime and Ben Shelton added a doubles win for Team World, who take a 10-2 lead into the final day.

With each match win worth three points on Sunday, Team World will need just one victory to lift the trophy for a second time -- after Europe claimed the first four editions of the event that began in 2017.

"We're just going to keep doing what we're doing," Team World captain John McEnroe said. "Felix said the job's not done -- but we're pretty close."

Tiafoe had lost his last three matches against Poland's Hurkacz, but the 11th-ranked American turned the tables with a 7-5, 6-3 victory that thwarted Team Europe's hopes of building momentum in the wake of Casper Ruud's 7-6 (8/6), 6-2 victory over Tommy Paul.

Ruud's win gave Europe their first points of the event,

after Team World swept Friday's four matches and Fritz opened day two with a 6-2, 7-6 (7/3) victory over Europe's highest-ranked player, world number six Andrey Rublev.

Norway's Ruud, ranked ninth in the world, admitted he felt some pressure taking the court with his team trailing 6-0 -- and he acknowledged that he got away with "a bit of a steal" in the first-set tiebreaker, saving a set point at 6-5 before pocketing the set.

He was dominant in the second set, however, breaking Paul to open the set and breaking the American again with a blistering service return for a 5-2 lead.

Ruud served it out with a love game, but his hopes that it would be "a momentum shift" were dashed when Tiafoe opened the night session at Rogers Arena with a crowd-pleasing win over Hurkacz.

World number 16 Hurkacz got off to a strong start and had a set point against Tiafoe's serve at 5-4 in the first.

Tiafoe worked out of the jam, then grabbed the first break of the match in the next game before sealing the set with a hold at love.

AP ■ BARCELONA

Barcelona coach Xavi Hernandez praised his side's "winning character" after a sensational 3-2 comeback to beat Celta Vigo on Saturday and move top of La Liga.

The coach, who signed a new deal until 2025 this week, celebrated with his 50th victory in La Liga, as Robert Lewandowski's brace and Joao Cancelo's late winner helped his team triumph despite entering the final 10 minutes two goals behind.

Jorgen Strand Larsen and Anastasios Douvikas struck for the visitors, who seemed on course for a surprise win against the champions, but Barcelona produced a comeback which Xavi called "epic".

"We didn't play well (but) came up with the epic, showing winning character," Xavi told reporters.



Vinicius returns to Brazil squad

AP ■ RIO DE JANEIRO

Real Madrid winger Vinicius was on Saturday named in the Brazil squad for the next set of 2026 World Cup qualifiers after being sidelined with injury.

The 23-year-old has been out since suffering a ham-

string injury against Celta Vigo on August 25 but has recovered quicker than expected. Vinicius missed the recent international window but Brazil coach Fernando Diniz on Saturday recalled him to the squad for the games with Venezuela and Uruguay five on October 18.

Assefa smashes women's marathon world record

AP ■ BERLIN

Ethiopia's Tigist Assefa smashed the women's marathon world record in Berlin on Sunday, winning in 2hr 11min 53sec, more than two minutes ahead of the previous mark.

The 29-year-old Assefa bettered the record of 2:14:04 set by Kenyan Brigid Kosgei in Chicago in 2019.

Assefa crossed the line just after Kenyan men's world record holder Eliud Kipchoge won a record fifth Berlin marathon.



She finished almost six minutes ahead of Kenyan Sheila Chepkirui (+5:56), while Tanzanian Magdalena Shauri finished third (+6:48).

Sakkari wins WTA Guadalajara title

AP ■ GUADALAJARA

Second-seeded Maria Sakkari ended her four-year wait for a second WTA title on Saturday, beating Caroline Dolehide 7-5, 6-3 to win the 1000 level Guadalajara Open.

Greece's Sakkari, ranked ninth in the world, had come up empty in six finals since her breakthrough victory in Rabat in 2019.

That included the Guadalajara final last year, when she lost to American Jessica Pegula, and a loss to Coco Gauff in the final at Washington this year.

An emotional Sakkari thanked her coach of five years, noting they'd waited "more than four years for a second title.



"We've heard so many bad things - that I will never win a title, that I'm a top-five player with only winning one title, that was very hard for me to overcome," she said. "I'm so happy that I did it here this week."

The victory came less than a month after Sakkari was unceremoniously dumped from the first round of the US Open, her third straight first-round exit at a Grand Slam.

Sakkari had said at Flushing Meadows she was "suffering on the court" and was "uncertain" about what to do about it.

This week, however, Sakkari has looked in total command, becoming the first player this year to reach the final of a WTA 1000 event without dropping a set.

Sakkari ended a fairytale week for Dolehide, ranked 111th in the world and playing in her first career final.

Dolehide, who will rise to inside the top 50, came from a set down to beat Peyton Stearns in three tiebreaks in the first round, she beat eighth-seeded Ekaterina Alexandrova in the third round and saved four match points in her quarter-final win over Martina Trevisan.

Verstappen wins Japanese GP, Red Bull clinch title

AP ■ SUZUKA

Max Verstappen helped Red Bull clinch the Formula One constructors' championship and took a giant step towards his third straight drivers' title by winning the Japanese Grand Prix on Sunday.

Runaway championship leader Verstappen finished ahead of McLaren pair Lando Norris and Oscar Piastri and can lift the title at next month's Qatar Grand Prix.

He holds a 177-point lead over teammate and nearest challenger Sergio Perez.

Verstappen's win helped Red Bull clinch their second



straight constructors' title even though Perez retired from the race.

"You have built a rocket ship of a car," he told his team over the radio after crossing the line.

Nearest challengers Mercedes were unable to stay in contention, with Lewis Hamilton finishing fifth and George Russell placing seventh.

Ferrari's Charles Leclerc was fourth, while teammate Carlos Sainz was sixth.

Verstappen was back to his breathtaking best after a disappointing fifth-place finish at last week's Singapore Grand Prix.

"Unbelievable weekend, to win here is great," said Verstappen.

"The car was working very well on every compound but the most important thing was to win the constructors.

Repeating Red Bull success 'almost impossible': Horner

AP ■ SUZUKA

Red Bull chief Christian Horner said it would be "almost impossible" for his team to better this season's performance after they won Formula One's constructors' championship on Sunday.

Defeat at last week's Singapore Grand Prix ended Red Bull's hopes of an

unprecedented unbeaten season and Horner thinks what they have achieved may never be repeated.

"It's a golden moment -- for the team to do better than we're doing I think it's almost impossible," he said.

"We're riding a wave and of course we want to try and ride that wave as long as we can, but Formula One is a fast-moving business.

Bezzecchi wins Indian MotoGP

AP ■ GREATER NOIDA

Pole-starter Marco Bezzecchi won India's inaugural MotoGP in a near-flawless race on Sunday, but world champion Francesco Bagnaia crashed out after slipping on a turn.

Jorge Martin, who won Saturday's sprint race, just held on for second spot with Fabio Quartararo a close third at the Buddh International Circuit.

Italy's Bezzecchi, on a Ducati-VR46, won his third race of the season in 36 minutes, 59.157 seconds and punched the air in celebration in front of a raucous grandstand.



But it was heartbreak for Bagnaia, who lost control of his Ducati and the bike went for a somersault.

The Italian still leads the world championship with 292 points but saw his lead cut in the 13th race of the 20-race season. Martin is on 279 points followed by Bezzecchi on 248.

"Wasn't easy for sure because of the heat and everything. But I felt good on the bike," Bezzecchi told reporters.

Bezzecchi crashed out in the first lap of Saturday's sprint race before finishing fifth and said the incident motivated him to come up trumps. "After yesterday I was really motivated to bounce back because I think, yesterday also I could have done a bit better than fifth," he said.

Iyer, Gill, Sky fire India to 399/5

PTI ■ INDORE

Shubman Gill continued his sensational run with a fifth ODI hundred of the year while Shreyas Iyer hit a timely ton under pressure to fire India to a record 399 for five against Australia in the second game here on Sunday. Gill (104 off 97 balls) and Iyer (105 off 90 balls) shared a stroke-filled 200-run stand off 164 balls after Ruturaj Gaikwad (8) missed out on a batting beauty. Suryakumar Yadav (72 not out off 37 balls) and skipper K L Rahul (52 off 38 balls) plundered a pedestrian looking Australian attack in the death overs to provide the final flourish for India. The last 10 overs yielded 103 runs as India racked up their highest-ever total against Australia in ODIs. The Holkar Stadium tends to produce high-scoring games and Sunday's game proved no exception. Gill's peerless form is an ominous reminder to rivals

ahead of next month's World Cup. It was a second consecutive ODI hundred for the 24-year-old at this venue, having hammered 112 off 78 balls against New Zealand earlier this year when India ended with a match-winning 395. Unlike Iyer, Gill began slowly on Sunday, collecting nine off his first 19 balls before going after the Aussie bowlers with disdain. He was unstoppable after his first strike which was a straight six off pacer Sean Abbott in the ninth over. Cameron Green tried a short one against Gill who was happy to pull him away for a six over fine leg. But the rain caused a 40-minute delay, putting a temporary halt to the entertainment. Both Gill and Iyer, who struggled with cramps towards the end of his innings, continued to find boundaries after resumption. The highlight of Gill's knock was how frequently he danced down the track against



SHREYAS IYER WAS THE FIRST TO COMPLETE THE CENTURY, WHICH IS ALSO HIS THIRD IN ODIs, WHILE SHUBMAN GILL GOT TO THE MILESTONE, HIS SIXTH IN THE FORMAT, 19 BALLS LATER.

the fast bowlers while Iyer's aggressive intent from ball one stood out in a scenario where he was desperately searching for runs. Both Iyer and Gill got their half-centuries with straight sixes, off debutant Spencer Johnson and Green respectively. Conditions were ideal for the batters but Australian

attack, missing the likes of Mitchell Starc and Pat Cummins, looked short on ideas. Lead spinner Adam Zampa too could not stem the flow of runs. Iyer was the first to complete the century, his third in ODIs, while Gill got to the milestone, his sixth in the format, 19 balls later. When both the batters departed, Rahul and Kishan (31 off 18) played some bold strokes to up the scoring rate. Suryakumar, who had to change his game in the previous match to adapt to the needs of ODI cricket, came out to bat in the 41st over. In the T20 context, it was an ideal time for him to come and explore his 360 range from ball one. He did just that to power India to a formidable total. His innings included four sixes in a row off Green in the 44th over. The towering pacer conceded 103 runs in his 10 overs, so symbolic of their wretched outing with the ball on the day.

Iyer settles middle-order debate with timely hundred

PTI ■ INDORE

India might be treating the ongoing ODIs against Australia as a warm-up exercise before the World Cup but Shreyas Iyer had all to play for going into the three-match series. The 28-year-old has had to deal with his share of injuries since making his international debut back in 2017. The Asia Cup that India won marked his comeback from a back surgery after six months but a back spasm in the middle of the tournament meant he only got to bat once over the course of two weeks. Considering what he has gone through the year, especially the range of emotions in the last one month, a third ODI hundred could not have come at a better time for him. Iyer was India's designated number four before the injury pegged him back and a virtual no show in the Asia Cup meant his place in the playing eleven was far from secure. In the meantime, Ishan Kishan also made a strong claim for a middle-order spot with a few good knocks. Iyer had a lot to prove in the Australia series and a run-out in the first ODI showed that luck too was not on his side. However, he made his own luck at the high-scoring Holkar Stadium on Sunday. When he walked out to bat at number three, he had Gill at the other end like he had on Friday when got run out attempting a single. The mix up might have played on his mind but in a high-pressure scenario, Iyer oozed confidence from the start and showed the same faith in Gill while taking a quick single to get off the mark. Iyer is known for his belligerent play against the spinners but he was equally effective against the pacers. He began with a lofted hit off debutant Spencer Johnson before producing a couple of crisp cover drives off Josh Hazlewood. As Gill took his time to get going in the powerplay, Iyer found the gaps with ease. An odd short ball was directed at Iyer deliberately but he was



quick to put it away. An aerial strike over cover off Sean Abbott pretty much confirmed that Iyer was in his elements. The 45-minute rain delay did not disturb his rhythm and he returned to do what he does best: take the attack to the spinners. After slapping left-arm pacer Johnson for a straight six to bring up his fifty, Iyer punished leg-spinner Adam Zampa for bowling a half-tracker and his third six came in the following over from offie Matthew Short, a massive hit over wide long-on. Strike rotation was also a key part of his innings comprising 39 singles. Iyer completed a memorable hundred with a single off Zampa in the 30th over. The roar from him after reaching the milestone was understandable considering the series of events over the past six months. The much needed runs from his bat might have come on a better of a track and against an ordinary looking Australian attack. But it might just be enough to settle the middle-order debate going into the World Cup at home.

Indian women to face SL for gold

PTI ■ HANGZHOU

Pooja Vastrakar bowled a sharp and incisive spell to take the Indian women's cricket team to its maiden Asian Games final, crushing Bangladesh by eight wickets in a lopsided semi-final here on Sunday. Right arm seamer Vastrakar, who replaced Anjali Sarvani in the squad just before leaving India, had career-best figures of 4/17 in four overs as Bangladesh were bowled out for 51 in 17.5 overs -- their lowest ever T20 score against the neighbours. India will face Sri Lanka in the final on Monday. Lankans defeated defending champions Pakistan, who had won the gold at Incheon Games



2014, by six wickets in the semifinals. Against Bangladesh, Vastrakar and her young new-ball partner Titus Sadhu (1/10 in 4 overs) extracted all

the juice available from the deck as they bowled quick, with the bounce on offer also helping. Only skipper Nigar Sultana (12) was able to reach double figures for Bangladesh. The chase of 52 was a cakewalk as it was achieved in only 8.2 overs. Kanika Ahuja (1 not out) and Jemimah Rodrigues (20 not out) took India home despite losing skipper Smriti Mandhana (7) and Shafali (17) cheaply. It was also sweet revenge for the women's team, who were forced to play the second game on the trot without their regular skipper Harmanpreet Kaur, who is serving a two-match suspension.



India enter round of 16 in men's football

PTI ■ HANGZHOU

Riding on a Sunil Chhetri strike, the Indian men's football team held Myanmar to a 1-1 draw and progressed to the round of 16 in the Asian Games here on Sunday. They will play Saudi Arabia in the pre-quarters. Chhetri scored from the spot in the 23rd minute but it was Rahim Ali who earned the penalty when he was brought down inside the box by Hein Zeyar Lin. While Lin was shown a yellow card for his sliding tackle, the peerless Chhetri made no mistake in finding the back of the net, in what was a repeat of the act he performed against Bangladesh in the second group game two days ago. Coming off the bench, Kyaw Htwe found the equaliser for Myanmar when he headed the ball past Dheeraj Singh in the 74th minute at the Xiaoshan Sports Center Stadium. However, despite the two teams having same points, India progressed as the runner-up from Group A, as the Chhetri-led side has scored more goals than Myanmar in the tournament. All in all, it was a creditable performance from the Indians who were thrashed 5-0 by hosts China in their opener, before getting their act together to eke out a scrappy 1-0 win over Bangladesh. China topped the pool. India showed intent from the beginning but seemed to struggle in the final third. However, they still managed to take the lead in the game thanks to Chhetri's goal. However, they could not end the group stage on a winning note. The last time the two teams met, earlier this year in Imphal, India beat Myanmar 1-0.

Indian men lose to South Korea 0-3 in TT quarterfinals; women bow out

PTI ■ HANGZHOU

The Indian men's team missed out on an Asian Games bronze medal in table tennis after a second-string South Korea blanked them 3-0 in the quarterfinals here on Sunday. Harmeet Desai lost the first match 0-3 to An Jaehyun. G Sathiyam tried to put up a fight, but it was not enough to get past Park Ganghyeon as India trailed 0-2 after the first two ties. The onus was on Achantha Sharath Kamal to bring India back into the contest. However, things did not quite unfold in the manner the Indians would have liked as the veteran from Chennai went down 2-3 to Oh Junsung. The defeat would have been even more hurting for the Indians as South Korea's top three players did not even play in the match.



Earlier in the day, Sharath raised his game just in time to help India escape unscathed against Kazakhstan. But the women's table tennis team imploded against a resilient Thailand to bow out of the Games. Star Indian paddler Manika Batra failed in both her singles matches as the

women's team lost 2-3 to a resilient Thailand. The match against Kazakhstan was locked 2-2 when Sharath Kamal produced a face-saving win in the decisive fifth rubber. Sharath had lost the opening singles tamente 1-3 (11-8, 9-11, 11-6, 11-8) to Krill Gerassimenko, the top-ranked player from Kazakhstan. The world No. 78 started briskly and ended in the same vein, despite Sharath winning the second game. Sathiyam accounted for Aidon Kenzhigulov 14-12 11-8 11-5 to level the scores before Harmeet put India ahead. The world No. 69 Indian beat Alan Kurumangaliyev 11-7, 12-10, 11-5. However, Sathiyam faced stiff resistance from Krill in their reverse singles, but the world No. 107 struggled, eventually losing 5-11, 11-9, 9-11, 11-5, 5-11.

Nikhath begins Asiad campaign with dominant win

PTI ■ HANGZHOU

In a rematch of World Championship final, top Indian boxer Nikhat Zareen outclassed Vietnam's Thi Tam Nguyen 5-0 to move to the women's 50kg pre-quarterfinals while Preeti Pawar (54kg) sealed a place in the quarterfinals of the Asian Games here on Sunday. Two-time world champion Zareen defeated the two-time Asian Champion Nguyen by unanimous

decision. One of only four boxers to not get a first round bye in the 50kg event despite being the reigning world champion, Zareen controlled the proceedings from the word go. "I had not expected it (to be a one-sided bout) but my plan was to make it one because it's happening in another country and I didn't want to give any chance to her. My plan was to win the first two round unanimously and then relax in the third,"



Zareen said after the win. In the opening two rounds Zareen landed accurate punches, rattling her opponent. Such was her power that the referee was forced to give Nguyen the eight count twice in 30 seconds in the opening round. Nguyen tried to attack in the second round but Zareen retaliated with strong combination punches, forcing a third eight count upon the Vietnamese boxer.

After rejections, Arvind sings redemption song

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

Indian rower Arvind Singh was a worried man after four failed attempts at cracking the army entrance exam. The son of a farmer didn't wish to follow in his father's footsteps. But then, having taken in his strides the rejections, he cleared the test in his fifth attempt and joined the Indian Army. Then rowing happened, and things changed for the better. On Sunday, Singh opened the country's account at the Asian Games with a silver medal in men's lightweight doubles sculls event along with Arjun Lal Jat. "For a farmer's son, joining Army was the only option I had... Otherwise I would have been forced

to do farming to make ends meet," Singh remembered his days of struggle while talking to PTI from the Hangzhou Games Village. With a sturdy six-foot, one-inch frame, the young athlete also tried his hands in his 'favourite' sports, cricket and athletics, but couldn't make much progress there. "So, this medal is dedicated to my father, (Vijay Singh) who faced so many hardships but ensured that I keep on trying to get into Indian Army. Despite our financial constraints, there was little pressure on me, and I didn't give up. "Whatever I'm today is because of my dad, he has made so many sacrifices. I'm sure they would be so happy today." Singh managed to get into the Indian Army in his fifth attempt,



in 2013, and was picked for the rowing team because of his "tall" 184-centimetre frame, in 2016. "Forget about knowing the sport, till then, I didn't even hear the word rowing but I learnt the sport and made rapid progress," he said giving credit to his Indian coach Ismail Bag. The best thing that happened to him was in 2018 when he got his partner Arjun Jat, also a son of a farmer and the duo showed a fine chemistry to make a formidable lightweight Indian double sculls pair. In the next year, the duo won a silver at the Asian Rowing Championship in South Korea, and they also competed together in the Tokyo Olympics where they finished 11th.

Last year, the duo won the National Games gold in Gujarat and also the Asian Championship. "But this medal is on top of everything. When I go back home I will get a new cabinet just for this," he said. At the Fuyang Water Sports Centre on Sunday, the duo had a timing of 6:28.18s to finish behind China's Junjie Fan and Man Sun, who won gold with 6:23.16s. The Uzbekistan pair of Shakhzod Nurmatov and Sobirjon Safaroliev bagged the bronze clocking 6:33.42s. "It was a tough race and we could have won a gold, but missed it. But we are not disappointed, it's a learning curve and we hope to turn this into a gold in the next edition in 2026," he said.