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## BANGLADESH CHALLENGES INDIA Capital chaos continues

PTI ■ DHAKA

Bangladesh on Tuesday summoned Indian High Commissioner Pranay Verma to the Foreign Affairs Ministry office here, a day after Dhaka lodged a strong protest against the alleged vandalism of its mission in the Indian state of Tripura. Describing the India-Bangladesh relationship as "multifaceted" and one that cannot be reduced to a single issue or agenda, Verma told reporters after his meeting with acting foreign secretary Riaz Hamidullah that New Delhi remains interested in working with Dhaka "to fulfill our shared aspirations for peace, security and development." Earlier, Foreign Affairs Adviser Mohammad Touhid Hossain said the Indian envoy was asked to come to the foreign office after the Agartala incident. India on Monday described as "deeply regrettable" the incident of the breach of the premises of the Bangladesh consulate in Agartala in the northeastern state of Tripura, bordering Bangladesh, by a group of people protesting the arrest of Hindu monk Chinmoy Krishna Das here. The comments by the Ministry of External Affairs (MEA) came hours after the protesters reportedly barged into the assistant high commission of Bangladesh and allegedly resorted to vandalism. The envoy described the relationship as "multifaceted and wide-ranging," which could not sit with one issue or agenda and India is interested



Police officers stand guard outside Indian High Commission after a call for anti India protests AP/PTI

to work with Bangladesh government to fulfill the two countries' shared aspiration for peace, security and development. "We are working across so many issues. And we really want to build a positive, stable, constructive relationship," he said. Verma also pointed out the many interdependencies and Delhi is keen to build on that "for mutual benefits." India will keep ensuring that the mutual cooperation benefits the two peoples, and the number of positive developments that have taken place in the bilateral relationship in the last few months, "whether it is trade, it is power transmission, supply of essential commodities, we

have maintained lot of positive momentum in the relationship," he added. "We are willing to engage with the interim government of Bangladesh, and we remain interested in working with the Government of Bangladesh to fulfill our shared aspirations for peace, security and development," the envoy added. Meanwhile, Bangladesh announced that all consular services at its Assistant High Commission in Agartala will remain suspended until further notice "because of security reasons" with immediate effect. Earlier in the day, terming the vandalism at Bangladesh's diplomatic mission in Agartala as India's "failure,"

Law Affairs Adviser in the interim government Asif Nazrul asked New Delhi to reassess its neighbour afresh after the toppling of the Sheikh Hasina regime. "We believe in a friendship based on equality and mutual respect. While Sheikh Hasina's government followed a pro-India policy to cling to power without elections, India must realise that this is not Sheikh Hasina's Bangladesh," he wrote in a Facebook post. Three days after Hasina fled to India following widespread protests against her Awami League-led government over a controversial job quota system, Muhammad Yunus, a Nobel laureate, took over as the Chief Adviser of the

interim government. The tension between the two neighbours simmering since August 5, when deposed prime minister Sheikh Hasina fled to India, aggravated further with the arrest of the Hindu monk Chinmoy Krishna Das last week. Nazrul alleged an outfit named Hindu Sangharsh Samiti was responsible for what he described as "the disgraceful act" when Bangladesh Assistant High Commission in Agartala was vandalised, and "Bangladesh's national flag was set on fire." He emphasised that Bangladesh is an independent, sovereign, and self-respecting nation driven by a "fearless and dynamic young generation."

SAUMYA SHUKLA ■ NEW DELHI

The National Capital's roads, known for their infamous traffic jams, are also notorious for rampant disregard of traffic rules, with official data revealing a massive 150 per cent jump in "wrong lane driving" violations, as compared to last year. While police credit this staggering rise in number of violations to better enforcement, the city's traffic congestion may also be pushing drivers to break rules, as they look for quicker ways to reach their destination. According to official data, till December 2, 2024, the police issued 4,662 challans on vehicle owners for not plying in designated lanes as compared to 1,732 challans in 2023 and 1,829 challans in 2022. The fine for this violation is Rs 1,000 for private vehicles and Rs 10,000 for commercial vehicles. Similarly, in the same period, 99,962 challans have been issued for driving against the flow of traffic marking a significant rise from the last year when 59,527 challans were issued in 2023 and 43,768 issued in 2022. Violations in this result in a fine of Rs 5,000 against the vehicle owners. Even for "no entry" restrictions, the city witnessed 1,37,318 challans this year while it was 1,14,646 in 2023 and 84,067 in 2022 even as a hefty fine of Rs 20,000 is slapped on drivers. According to Special Commissioner of Police



PHOTO: PTI

(Traffic) Ajay Chaudhary, the rise can be attributed to special drives conducted by the Delhi Police and coordinated efforts of the department to curb such violations on the roads. The streets of the Capital are also constantly cramped with vehicles parked improperly with a total of 4,88,602 such violations seen this year, marking a rise from 4,70,771 challans in 2023 and 3,58,067 challans in 2022. A fine of Rs 500 is issued for such violations by the police. They also towed 1,78,108 vehicles for improper parking as against 1,60,799 vehicles in 2023, and 1,33,800 vehicles in 2022. Additionally, a total of 4,56,189 vehicle owners have been slapped with challans, which amount to Rs 10,000, regarding non possession of Pollution under Control Certificate (PUCC), as against 2,32,885 in 2023 and 1,64,638 in 2022. The police have impounded 8,231 End of Life vehicles (ELVs) while only 528 were impounded in 2023 and 1,147 in 2022. In light of the air pollution in Delhi and the subsequent

pulling up of the Delhi Police by the Supreme Court for failing to implement the Graded Response Action Plan (Grap) Stage 4 restrictions, police have also intensified its drive against non destined goods vehicles trying to enter the city. The police checked 2,28,235 such vehicles this year including 2,16,028 being checked when the GRAP came into force on October 15, marking a steep rise from 23,089 checked in 2023 and 12,268 checked in 2022. Out of the checked vehicles, 26,379 were returned in this year, 10,012 in 2023 and 3,274 in 2022. Addl/CP (Traffic) Satyaveer Singh Katara added that the police will continue its drive and ensure that tough measures are implemented on the roads. "Some people think they can take shortcuts to avoid traffic but we all need to develop basic road sense. We will ensure that we curb such violations and take strict measures against these offenders," Deputy Commissioner of Police (Traffic) Shashank Jaiswal said.

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## Google continues to dupe its users

BISWAJEET BANERJEE ■ BAREILLY



In yet another mishap tied to digital navigation, a car carrying three passengers veered off the road and plunged into the Kalapur canal in Bareilly's Izzatnagar area on Pilibhit Road. The driver had been following a route suggested by Google Maps, once again raising questions about the accuracy and reliability of satellite-based navigation systems in India. The accident occurred near Barkapur Tiraaha, where erosion has left the road dangerously damaged. The vehicle, a Tata Tigor, overturned into the canal but, fortunately, all three occupants emerged unscathed. The local police, led by Izzatnagar Station Officer Dhananjay Pandey, promptly reached the scene and recovered the car with the help of a JCB machine. The passengers, including Divyanshu, son of Mahendra

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## Congress-led INDIA Bloc tumbling down?

DEEPAK KUMAR JHA ■ NEW DELHI

Fissures are visible in the Opposition's Congress led INDIA Bloc, after the grand old party's massive defeats in the recent Maharashtra and Haryana Assembly elections and not much appreciated performance in the State polls of Jharkhand and Jammu and Kashmir where the party contested with its alliance partners, Jharkhand Mukti Morcha (JMM) and National Conference (NC), respectively. Rather one of the key allies in INDIA Bloc, Trinamool Congress (TMC), on Tuesday pitched for their party supreme West Bengal Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee be made the Bloc leader for all practical purposes, as the woman leader has a "100 per cent record" to take the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP). Partners like TMC, Samajwadi Party (SP) have raised eyebrows as the alliance could not work in the bypolls of Uttar Pradesh other States and the defeats have been shouldered on Congress. Congress found itself without its key allies, including the SP and TMC during a joint Opposition protest in the Parliament complex on Tuesday.

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Leader of Opposition in the Lok Sabha Rahul Gandhi and other Opposition MPs stage a protest during the Winter session of Parliament PTI

## House to meet on weekends, make up for lost time: Speaker

Lok Sabha Speaker Om Birla on Tuesday warned the members that if the business of the House is disrupted further due to adjournments, then he will have to convene the proceedings over the weekends to make up for the loss of time. "The House will convene on Saturday, December 14 at 11 am. If you continue with adjournments,

then for the number of days it has been adjourned, you will have to attend the proceedings on Saturday and Sunday as well," Birla said soon after the Question Hour. Lok Sabha proceedings were washed out last week due to protests by opposition members over the Adani indictment row, recent violence in Uttar Pradesh's Sambhal and other issues.

## Airport Authority lands show cause notice at Delhi International Airport

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

The Airport Authority of India (AAI) has issued a show cause notice to Delhi International Airport Ltd (DIAL) which operates the Indira Gandhi International Airport (IGIA), the country's largest airport, seeking an explanation on certain structural weaknesses detected during the study by an IIT Delhi team following the roof collapse incident at the old departure forecourt of Terminal 1 in June this year. IGI Airport is operated under a public private partnership. Following the roof collapse incident at T1 on June 28 that also killed one person, the civil aviation ministry had asked structural engineers from the Indian Institute of Technology (IIT), Delhi to carry out an assessment. When asked, a DIAL spokesperson said that its team of experts is currently preparing a comprehensive response to the queries raised by the Airports Authority of India (AAI). "Report of the study conducted by IITD has been shared with us. AAI wanted some clarifications on the points raised by them. Our team of experts is currently preparing a comprehensive response to these queries and they will be submitted within the stipulated timeline," he said.



FILE PHOTO: PTI

The IIT Delhi in its report found weaknesses in the part of the terminal that was not impacted by the collapse and certain strengthening of the structure is required. Till then, old T1 cannot be opened for operations, the official added. "Alternate arrangements have been made around the new T1, and T2 and T3," the official said. With the study finding certain defects, the official said AAI has issued a show cause notice to DIAL. Specific details about the show cause notice could not be immediately ascertained. "Report of the study conducted by IITD has been shared with us. AAI wanted some clarifications on the points raised by them. Our team of experts is currently preparing a comprehensive response to these queries and they will be submitted within the stipulated timeline," the DIAL spokesperson said. There was no comment from AAI.

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## Architect of infrastructure Nitin Gadkari Irked by New Delhi air

RAJESH KUMAR ■ NEW DELHI

Irked by increased pollution levels in Delhi, Union minister Nitin Gadkari, who is a Member of Parliament from Nagpur, on Tuesday confessed that he does not feel like visiting the National Capital as he often catches an infection due to the high pollution levels here. Addressing an event, Gadkari said the city of Delhi is such that, "I do not like to live here. I get an infection due to pollution here. 'Har baar Delhi me aata hua, aisa lagta hain ki (Delhi) jaana chahiye ki nahi. Itna bhayankar pollution hai' (Every time, while coming to Delhi, I think whether I should go or not because pollution levels are so high," he said. As Delhi struggles with worsening air quality, Gadkari has proposed a shift to Compressed Natural Gas (CNG) - powered transportation to combat the pollution crisis. Gadkari also

highlighted the importance of creating an "ethanol ecosystem to promote cleaner and greener alternatives. Gadkari noted that India imports fossil fuels worth Rs 22 lakh crore, which is challenging from the point of view of economy, environment and ecology. "We can reduce import of fossil fuels by encouraging alternative fuels," he said. Meanwhile, a report by the Centre for Research on Energy and Clean Air (CREA) highlighted that Delhi's PM2.5 concentration soared to an average of 249 micrograms per cubic metre in November 2024, the highest since 2017, despite enforcement of the Graded Response Action Plan (GRAP) and a decrease in stubble burning incidents. Delhi's PM2.5 level in November reached its highest monthly average in eight years despite the implementation of GRAP measures, making it the most polluted city in the

world. In November 2016, the average PM2.5 level was recorded at 254 micrograms per cubic metre, the highest November reading, followed by 249 micrograms per cubic metre this year. PM2.5 are fine particles with a diameter of 2.5 micrometres or less, about the width of a human hair. These are so small that they can penetrate deep into the lungs and even enter the bloodstream, posing significant health risks. The Commission for Air Quality Management in the National Capital Region and Adjoining Areas (CAQM), a statutory body responsible for formulating strategies to combat pollution in the region, implements anti-pollution measures under the GRAP. In November 2016, the average PM2.5 level was recorded at 254 micrograms per cubic metre, the highest for the month, followed by 249 micrograms per cubic metre in 2024. In comparison,



the average was 241 micrograms per cubic metre in 2023, 181 micrograms per cubic metre in 2022, 238 micrograms per cubic metre in 2021, 214 micrograms per cubic metre in 2020, 204 micrograms per cubic metre in 2019, 200 micrograms per cubic metre in 2018, and 248 micrograms per cubic metre in 2017, the data said. These fine particles pose significant health risks as they can penetrate deep into the lungs and enter the bloodstream. The report highlights a concerning trend, with 159 out of 268 cities across India exceeding the National Ambient Air Quality Standards (NAAQS) for PM2.5 levels in November. The NAAQS limit for PM2.5 is set at 60 µg/m³. Manoj Kumar, an analyst at CREA, said, "After 2017, this

November saw a continuous eight-day stretch in the Severe category (PM2.5 >250 µg/m³) from November 13 to November 20. This was due to the delayed implementation of stricter GRAP stages (3 and 4), despite IITM predicting a Severe AQI category on November 13." Stubble burning contributed an average of 19 per cent to Delhi's PM2.5 levels in November, with the remaining pollution originating from year-round sources. This underscores the need for a long-term, airshed-based strategy to address emissions from perennial sources, rather than relying solely on short-term GRAP measures. The report, published by CREA, an independent research organisation, further revealed that Delhi experienced 20 days in the "Very Poor" category (121-250 µg/m³) and 10 days in the "Severe" category (>250 µg/m³) in November. It added,

"GRAP's on-ground impact remained questionable, as transportation contributed over 20 per cent to the city's PM2.5 levels, mirroring pre-GRAP periods." Meanwhile, Ghaziabad, Gurgaon, Noida, and other cities in the Delhi NCR region also struggled with severe pollution, with 28 NCR cities surpassing the NAAQS threshold. Delhi residents received a respite from toxic pollution levels for the third consecutive day as the city's AQI remained in the very "poor" category on Tuesday, recording a reading of 268. In eight locations across the city, the AQI value stayed between 300 and over 400 -- 305 in Bawana, 307 in Jahangirpuri, 325 in Mundka, 304 in Nehru Nagar, 303 in RK Puram, 302 in Rohini, 342 in Shadipur, and 306 in Siri Fort. In the Delhi NCR area, Faridabad stayed at 255 points, Gurugram at 222, Ghaziabad at 181, Greater Noida at 195, and Noida at 162.

# Taking the spirit of the Constitution to the last mile

Nine years ago, we launched the Suganya Bharat Abhiyan. Over the years, the way this initiative has empowered Divyangjan fills me with immense satisfaction



NARENDRA MODI

Dear sisters and brothers, Today, the 3rd of December, is a very important day. Today, we mark the International Day of Persons with Disabilities. This is a day to salute the courage, determination and achievements of persons with disabilities. For India, this day is sacred. Respect for Divyangjan is deeply embedded in our cultural ethos. Our scriptures and ancient texts teach us to respect everyone and their innate potential. A verse from the Ramayana states: उत्साहो बलवानार्य, नस्त्वुत्साहात्परं बलम्। सोत्साहस्यास्ति लोकैस्सम् न किञ्चिदपि दुर्लभम्। It means that for those with determination and zeal, nothing in the world is impossible. Today, our Divyangjan exemplify this spirit, becoming a source of strength and pride for the nation. This year, the occasion is even more special as we celebrate 75 years of the Constitution. Our Constitution inspires us to work for equality and to reach the person at the last mile. Inspired by the values enshrined in our Constitution, we have laid a strong foundation for the progress of Divyangjan over the past 10 years. In this period, numerous policies have been formulated, and several significant decisions have been taken for their welfare. These decisions illustrate that our government is guided by the values of inclusion, sensitivity and commitment to all-round development. In this spirit, today serves as an occasion to reaffirm our dedication to the well-being of our Divyang brothers and sisters. Since my early days in public life, I have always strived to make the lives of Divyangjan easier. After becoming Prime Minister, I have worked to transform this spirit of service into a national mission. One of our first actions in 2014 was to replace the term "Viklang" with "Divyang". This was not merely a change in terminology; it ensured their dignity and recognised their contributions. This decision sent a clear message that the government

**FOR THOSE WITH DETERMINATION AND ZEAL, NOTHING IN THE WORLD IS IMPOSSIBLE. TODAY, OUR DIVYANGJAN EXEMPLIFY THIS SPIRIT, BECOMING A SOURCE OF STRENGTH AND PRIDE FOR THE NATION**

envision an inclusive environment where physical challenges do not become barriers, and every individual is given the respect and opportunities they deserve to contribute to nation-building according to their talents. On various occasions, my Divyang brothers and sisters have blessed me for this decision. Their blessings have become my greatest strength in working towards their welfare. Every year, numerous programs are organised across the country to mark Divyang Diwas. I still vividly remember that nine years ago, on this very day, we launched the Suganya Bharat Abhiyan. Over the years, the way this initiative has empowered Divyangjan fills me with immense satisfaction. Powered by the resolve of 140 crore Indians, this initiative has paved the way for a more inclusive India. The policies of previous governments often left Divyangjan lagging in accessing opportunities for government jobs and higher education. We changed that scenario. Reservation policies were reformed and over the past 10 years, the expenditure on the welfare of Divyangjan has been tripled, reflecting our deep commitment to addressing their needs and unlocking new opportunities. These decisions have opened new pathways of opportunity and progress for Divyangjan. Today, our Divyang companions are proudly contributing as dedicated partners in nation-building. I have personally witnessed the immense potential of young Divyangjan in India. The honour our athletes have brought to the nation in the Paralympics reflects this incredible energy. To channel this energy into driving the nation's progress, we have connected our Divyang friends with skill development programs, aiding their potential to contribute meaningfully to India's growth. These training programs are not merely government initiatives. They have boosted the confidence of our Divyangjan and empowered them with the spirit of self-reliance to seek employment and build their lives with

dignity. The core principle of our government is to ensure that the lives of my Divyang brothers and sisters are easier, more convenient, and dignified. It was with this spirit that we implemented the Persons with Disabilities Act. This historic legislation expanded the definition of disability from 7 to 21 categories. For the first time, acid attack survivors were also included under its ambit. Today, this law is serving as a powerful tool for empowering Divyangjan to lead more self-reliant and empowered lives. These laws have also transformed societal perceptions of Divyangjan. Today, our Divyang brothers and sisters are fully contributing to the development of a prosperous India. Indian philosophy teaches us that every individual in society possesses unique talents; we only need to bring them to light. I have always believed in the remarkable abilities of my Divyang friends, and I say with immense pride that over the past decade, my faith in them has only deepened. It fills me with great joy to see how their achievements are reshaping our society's aspirations and giving it a new direction. When our athletes, adorned with Paralympic medals, visit my home, my heart swells with pride. Every time I share the inspiring stories of my Divyang brothers and sisters during Mann Ki Baat, I am overwhelmed with joy. Whether it is education, sports, or startups, they are breaking barriers, reaching new heights, and actively contributing to the nation's development. I firmly believe that when we celebrate 100 years of independence in 2047, our Divyangjan will stand as a source of inspiration for the entire world. Let us resolve today to work towards this goal. Together, let us create a society where no dream is too big and no goal is out of reach. Only then can we truly build an inclusive and developed India. I see a crucial role for my Divyang brothers and sisters in achieving this vision. Once again, I extend my best wishes to all Divyangjan on this special day. —The author is Prime Minister of India

## Fadnavis meets Shinde at latter's official residence

**TN RAGHUNATHA ■ MUMBAI**  
In a clear indication of the return of normalcy within the ruling MahaYuti, senior BJP leader Devendra Fadnavis met care-taker chief minister Eknath Shinde at the latter's official residence on Tuesday evening, ahead of the swearing-in ceremony of the new government scheduled for Thursday. The meeting between Fadnavis and Shinde lasted for more than an hour. The two leaders are understood to have discussed matters relating to the formation of a new MahaYuti government in Maharashtra. The import of the crucial meeting is that Shinde has come around to accepting the reality that he would have no other choice but to accept the deputy chief minister's post under the BJP's chief minister who will in all likelihood be Devendra Fadnavis. If anything, Shinde will be number two in the new government. Tuesday's was the first meeting that took place between Fadnavis and Shinde after the dead-lock arose within the ruling MahaYuti over the chief minister's post. The two leaders along with NCP (AP) leader Ajit Pawar had earlier met Union Home Minister Amit Shah and BJP president J P Nadda in New Delhi on Thursday to formalise details about the formation of a government in Maharashtra. Fadnavis, who is the front runner for the chief minister's post in the state, is understood

to have taken the initiative to call on the care-taker chief minister -- both as a move to placate somewhat sulking Shinde and break the ice between them after the strains that surfaced within the MahaYuti in over the chief minister's post. Fadnavis, Shinde and Ajit Pawar are likely to meet on Wednesday afternoon or evening, after the election of the BJP's Legislature Party leader and chief minister-designate scheduled to take place earlier in the morning to discuss the matters relating to the power-sharing in the new government, including the number of ministries to be held by each of the three constituents and portfolio allocations. In a related development, the Ajit Pawar-led NCP on Tuesday demanded that it be given equal number of ministries like that of the Shiv Sena (Eknath Shinde) in the new BJP-headed MahaYuti Cabinet on the basis of its "better strike rate" in the recent Maharashtra Assembly polls. Since the Maharashtra Assembly comprises 288 members, there can be a maximum of 43 ministers in the State Cabinet -- a number that accounts for 15 percent of total members in the lower House of the State Legislature. In the normal course, the BJP will get 21 ministerial berths in the 43-member Cabinet, while the Shinde Shiv Sena is entitled for 12 ministries and the Ajit Pawar-led NCP will have to be satisfied with 10 berths. However, in the ongoing

struggle for power-sharing that is going on within the BJP-led MahaYuti ahead of the government formation, the NCP (AP) is demanding 11 ministries instead of ten berths, after carving one ministry from the Shinde Sena's quota of 12 ministries. Staking a claim for one more additional ministry in the to-be sworn in MahaYuti Cabinet, senior NCP (AP) leader and former minister Chhagan Bhujbal said: "If you look at the winning strike rate in the MahaYuti, the BJP is number one, the NCP (AP) is number two and the Shinde Sena is number three. Considering that we are a number two party in terms of strike rate, we deserve a better deal. That's why we are demanding that the NCP (AP) be given equal number of ministries in the new Cabinet." The "strike rate" that Bhujbal is speaking about refers to the fact that the BJP achieved a strike rate of 88.5 per cent, winning 132 of the 148 seats it contested, while the NCP (AP) registered a strike rate of 69.5 per cent, bagging 41 out of the 59 seats it contested. On the other hand, the Shinde Sena managed a strike rate of 69.13 per cent, by winning 56 seats out of the 81 seats it contested. Apart from 11 ministries, the NCP (AP) is demanding the post of a Cabinet ranked minister for its national working president Praful Patel and the post of a Governor. The Ajit Pawar-led party is understood to have placed its demands before the BJP's central leadership.

## LeT commander killed, two arrested in J and K

**MOHIT KANDHARI ■ JAMMU**  
A joint team of security forces eliminated a self-styled commander of Lashkar-e-Tayyeba, (LeT) involved in civilian killings at Gagangir, Ganderbal in the ongoing operation in the upper reaches of the Dachigam forest area in Srinagar on Tuesday while a bullet-ridden dead body of a former Village Defence Guard was recovered far away from his home near Chapper, Latti area of Udhampur. Meanwhile, Udhampur police have also detained two female terror associates under the stringent Public Safety Act (PSA) as they were posing a significant threat to the safety and security of the state. In Jammu, Lieutenant Governor Manoj Sinha chaired another high-level security review meeting with the Director General of Police and other senior police officers at Raj Bhawan. This is the third security review meeting after the formation of the newly elected government in Jammu and Kashmir. The meeting took place close on the heels of the culmination of the All India Conference of Directors General and Inspectors General of Police (DGPs-IGPs), at Bhubaneswar. The conference was chaired by the Prime Minister and Home Minister and attended by NSA, Union Home Secretary and several others. Omar Abdullah, who returned from Umrah, remained present in his office in the civil secretariat, Jammu. While IG was holding a security review meeting Omar took stock of the working of the civil aviation department along with his political advisor and senior bureaucrats. Confirming the elimination of one terrorist Srinagar-based

Chinar Corps posted on X, "One terrorist has been neutralised by the security forces in the ongoing Operation at upper reaches of Dachigam Forest, Srinagar. Jammu and Kashmir police have identified the slain terrorist as Junaid Ahmed Bhat belonging to the pro-Pakistan Lashkar-e-Tayyeba outfit. According to police, the said terrorist was involved in civilian killings at Gagangir, Ganderbal, and several other terror attacks. Search Operation is in progress". Earlier, a joint operation was launched by the Indian army and the Jammu and Kashmir police late Monday evening based on specific information about the presence of terrorists in the area. Security was also tightened in and around Srinagar due to ongoing anti-terrorist operations in the Harwan area. In Udhampur, while confirming the detention of two female OGW's police also revealed their identities. The female OGW's have been identified as Maryama Begum W/O Mohd. Shafeeq R/O Loudhara, Basantgarh and Arshad Begum W/O Late Jamal Din R/O Rai Chak, Basantgarh. According to a police spokesman these terror associates were found to be involved in providing logistics support to terrorist groups and working as guide/facilitators for terrorist organisations. Their continuous actions posed a serious risk to public safety and tranquility. To prevent further criminal activities detrimental to the security of the state and keeping in view their activities both were ordered to be detained under PSA.

## Indian Classical Music Festival kicks off in Delhi

**STAFF REPORTER ■ NEW DELHI**  
The Delhi government on Tuesday inaugurated the 2024 edition of the Indian Classical Music Festival, drawing a packed audience for the three-day event. Addressing the event at the Shriram Centre in Mandi House, Minister of Art and Culture Saurabh Bharadwaj said, "The Festival is a celebration of the country's rich musical heritage. We are proud to host this event, which helps preserve our cultural traditions." He said that the aim is to raise awareness about Indian classical music and inspire the younger generation to connect with and carry forward this timeless art form.

## Capital chaos continues

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Further, the Delhi Traffic Police also said that to make sure that non-destined vehicles do not enter the national Capital, they have also deployed police personnel on several pickets outside Delhi as well in different districts including Sonapat, Gurugram and Jhajjar in Haryana, and Ghaziabad in Uttar Pradesh. Moreover, Katara informed that they had deployed traffic personnel in 42 entry points even before GRAP IV came into effect in which 23 entry points in Delhi witness 98 per cent of traffic flow from other neighbouring states to Delhi.

## Airport Authority lands show...

**From page 1**  
Under the Operation, Management and Development Agreement (OMDA), inked back in 2006, DIAL is also required to comply with various service quality requirements. DIAL is a joint venture in which GMR Airports Ltd has a 64 per cent while AAI and Fraport AG Frankfurt Airport Services Worldwide have 26 per cent and 10 per cent, respectively. Delhi airport has three terminals, T1, T2 and T3, and handles around 1,400 flights daily. From August 17, DIAL started operating the new T1. The old T1 has been shut from June 28 following the roof collapse incident.

## Google continues...

**From page 1**  
These incidents highlight the potential dangers of over-reliance on GPS systems, particularly in areas with incomplete infrastructure or inadequate safety measures. While tools like Google Maps have made travel easier, they are not infallible, especially in regions where real-time updates on road conditions are lacking. Residents and experts alike have called for better infrastructure management and coordination between the local authorities and tech companies. Regular updates to navigation platforms and the inclusion of alerts for hazardous or incomplete routes could help prevent such accidents in the future. The recent spate of accidents has sparked outrage in Bareilly, with citizens demanding stricter oversight of both public infrastructure and digital navigation tools. Experts urge drivers to verify road conditions, especially in rural or underdeveloped areas, rather than relying solely on GPS directions. As investigations into these incidents continue, they serve as a grim reminder of the need for vigilance on the roads and accountability from all stakeholders, including government agencies and tech platforms.

## Congress-led INDIA Bloc tumbling down?

**From page 1**  
The protest, spearheaded by members of the INDIA Bloc, focused on the demand for a Joint Parliamentary Committee (JPC) probe into allegations of bribery and fraud against the Adani Group. While SP has prioritised the Sambhal violence issue to raise in Parliament, TMC has so far skipped all opposition meetings on formulating the INDIA Bloc's joint strategy during the session. TMC MP Samik Bhattacharya called the protests led by Congress as their agenda where TMC and others do not figure. Mamata Banerjee-led TMC said it will not be a rubber stamp for Congress decisions and advocated for smooth functioning of the ongoing Winter Session of the Parliament which was marred by continuous protest resulting in no business or discussions ever since it began on November 25. The Government and Opposition parties reached an agreement on Monday to break a week-long impasse in Parliament with the dates announced for a discussion on the Constitution, to mark its 75th year of adoption, in the Lok Sabha and the Rajya Sabha. Leader of Opposition in Lok Sabha Rahul Gandhi led the demonstration in Parliament premises which saw MPs from the Congress, Aam Aadmi Party (AAP),

Rashtriya Janata Dal (RJD), Shiv Sena (UBT), Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam (DMK), and Left parties, among others. However, the absence of SP and TMC highlighted fissures within the INDIA Bloc. "Different parties have different perspectives, TMC has said that it is a part of the INDIA alliance but they sometimes have different agenda," Congress chief spokesman Jairam Ramesh said. Congress and the TMC had contested the Lok Sabha elections and the recent bypolls in West Bengal separately. The Trinamool Congress won all six seats in the bypoll and 29 of 40 constituencies in the Lok

Sabha elections, bettering its 2019 tally despite a big effort being put into the state by the BJP. "This attitude leads to electoral losses, if we feel we're winning, we will not accommodate regional party but, in States where we're down, regional parties must accommodate us". Arrogance, entitlement, and looking down on regional parties is a recipe for disaster," Trinamool Congress Rajya Sabha MP Saket Gokhale said. On TMC leaders suggesting that Mamata Banerjee should be made the INDIA bloc leader, TMC Lok Sabha MP Kirti Azad said Mamata Banerjee has a 100 per cent record. "Whenever Prime Minister Narendra Modi

# SC seeks details from DUSIB on facilities available for housing homeless

STAFF REPORTER ■ NEW DELHI

The Supreme Court on Tuesday sought details from the Delhi Urban Shelter Improvement Board (DUSIB) on the facilities available for housing homeless persons in the national capital in view of the impending chilly winters.

"We are concerned. We are on the eve of what is going to be a very chilly winter," a bench of Justices B R Gavai and K V Viswanathan observed.

The apex court asked the DUSIB to give details about the number of persons who could be accommodated in shelter homes and an

estimate of those requiring such facilities.

The bench said if there was any deficit in the facilities available, the DUSIB would also apprise how it proposes to deal with such a situation.

The top court was hearing a matter concerning the right to shelter of homeless persons in the urban areas.

Advocate Prashant Bhushan, appearing for one of the petitioners, said the apex court had passed several orders in the matter, terming it an important issue.

He said the total capacity of shelter homes in Delhi was only around 17,000 persons and the DUSIB had



demolished nine such shelter homes.

Bhushan said these demolished shelter homes had around 450 people living there, though the capacity was only 286.

"What is the total capacity of shelter homes in Delhi?" the bench asked the DUSIB counsel.

The lawyer responded it was around 17,000 and the application filed before the court concerned only six temporary shelters.

The DUSIB counsel said there were six temporary shelter homes that were destroyed due to floods in the River Yamuna in 2023 and since June 2023, nobody lived there.

He said the applicant should not have any objection if homeless people around that area were being shifted to a permanent shelter home at Geeta colony.

The lawyer said not even a single death was reported owing to cold conditions in Delhi during last winter.

The bench asked the DUSIB to file an affidavit pointing out details, including the facilities available with the board for accommodating the homeless.

The bench posted the matter on December 17.

During the hearing, Bhushan claimed there was allegation of bribery against one of the senior officers of DUSIB and an FIR was also

registered in the matter. "This amounts to character assassination," the bench observed, noting the officer was not even made an accused in the case.

"Making such wild allegations that he is involved in corruption, he is made an accused," the bench said, "where do you find it? This seriously affects somebody's reputation".

The bench told the DUSIB's counsel to give details about the facilities available for the homeless and whether they were sufficient to meet the requirements, suggesting it to take the average of the last five-six years authentic data available.

## LG expresses concern over neglect of Punjabi language in Govt schools

STAFF REPORTER ■ NEW DELHI

Delhi Lieutenant Governor (LG) Vinay Kumar Saxena has expressed serious and deep concern over the neglect towards Punjabi, one of the official languages of Delhi, in government schools in the capital, Raj Niwas said on Tuesday. Critical concerns, including a severe shortage of Punjabi teachers in both, Delhi government and MCD schools, and decreasing funding have been raised before the LG by various stakeholders in the past, officials said.

Giving details, they said disposing a file with regards to a status report submitted by the Punjabi Academy, GNCTD, on the condition of Punjabi Language, Saxena underlined many a shortcomings and asked for a thorough re-examination.

The report was put up by the Punjabi Academy, Department of Art, Culture and Language, GNCTD, after a representation was made by the Delhi Sikh Gurudwara Management Committee



(DSGMC) to the LG and had subsequently been forwarded by the LG Secretariat to ACL. Observing that the report submitted by the Department is incomplete, inconclusive and does not reflect the whole picture with respect to the concerns raised by DSGMC, Saxena has ordered a thorough investigation into the matter, directing the Chief Secretary, to examine the issue with all stakeholders.

The LG also observed that the ACL Department in the first instance should have sought the details from these agencies on current vacancy

schools also remain vacant. This acute teacher crisis has directly impacted the quality of Punjabi language education, hindering the development of linguistic skills and cultural understanding among students.

Saxena also observed that there is lack of seriousness in the overall efforts on the part of authorities concerned towards attaining the aims and objectives with which the Punjabi Academy was established, adversely affecting the promotion, propagation and development of Punjabi Language, the second official language as per the Delhi Official Language Act, 2000 and its Literature and Culture in Delhi.

Saxena noted that gap areas may be identified and necessary corrective measures may be undertaken in a time bound manner, in terms of extant law and guidelines, for ensuring fulfilment of statutory responsibilities towards the Punjabi Language, literature and culture in Delhi.

position of Punjabi teachers and efforts made to address the deficiencies, if any. While 752 posts of TGT Punjabi and 4 posts of PGT Punjabi are lying vacant in Schools of Education Department, GNCTD, Punjabi Academy could spend only Rs. 19.99 Cr against the paltry Rs. 27.28 Cr allocated to it during FY 2023-24. There has been a reduction of 17% in the budget allocation for the Punjabi Academy in the current fiscal. Similarly, large number of positions of Punjabi Teachers in MCD

## Student dies under mysterious circumstances in South West Delhi school Police cite medical reasons, family alleges foul play

STAFF REPORTER ■ NEW DELHI

A 12-year-old student died under suspicious circumstances at a private school in south-west Delhi on Tuesday morning. While the police attribute the mysterious death to medical reasons, the child's family points to foul play in the incident.

According to the police on Tuesday, the boy has been identified as Prince, a resident of Kudampur Pahari in Vasant Vihar, who was a student of class six. Police suspect that his death may have been caused by a seizure. However, the family has alleged foul play, claiming that Prince was beaten up by his classmate. Deputy Commissioner of Police (Southwest) Surendra Choudhary said, "Information was received from Fortis hospital in Vasant Kunj at 10.15 am, stating that Prince, who is a student of Chinmaya Vidyalaya Vasant Vihar, had



been brought dead." "Upon enquiring and inspection of the body it was revealed that there was no visible injury on body, but some foam like substance was oozing out from his mouth," the police said in a statement.

Doctors verbally suggested that the boy might have had a convulsion-related condition, but inquest proceedings are underway. "School students and teachers are being interrogated and necessary

legal action will be taken accordingly," it said.

Prince's father, Sagar, who works as a sewer line worker in Vasant Vihar Society, said that his son had no medical history and was completely fit and fine when he dropped him in the school.

"My son was completely healthy and had no history of fits. He would even play football and was a good player, participating in inter-school tournaments and winning several medals," Sagar said, adding that

"something is fishy in the school's and police's theory." He claimed that some students told them that Prince had a fight with a classmate during which he collapsed and school teachers then took him to hospital. He was initially taken to Holy Angels Hospital and later referred to Fortis Hospital where doctors declared him brought dead.

Sagar further said that he dropped his son in the school before going for work. "I got a call at 9.45 am from school that my son got hurt and when I reached the hospital, he was already dead," he said.

Prince was the younger among Sagar's two sons. His elder brother Priyanshu is in class eight in another private school. Prince's uncle Vineet raised questions on the absence of his class teachers and other staff during the incident. There was no comment from the school regarding the incident.

## Centre notifies elevation of Justice Manmohan to SC, Justice Bhakru to be acting Chief Justice of HC

STAFF REPORTER ■ NEW DELHI

The Centre on Tuesday notified the elevation of Delhi High Court's Chief Justice Manmohan as a judge of the Supreme Court and appointed Justice Vibhu Bakru as the acting Chief Justice of the Delhi High Court.

"In exercise of the powers conferred by the Constitution of India, the President, after consultation with Chief Justice of India, is pleased to appoint Shri Justice Manmohan, Chief Justice, High Court of Delhi as a Judge of the Supreme Court of India," said Union Law Minister Arjun Ram Meghwal on X.

Once Justice Manmohan takes oath as judge of the top court, the working strength of the top court will rise to 33, one short of the sanctioned strength of 34, which includes the chief justice of India. The Supreme Court collegium on November 28 recommended the elevation of Justice Manmohan to the top court. The two vacancies in the



apex court arose after retirements of Justice Hima Kohli and former CJI D Y Chandrachud. Justice Manmohan, 61, is the son of late Jagmohan, a famous bureaucrat-turned politician who also served as the Governor of the erstwhile state of Jammu and Kashmir, Union Minister and the Lieutenant Governor of Delhi. He enrolled as an advocate in 1987 after obtaining a law degree from Campus Law Centre, Delhi University. Justice Vibhu Bakru will take over from Chief Justice Manmohan whose elevation to the Supreme Court was cleared on Tuesday. Justice Bakru was born in Nagpur in 1966 and completed his schooling at Delhi



Public School, Mathura Road, New Delhi. He pursued a Bachelor of Commerce (Honours) from Delhi University, graduating in 1987, and qualified as a Chartered Accountant in 1989. He later obtained his LL.B degree in 1990 and enrolled with the Bar Council of Delhi the same year. Justice Bakru built a legal practice before various forums, including the Supreme Court, Delhi High Court, Company Law Board and other tribunals. In 2013, he was appointed as an additional judge of the Delhi High Court before being made a permanent judge on March 18, 2015.

## Chaotic condition of law and order: Kejriwal calls for Shah's resignation

STAFF REPORTER ■ NEW DELHI

AAP supremo Arvind Kejriwal stepped up his attack on the BJP and Union Home Minister Amit Shah, calling for his resignation if he could not handle the "chaotic" law-and-order situation in the national capital.

"There is chaos all over and people are afraid of stepping out of their homes due to the rising crimes, he alleged after meeting the kin of a youth who was stabbed to death outside his house in a Pitampura slum cluster. "Two youths were attacked by seven to eight local boys in this area. Manish was stabbed multiple times and I was told that he died because he could not be taken to hospital in time. The other victim, Himanshu, was saved. Police have not recorded his statement as a witness," Kejriwal said. "If Amit Shah is unable to



handle law and order in Delhi and his concern is only making political tours across the country then he should resign," the former Delhi chief minister said. He alleged that the police were threatening the victims and not taking action against the accused. No immediate reaction was available from the Delhi Police which is controlled by the Union Home Ministry. Kejriwal said that AAP will unite the people and "force" the BJP-led Centre to ensure people's safety in the city.

Alleging that drug abuse, chain snatching and other such crimes were rampant in Delhi, the AAP supremo claimed he was getting numerous phone calls, requesting him to visit their areas which he would do and raise people's issues.

AAP Rajya MP Raghav Chadha filed a Suspension of Business notice in Rajya Sabha under rule 267 on Tuesday, seeking to discuss the 'deteriorating law and order' situation and the 'rise in crimes' in the national capital. AAP Rajya MP Sanjay Singh has also filed an adjournment motion notice in the upper house seeking to discuss the deteriorating law and order situation concerning the 'increasing crimes' in Delhi.

On Monday, he visited to the family of two brothers in west Delhi's Naraina, who were killed in separate incidents over the past few months.

## MCD spent nearly Rs 100 crore on dengue control ops this year, says RTI data



STAFF REPORTER ■ NEW DELHI

The Municipal Corporation of Delhi (MCD) has spent nearly Rs 100 crore on dengue control operations in the financial year 2024-25 so far, up from Rs 87.99 crore in the previous fiscal year, according to the Right to Information (RTI) response.

This increase reflects the MCD's intensified efforts to combat mosquito-borne diseases, which have seen a rise in the number of cases this year.

A detailed breakdown of the 2024 expenditure shows that Rs 96.79 crore was spent, including Rs 4.8 crore on fogging, Rs 83.25 lakh on anti-larval measures, Rs 42.02 lakh on medicines and equipment, Rs 1.2 lakh on special drives, Rs 17.05 lakh on worker training and Rs 2.20 lakh on advertisements.

The Right to Information (RTI) response also revealed that 2.89 crore houses were inspected for mosquito breeding in 2024, in comparison to 4.14 crore in 2023. The expenditures last year included Rs 4.18 crore on fogging, Rs 9.56 crore on anti-larval measures, Rs 90 lakh on medicines and equipment, Rs 2.09 lakh on advertisements and Rs 2 lakh spent on training.

The RTI response did not provide any information or assessments regarding the effectiveness of these measures or the overall dengue management strategy for 2023 and 2024. Notably, the MCD spent Rs 12.50 lakh on special drives last year. As of November 30, Delhi

had reported over 5,700 dengue cases, along with three dengue-related deaths, according to the MCD data. In October alone, over 2,400 cases of dengue were reported, the highest in four years.

Although dengue cases have decreased compared to last year's 9,266, other mosquito-borne diseases, such as malaria and chikungunya, have seen a significant rise. By November 30, Delhi had recorded 766 malaria cases, a 99 per cent increase from 384 cases in 2023 and the highest in four years. Similarly, chikungunya cases surged to 266 this year, up from just 44 in 2023, also the highest in four years.

The spike in mosquito-borne diseases was most noticeable between September and October, likely due to changing weather conditions in Delhi, the data showed. However, there has been a decline in the number of such cases with the onset of winter.

In contrast, last year, the spike occurred between August and November. Mosquitoes in India typically breed during the monsoon season, which runs from June to September. This year, however, a delayed monsoon in Delhi led to a late rise in cases, followed by an early decline as winter approached.

The civic body has also been combating the Japanese encephalitis virus, another mosquito-borne disease. A case of Japanese encephalitis was reported in Delhi earlier this month, prompting the MCD to intensify anti-mosquito measures.

## CM Atishi inspects 150 new Mohalla buses at Kushak Nala depot

STAFF REPORTER ■ NEW DELHI

Delhi Chief Minister Atishi inspected 150 new Mohalla buses at the Kushak Nala depot on Tuesday and promised to improve last-mile connectivity in the national capital in line with the AAP dispensation's commitment to building world-class public transport infrastructure.

The Mohalla Bus Scheme is designed to provide efficient feeder services. Each of these nine-metre electric buses can seat 23 passengers and has a standing capacity of 13. Specifically designed to navigate the narrow and congested roads of Delhi, these buses have 25 per cent of seats reserved for women. In a post on X, Atishi described the Mohalla buses as a "game changer" for public transport in Delhi.



"Today I inspected these electric low-floor mohalla buses at the Kushak Nala depot. Equipped with state-of-the-art facilities, these

buses can run up to 200 kilometres with just an hour of charging. In the next two weeks, 150 Mohalla buses will hit the roads, and 2,140

such buses will connect every colony of Delhi by 2025," she said. Atishi further emphasised that the initiative aligns

with the Aam Aadmi Party (AAP) government's commitment to building world-class public transport infrastructure under the leadership of Chief Minister Arvind Kejriwal. "Currently, Delhi operates a fleet of 1,940 electric buses, making it the second-largest city globally in electric bus deployment. Delhi will soon become the leader in sustainable urban transport with the largest electric bus fleet," she said. The green-coloured buses, easily identifiable for commuters, can travel more than 200 kilometres on a single charge, which takes only 45 minutes.

The 9-metre-long Mohalla Buses are powered by electric batteries and designed for narrow and congested areas where standard 12-metre DTC buses cannot operate. These buses will also improve

connectivity to key transport hubs like metro stations, saving time and reducing the need for multiple bus changes or auto-rickshaw rides. Each bus is equipped with six battery packs totaling 196 kW capacity, offering a range of over 200 km on a 45-minute charge. With 23 seats and standing space for 13 passengers, these green-colored buses are easily identifiable. Notably, 25% of the seats (6 in total) are reserved for women and marked in pink.

The Mohalla Bus initiative aims to provide reliable feeder bus services in neighborhoods across Delhi using 9-metre-long electric buses.

The Delhi government plans to deploy a total of 2,140 such buses by 2025, with dedicated depots for their parking and maintenance.

# Committed to engaging with China for fair, mutually acceptable framework for boundary settlement: EAM

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■  
NEW DELHI

External Affairs Minister S Jaishankar on Tuesday said here India remains committed to engaging with China to arrive at a fair and mutually acceptable framework for boundary settlement. He also said the recent developments that reflect continuous diplomatic engagements have set India-China ties in the direction of "some improvement." His statement in Parliament came two months after India and Chinese armies disengaged from friction points in eastern Ladakh. This process came about after nearly four years of stand-off between the soldiers of the two countries there after tension flared up in May 2020 leading to clashes in the Galwan valley. Twenty Indian army personnel including the commanding officer were killed. Nearly 40 Chinese soldiers were died in the clash. On its part, Beijing had stated after disengagement that a resolution had been reached on

"relevant matters" and that it would work alongside New Delhi to implement the terms of the agreement. Jaishankar said India-China relations cannot be normal in the absence of a clearly articulated approach. Making a statement in the Lok Sabha, the minister said India-China ties have been abnormal since 2020 when peace and tranquillity in border areas were disturbed due to Chinese actions. "The amassing of troops by China in eastern Ladakh in April-May 2020 resulted in face-offs at a number of points. After the Galwan Valley clashes, we were addressing a situation that not only saw fatalities but events that needed heavy weaponry deployment," he said. The recent developments that reflect continuous diplomatic engagements have set India-China ties in the direction of "some improvement", he said. "We remain committed to engaging with China to arrive at a fair and mutually acceptable framework for boundary



settlement... The government has maintained that India-China relations cannot be normal in the absence of peace and tranquillity in the border areas, the combination of a firm and principled stance on this situation and the border areas, as well as a clearly articulated approach to the totality of our ties," Jaishankar said. "We have been very clear that the restoration of peace and tranquillity will be the basis for the rest of the relationship to move forward," he added. Jaishankar credited the Indian forces, saying that despite logistical challenges and the Covid pandemic, they countered the Chinese troops rapidly. He said bilateral relations between India and China were on course of some improvement after the successful disengagement along the Line of Actual Control (LAC) in eastern Ladakh. "Our (India-China) ties have been abnormal since 2020 when peace and tranquillity in the border areas were disturbed as a result of Chinese

actions. Recent developments that reflect our continuous diplomatic engagement since then have set our ties in the direction of some improvement," he said while briefing the Lok Sabha on India-China ties and the border truce reached in October. Jaishankar also said in the months following the 2020 Galwan Valley clash, "we were addressing a situation that had not only seen fatalities for the first time in 45 years but also a turn of events serious enough for heavy weaponry to be deployed in close proximity to the LAC". "While a determined counter-deployment of adequate capability was the government's immediate response, there was also the imperative of a diplomatic effort to defuse these heightened tensions and restore peace and tranquillity." The Minister went on to list a series of agreements reached in the past between India and China, including those signed in 1991, 1993, 1996, 2003, 2005, 2012 and the last one in

2013 to reach an understanding on border defence cooperation. "The purpose of my recalling these agreements is to underline the elaborate nature of our shared efforts to ensure peace and tranquillity and to emphasise the seriousness of what its unprecedented disruption in 2020 implied for our overall relationship," he said. The current agreement pertains to patrolling in the Depsang and Demchok areas. Earlier, the militaries of the two countries had pulled back from four of six friction points in eastern Ladakh, including the Galwan Valley, after the clash. In November, Indian and Chinese armies completed one round of patrolling in Demchok and Depsang and also agreed to carry out one coordinated patrol every week in the areas where tensions have persisted. In an effort to maintain ongoing stability, talks will continue at the local commanders' level, involving brigadiers and officers of similar ranks.

## Recent violence in Sambhal figures in both houses of Parliament

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■  
NEW DELHI

Recent violence in Sambhal, Uttar Pradesh figured in both house of Parliament on Tuesday. While Samajwadi Party president Akhilesh Yadav in the Lok Sabha criticized the local administration, his uncle Ram Gopal Yadav claimed in the Rajya Sabha that violence was pre-planned. Raising the issue in the Lok Sabha, Akhilesh Yadav said violence part of a "well-planned" conspiracy and that the talk of "khudai" (digging) across the country by the BJP and its associates will end up hurting communal unity. The former Uttar Pradesh chief minister squarely blamed the local police and administration for the recent violence in Sambhal. He alleged that police personnel fired from official and personal weapons, killing five innocent people and injuring dozens after some locals pelted stones at them to protest their high-handedness. The MP from Kannauj demanded the suspension of guilty officials and registration of a murder case against them to ensure that there is no such "violation" of the Constitution



again. Akhilesh Yadav, amid occasional interruptions from the treasury benches, suggested that the BJP's inner politics was also at work and claimed that it was a "battle" between Delhi and Lucknow. Ram Gopal Yadav said in the Rajya Sabha Sambhal was converted into a police zone and people were baffled why it was being done. At one point, water started flowing out of the mosque and people thought some mischief was happening inside. Peace was disturbed with police opening fire, in which five people were killed and several injured, he said. Ram Gopal Yadav, however, failed to complete his speech and Chairman Jagdeep

Dhankhar said certain parts of his statement would not go on record. At this, the SP and some other opposition parties staged a walkout. Indian Union Muslim League (IUM) MP E T Mohammed Basheer described the Sambhal incident as shocking. "The peaceful coexistence (of different communities) in this country is becoming more and more difficult. We have to preserve our secularism," he said. Basheer alleged the government is supporting the campaign aimed at targeting mosques and demanded a comprehensive inquiry by a judicial commission. Akhilesh Yadav also spoke outside Parliament and said the Uttar Pradesh government was behind the incident.

## Ensure ICC for sexual harassment at workplace in all Govt departments: SC

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■  
NEW DELHI

With a view to ensure a nationwide compliance of the Sexual Harassment of Women at Workplace (Prevention, Prohibition and Redressal) Act, 2013, the Supreme Court on Tuesday directed all states and union territories to constitute an internal complaints committee in all government departments and undertakings. Issuing a slew of directions, a bench of Justices B V Nagarathna and N Kotiswar Singh said that the POSH Act must be uniformly implemented across the country. The top court therefore directed the states and UTs to appoint an officer in each district by December 31, 2024, who would constitute a local complaints committee by January 31, 2025 and appoint nodal officers at taluka levels. The apex court directed the deputy commissioners/district magistrates to survey the public and private organisations for ICC compliance under Section 26 of the POSH Act and submit reports. They would engage with private sector stakeholders to ensure ICC constitution and adherence to



statutory provisions, it said. The bench granted time till March 31, 2025 for the compliance of its directions and directed chief secretaries to oversee the execution. The direction came on a petition dealing with the implementation of the court's May 2023 order directing the Centre and the state governments to undertake a time-bound exercise to verify whether panels to probe sexual harassment allegations at workplace were constituted in all ministries and the departments. The top court said it was "disquieting" to note "serious lapses" in the enforcement of the 2013 Prevention of Sexual Harassment Act despite such a long time. Calling it a "sorry state of

affairs", the apex court said it reflected poorly on all the state functionaries, public authorities and private undertakings. The court direction came on a plea filed by a former head of department at Goa University Aureliano Fernandes, who challenged an order of the Bombay High Court over allegations of sexual harassment against him. The high court rejected his plea against an order of the executive council of Goa University (disciplinary authority) which dismissed him from services and disqualified him from future employment. The top court set aside the high court order, noting procedural lapses in inquiry proceedings and violation of the principles of natural justice.

## Former CBI director Vijay Shankar breathes his last on Tuesday



PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■  
NEW DELHI

Former CBI Director Vijay Shankar breathed his last on Tuesday after prolonged illness, his family said. He was 76. His mortal remains will be donated to AIIMS as per his last wish, they said. A 1969-batch IPS officer of the Uttar Pradesh cadre, Shankar headed the Central Bureau of Investigation (CBI) from December 12, 2005 to July 31, 2008. During his tenure as CBI director, the agency took over the infamous Aarushi-Hemraj double murder case. As

Additional Director of CBI, he supervised the extradition of gangster Abu Salem and actor Monika Bedi from Portugal. He also supervised the investigation into the Telgi scam. Before being appointed CBI director, Shankar headed National Disaster Response Force, and Civil Defence and Home Guards. He served as Inspector General in Jammu and Kashmir at the peak of militancy in the 1990s. A recipient of the coveted President's police medals for distinguished and meritorious service, Shankar also served in Uttar Pradesh Police and Moscow under the Ministry of External Affairs.

## President calls for empathy, inclusivity, equal opportunities for Divyangjan

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■  
NEW DELHI

President Droupadi Murmu, on Tuesday, underscored the importance of providing opportunities for employment, entrepreneurship, and economic empowerment for Divyangjan (people with disabilities), saying such avenues can significantly improve their lives, enabling them to live more meaningful and independent lives. Speaking at the National Awards ceremony on World Disability Day on December 3, President Murmu highlighted the need for empathy, inclusivity, and equal opportunities for Divyangjan (persons with disabilities). She emphasised that persons with disabilities deserve empathy, not sympathy;

natural affection, not special attention; and, above all, they should experience respect. She urged society to foster an environment that treats Divyangjan with dignity and equality. President Murmu pointed out that being differently-abled is not a limitation but a special condition that requires tailored support. "Special training, counselling, and facilities must be provided for their needs. While the government is prioritizing their welfare, society must also step forward to ensure their inclusion," she said. The President also lauded the significant achievements of Divyangjan in various fields, especially sports and noted the remarkable improvement in India's performance in the



Paralympics. She said in 2012, India won only one medal, but by 2024, increased awareness and support for Divyangjan had led to a remarkable 29 medals. "A truly sensitive society ensures equal opportunities and seamless access for everyone," she said. She also praised the collaboration among various ministries and departments under a whole-of-gov-

ernment approach to enhance accessibility and urged them to work more cohesively to advance the social and economic empowerment of Divyangjan. At the ceremony, 33 individuals, institutions, and organizations were recognized for their significant contributions to the empowerment of persons with disabilities in various fields. Among the honorees were Iytha Mallikarjuna, recognized as the Sarvshreshth Divyangjan for his work in creating opportunities for persons with disabilities, and Prateek Khandelwal, a Bengaluru-based social entrepreneur, awarded for his efforts in making urban spaces accessible through his initiative Ramp My City. In a related event, the National Centre for Promotion

of Employment for Disabled People (NCPEDP) Helen Keller Awards celebrated 25 years, honoring 17 individuals and organizations for promoting the inclusion of persons with disabilities in the workforce. Notable awards included Role Model Persons with Disabilities to Basant Sahu (Chhattisgarh), Nishtha Thaker (Gujarat), Resham Talwar (Delhi), and Dilip Kumar Dahyalal (Gujarat). Role Model Supporters of Increased Employment for Persons with Disabilities: Ashish Verma (Hyderabad), Ameesha Prabhu (Mumbai), and Ajay Govind (Dehradun) while Lifetime Achievement Award was conferred on Thilakam Rajendran, for her relentless dedication to disability inclusion.

## WCD Minister slams two BJP-Opp ruled States for not enforcing women's safety measures

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■  
NEW DELHI

A day after Union Minister Mansukh Mandaviya rapped the Delhi and West Bengal Governments for failing to implement central flagship Ayushman Bharat health insurance scheme, Union Women and Child Development Minister Annapurna Devi pulled up the two BJP-Opposition ruled States for not enforcing crucial women's safety measures despite central funding and support. Addressing the media, the Minister pointed out that the Delhi government had failed to pay the staff working at the One-Stop Centres (OSCs), which were set up under the Nirbhaya Fund to assist women in distress. She emphasised that the Centre had consistently provided support through initiatives like the Nirbhaya Fund, yet state-level delays in implementation were disappointing. The Delhi High Court had recently directed the Delhi government's revenue department to streamline payment processes for OSC staff and take action against the responsible officials. "The Centre has consistently supported states through initiatives like the Nirbhaya Fund, but it is disappointing to see delays in implementation at the state level," the Minister said. Minister Devi also took aim at the West Bengal government for its failure to operationalise Fast Track Special Courts (FTSCs) aimed at expediting cases under the Protection of Children from Sexual Offences (POCSO)



Act, an initiative that received central backing. In contrast, she highlighted the success of these programs on the national level, citing the 802 OSCs across the country that have supported over 10 lakh women and the 752 FTSCs that have resolved over 2.66 lakh cases. Devi further emphasized the central government's commitment to women-led development, noting the increase in the Gender Budget from Rs 97,000 crore in 2013-14 to over Rs 3 lakh crore in 2024-25. Devi also referred to the Nari Shakti Vandan Act, which reserves 33 percent of seats for women in Parliament and state assemblies, as a landmark step toward empowering women. She reiterated Prime Minister Narendra Modi's belief that India's progress is closely tied to the empowerment of its women. Savitri Thakur, the Minister of State for Women and Child

Development, echoed Devi's sentiments, celebrating the progress in gender equality. She highlighted the election of 74 women to the Lok Sabha in 2024 as a record and noted the successes of programs like Beti Bachao, Beti Padhao, which have improved the national sex ratio. Thakur also pointed to the significant number of women who have benefited from housing initiatives like the Pradhan Mantri Awas Yojana, as well as financial empowerment programs like Stand Up India and Pradhan Mantri Mudra Yojana. Former Union Health Minister Mansukh Mandaviya had on Monday vehemently criticised the Delhi and West Bengal Governments for not implementing the Ayushman Bharat health insurance scheme, saying that there should not be any politics over health schemes.

## NCPEDP marks World Disability Day 2024 with the launch of a Media Toolkit

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■  
NEW DELHI

As one of its vital institutions, media has enormous influence on society and societal values. It's a potent tool to influence behavior and challenge stereotypes. Acknowledging the role of media in transforming societal initiatives, the National Centre for Promotion of Employment for Disabled People (NCPEDP) in collaboration with O.P. Jindal Global University and EXL launched a Media Toolkit - A Guide to Reporting Disability. This toolkit would provide journalists with guidelines on respectful language, best practices, and strategies to engage with disability issues thoughtfully, ensuring that this invis-

ibilized topic receives accurate representation in media. "This toolkit has been developed to equip journalists with the tools to report on disability with accuracy and respect, promote the use of empowering language that highlights rights and capabilities, not just challenges, serves as a resource for understanding the socio-political and legal framework that governs disability rights in India, such as the RPWD Act 2016 and the UNCRPD. I hope this initiative will contribute to building a media landscape where persons with disabilities are portrayed not as victims or heroes but as individuals with equal rights, aspirations, and contributions to make," remarked Arman Ali, Executive Director, NCPEDP, during a panel discussion held

on the launch of the toolkit on Tuesday. The launch of the media toolkit was followed up by a panel discussion titled "The Role of Media in Shaping the Discourse on Disability," moderated by Prof. Kishalay Bhattacharjee, Professor & Dean, Jindal School of Journalism and Communication, O.P. Jindal Global University. The panelists included Arman Ali, Executive Director, NCPEDP; Dr. Navneet Anand, Founder Director, GreyMatters Communications; Bharat Sharma, Senior Assistant Vice President - Transformation and Solutioning, EXL; and MuskanJain, Assistant Vice President - Global Corporate Social Responsibility Lead, EXL.

## PM Modi speaks to TN CM enquiring about flood situation

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■  
NEW DELHI

Prime Minister Narendra Modi spoke to Tamil Nadu Chief Minister M K Stalin on Tuesday to enquire about the flood situation in parts of the state and assured him of all possible support from the Centre. Official sources said Modi called up Stalin regarding the flood situation. Villupuram district in north Tamil Nadu continued to reel under unprecedented flooding on Monday following extremely heavy rainfall, virtually blocking access to villages and residential colonies as bridges and roads were



submerged and inundating huge acreage of standing crops. In Tiruvannamalai, tragedy unfolded as five bodies were recovered from a house crushed by a boulder that rolled down a hilltop following a mud slip on the night of December 1 during rains.

# Maharashtra village cancels ballot-based repoll after police warning

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ SOLAPUR/MUMBAI

A section of villagers from Maharashtra's Malshiras Assembly segment seeking re-election using ballot papers gave up their plan on Tuesday after intervention by police and administration, NCP (SP) leader Uttam Jankar who won the seat said.

Nana Patole, state Congress president, alleged that officials used police to block villagers under the Bharatiya Janata Party's (BJP) pressure, raising serious concerns about the credibility of Electronic Voting Machines (EVMs). Earlier, residents of Markadwadi village under the Malshiras segment in Solapur district had put up banners claiming a repoll will be held on ballot papers on December 3.

The village is part of the Malshiras Assembly constituency, where Jankar defeated BJP's Ram Satpute by 13,147 votes in the November 20 polls.

Though Jankar won the seat, Markadwadi residents claimed the quantum of votes polled by the Nationalist Congress Party (Sharad Pawar) (NCP-SP) leader was less compared with Satpute, expressing doubt about EVMs.

The Malshiras sub-divisional magistrate on Monday imposed prohibitory orders, under section 163 of the Bharatiya Nagrik Suraksha Sanhita, from December 2 to December 5 in the area.

Tehsildar Vijaya Pangarkar

rejected the villagers' plea seeking re-poll using ballot papers.

"The Assembly elections were conducted lawfully, and no objections were raised during voting or counting. Conducting a ballot paper poll now is illegal and beyond the scope of the election process," Pangarkar said on Tuesday.

Later, Narayan Shirgavkar, deputy superintendent of police (Malshiras division), said they had a detailed meeting with the villagers and NCP (SP) leader Jankar.

"We explained the procedures in the law to them and warned them that even if one vote is cast, cases will be registered," Shirgavkar said.

Jankar said after discussions with police officials and villagers, the repoll plan was cancelled.

The Congress, which won only 16 seats in the Maharashtra Assembly polls, has questioned the election process and EVM credibility. On Tuesday, Patole claimed that the people of Maharashtra suspect that the elections were not conducted transparently.

"Markadwadi villagers took a democratic step to address these doubts through a ballot paper poll. Instead, the administration, under BJP pressure, imposed restrictions and used police force to block them. This raises serious concerns about the credibility of EVMs and the government's intent," Patole tweeted.

If there were no irregularities

why is the administration afraid of a mock poll, Patole questioned.

"This was an opportunity to restore public trust in EVMs, but instead, the BJP's influence has eroded faith in the electoral system," the Congress leader stated.

NCP (SP) MLA from Ahilyanagar district, Rohit Pawar, also criticised the administration.

"The ballot paper poll decision by Markadwadi villagers was an opportunity for the Election Commission of India (ECI) to demonstrate EVM transparency. Instead, the administration acted in fear, imposing restrictions and deploying a massive police force. This raises questions about the state of democracy," he told reporters.

Ram Satpute, who lost the electoral contest in Malshiras constituency, accused BJP MLC Ranjitsinh Mohite Patil of orchestrating the unrest among villagers. "This was not a villagers' movement," Satpute said.

"Ranjitsinh Mohite Patil created a false narrative to malign the administration at the state level while targeting EVMs. The administration has rightly dismantled his plan. For the past three days, Mohite Patil's men have been threatening villagers, trying to instigate unrest. Uttamrao Jankar is merely a pawn, while Mohite Patil is the mastermind behind this scheme," Satpute alleged.

Earlier this year, Mohite Patil's younger brother and NCP (SP) leader defeated Satpute

in the Lok Sabha elections. Jankar said a meeting was held with police officials who warned of seizing the material at the polling station and filing cases.

"After meeting police, we discussed the matter with villagers. The villagers opined if the administration does not allow polling, there will be chaos and conflict between police and residents, which will deter people at the polling station," he said.

Considering the stand of the police and the administration, the villagers decided to stop the "polling" process, Jankar said.

Earlier, a villager Ranjit Markad claimed the village had 2,000 eligible voters on the polling day, and 1,900 of them exercised their franchise.

"The village always supported Jankar in the past, but this time, as per the counting of votes through EVMs, Jankar got 843 votes while BJP candidate Satpute polled 1,003 votes. This is not possible and we do not trust these EVM numbers, that is why we decided to conduct the repoll through ballot papers," said Markad.

In the recently concluded Maharashtra polls, the Mahayuti won 230 of the state's 288 seats, with the BJP emerging victorious in 132, Shiv Sena 57 and Ajit Pawar's NCP 41.

The Maha Vikas Aghadi, comprising the Shiv Sena (UBT), Congress and Sharad Pawar's NCP (SP), managed to get just 46 seats.



Residents affected by cyclone Fengal in Villupuram block Chennai-Tiruchirappalli National Highway demanding relief from the government. PTI

# Stalin announces Rs 2,000 for families affected by Fengal

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ CHENNAI

The families in Villupuram, Cuddalore and Kallakurichi districts which bore the brunt of damage caused by Cyclone Fengal would be provided a relief of Rs 2,000 each, Tamil Nadu Chief M K Stalin announced on Tuesday.

Chairing a meeting at the Secretariat here to assess the damage due to rain in the state, the chief minister directed the officials to provide a relief sum of Rs 2,000 on the basis of family ration cards to families whose livelihood was affected due to a very heavy rain in Villupuram, Cuddalore and Kallakurichi districts. These districts witnessed unprecedented rain for more than two days.

The meeting decided to extend relief assistance to the rain-hit people in Villupuram, Kallakurichi, Thiruvannamalai, Cuddalore, Dharmapuri and Krishnagiri districts, and extend Rs 5 lakh as compensation each to the families who lost their kin due to cyclone or floods.

The government has decided to provide Rs 10,000 as compensation for damaged huts, give priority to construct houses under the Kalaingar Kanavu Illam (housing scheme) for completely damaged huts, provide Rs 17,000 per hectare relief for rain-damaged paddy crops, including irrigated crops to farmers, and Rs 22,500 per hectare for perennial crops and trees damaged.

It also decided to give Rs 8,500 per hectare for rain-damaged (rain-fed) crops, Rs 37,500 as

compensation for the loss of cattle including oxen and cows, Rs 4,000 for the loss of goats and sheep and a relief of Rs 100 for the loss of chicken. Special camps would be conducted in the rain-affected areas for issuing certificates, voter's ID and other documents lost or damaged due to floods, the government said in a release here.

Textbooks and notebooks damaged due to rain would be provided for the affected students.

The chief minister himself visited Chengalpattu and Villupuram districts to assess the damage due to rain and to supervise the relief and restoration work, while Deputy Chief Minister Udhayanidhi Stalin and state ministers supervised the relief work in various other districts in the state.

# New laws protecting rights of citizens, claims PM

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ CHENNAI

Chandigarh has become the country's first administrative unit where 100 per cent implementation of the three criminal laws has been done with Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Tuesday saying these new legislations are becoming protector of citizen's rights and the basis of ease of justice. The laws -- Bharatiya Nyaya Sanhita, Bharatiya Nagrik Suraksha Sanhita and Bharatiya Sakshya Adhiniyam - came into effect on July 1, replacing the British-era Indian Penal Code, Code of Criminal Procedure and the Indian Evidence Act, respectively.

Chandigarh has become the country's first administrative unit where 100 per cent implementation of the three laws has been done. Speaking on the occasion, the prime minister said the new criminal laws represent a concrete step towards realising the ideals enshrined in the Constitution for the benefit of all citizens.

He said the new laws came into effect at a time when country is moving ahead with the pledge of "Viksit Bharat" and 75 years of adoption of Constitution have been completed, thus the launch of the Bharatiya Nyaya Sanhita, rooted in constitutional values, is a significant occasion.



Members of the United Zou Organization (UZO) stage demonstration against the decision to scrap the Free Movement Regime and fence the India-Myanmar border. PTI

# Zou group protest border fencing, FMR

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ CHURACHANDPUR

A demonstration was held in Manipur on Tuesday to protest the government's decision to scrap the India-Myanmar Free Movement Regime (FMR). Demonstration, led by the United Zou Organisation, started at the 'Wall of Remembrance' around 11.30 am. The demonstrators raised slogans against the government's decision to scrap FMR and fence the international border.

# Meity groups urge Center to secure Indo-Myanmar border

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ IMPHAL

Coordinating Committee on Manipur Integrity (COCOMI), an umbrella body of Meitei civil society organisations, on Tuesday asked the central government to secure the Indo-Myanmar border and dismantle the infrastructure of armed militant groups. COCOMI also called for transparent investigations into allegations of collusion between security forces and Kuki armed groups. The Centre needs to take

"decisive action to secure the Indo-Myanmar border and to dismantle the infrastructure of armed militant groups within the state in a stipulated time," COCOMI said in a statement.

A comprehensive strategy is required to address infiltration, illegal poppy cultivation, illegal arms smuggling and trafficking of drugs and also to restore the demographic balance in Manipur, it said.

COCOMI also alleged that the crisis in the northeastern state resulted from "Kuki aggression" and that the

India-Myanmar border has been "mismanaged deliberately".

Both the central and state governments have repeatedly claimed that infiltration from Myanmar is the root cause behind the violence between Imphal valley-based Meiteis and Kukis based in hill districts.

Manipur has remained gripped by recurring bouts of violence since ethnic clashes between the two communities first erupted in May last year. At least 258 people have been killed and thousands rendered homeless since then.

# Newborn's body found in a box at Lucknow airport

BISWAJEET BANERJEE ■ LUCKNOW

A shocking incident unfolded at Lucknow's Amausi Airport on Tuesday morning when the body of a newborn was discovered in a courier box during routine cargo scanning.

The package, booked for Indigo flight 6E 2238 to Mumbai, triggered a security alert, prompting immediate action by the airport's cargo staff and authorities.

The discovery occurred when a scanning machine beeped unusually during the inspection of cargo items.

Upon opening the box, staff found the lifeless body of a month-old infant inside a plastic container. The matter was promptly reported to the Central Industrial Security Force (CISF), which is responsible for airport security.

The courier agent who booked the parcel, identified as Shiv Baran Yadav, was detained and handed over to the CISF for questioning. However, Yadav reportedly failed to provide any explanation or documentation regarding the presence of the newborn's body in the courier package.

According to airport sources,

the cargo team, led by staff member Ankit Kumar, was conducting routine scans of goods booked for air cargo. The scanning machine flagged the package, and upon manual inspection, the body of the newborn was found. Shocked by the discovery, the cargo team immediately informed the CISF and local police, who took charge of the situation.

"We were shocked to find the infant's body inside," Kumar said.

The airport police confirmed the recovery of the body from the cargo premises and are probing the circumstances surrounding the incident. "It

appears that the body was being sent to Mumbai, possibly for some examination," said the airport post-in-charge. Authorities are investigating whether the courier company or the agent was aware of the box's contents. As of now, no official documents have been presented to justify the transportation of the body. The identity of the newborn and the circumstances of their death remain unknown, and police are working to uncover more details.

The incident has raised serious concerns over the misuse of courier services and airport security measures.

# Engineering seats scam, 10 arrested

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ BENGALURU

Ten people, including a staff member of the Karnataka Examinations Authority (KEA), have been arrested for their alleged involvement in an engineering seat-blocking scam, police said on Tuesday.

According to police, the matter came to light on November 13 when KEA officials lodged a complaint at the Malleswaram police station, reporting a suspected seat-blocking scheme during the 2024-2025 undergraduate engineering admissions.

A senior police officer said that during the investigation, three private engineering college managers were questioned based on the complaint, which led to the collection of evidence. "We have arrested 10 people, including a KEA staffer. The others include middlemen and staff members from some engineering colleges," the officer said. The arrests were made over some time, with three suspects apprehended on Monday.

# Students protest Waqf claim, chant Hanuman Chalisa in Varanasi College

BISWAJEET BANERJEE ■ LUCKNOW

Tensions flared at Uday Pratap College (UP College) in Varanasi as students staged a protest on Tuesday, reciting the Hanuman Chalisa near a campus shrine in defiance of police efforts to maintain order.

The demonstration was a direct response to the Uttar Pradesh Sunni Central Waqf Board's contentious claim over the college premises. Hundreds of students gathered, raising slogans of "Jai Shri Ram" and breaking through police barricades. A heavy police presence, led by Additional Police Commissioner (Law and Order) Dr. S. Channappa, was deployed to contain the unrest, but the students remained resolute in their demands.

Protesting students alleged that an increase in religious activities on campus was affecting the academic atmosphere. "The rise in such activities is spoiling the study environment. We cannot allow

this to continue," said one of the agitators.

The situation escalated further when a group of individuals attempted to offer namaz at the campus mosque. Police intervened, detaining one individual, identified as Mukhtar, for allegedly inciting religious gatherings.

Authorities clarified that no religious activity would be permitted on campus until ongoing exams were concluded.

Despite efforts by the police to prevent further demonstrations, students managed to breach barricades and continue their protest near the shrine.

The unrest stems from a 2018 notice issued by the Sunni Central Waqf Board, claiming the college land as its property. This notice, which has recently resurfaced, has sparked outrage among students and staff, who see it as an infringement on the institution's autonomy.

UP College spans over 100 acres and includes a mosque built by Nawab Tonk, along with the tomb of Kachnar Shah, occupying three biswas

of land. While the mosque has historically been frequented by four to five daily worshippers, over 500 people reportedly gathered for Friday prayers last week—an unusual surge that coincided with Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath's visit to the college. During the event, the CM announced plans to upgrade the institution to university status. The land dispute dates back to 2008, when Wasim Ahmed, a resident of Varanasi, filed a claim with the Waqf Board, alleging that the college administration had encroached on Waqf property. In 2018, the board issued a notice warning that the land would be registered as Waqf property if the college failed to respond.

Founded in 1909 by Maharaja Rajarshi Singh Judeo, Uday Pratap College is an educational hub comprising multiple institutions, including Uday Pratap Inter College, Rani Murar Balika Inter College, Uday Pratap Public School, a management college, and an autonomous college, catering to over 15,000 students.

# Fighting for justice, 40 years past midnight in Bhopal



Survivors of the 1984 Bhopal gas tragedy take out a torch rally to mark the 40th anniversary of the disaster. PTI

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ IMPHAL

Organisations representing survivors of the Bhopal gas tragedy on Tuesday took out a protest march to mark the 40th anniversary of one of the biggest industrial disasters in the world and demanded an end to the "injustice" faced by them.

The rally participants, carrying an effigy of "corporate crime" at the now defunct Union Carbide factory site, denounced various regional, national and international leaders and relief organisations for their

continued involvement in the "denial" of justice and a life of dignity to survivors of the catastrophe.

A large number of women and men, holding placards, marched towards the abandoned factory site while raising the slogan "Bhopal Ka Insaaf Karo".

On the intervening night of December 2-3, 1984, the highly toxic gas methyl isocyanate (MIC) leaked from Union Carbide's pesticide plant, killing 5,479 persons and maiming more than five lakh others.

Bhopal Gas Peedit Mahila Stationery Karmchari Sangh

president Rashida Bee, alleged that successive US presidents have actively protected Union Carbide and Dow Chemical from prosecution in India.

"We wish that US President-designate Donald Trump puts an end to the long history of injustice in Bhopal in his effort to make America great again. We hope Trump will take action against Union Carbide Corporation and the Dow Chemical company," she said.

Balkrishna Namdeo, from the Bhopal Gas Peedit Nirashrit Pensionbhogee Sangharsh Morcha, claimed all scientific studies were now pointing out

the ongoing illnesses and continuing deaths among the half-a-million survivors and health impacts on their children.

Bhopal Group for Information and Action representative Rachna Dhingra claimed the Union Carbide-owned Dow Chemical's business in India has increased more than 10 times under the present regime at the Centre.

In 10 years, the groundwater in Bhopal, which should have been cleaned up by Dow Chemical according to the polluter pays principle, has moved 3 kilometres into the city, she further claimed.

# Over 400 workers from Odisha died across India in last decade

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ BHUBANESWAR

Over 400 migrant workers from Odisha died outside the state in the last 10 years, the assembly was informed on Tuesday.

Replying to a question by BJP MLA Tankadhar Tripathy, Labour Minister Ganesh Ram Singhkhuntia said 403 migrant workers from Odisha died in other states between 2015 and November 27. The highest number of 59 migrant workers from Ganjam district died while working outside

the state during the period. It was followed by Kalahandi, 39, Bolangir, 35, Kandhamal, 32, and Rayagada, 28, districts.

Singkhuntia said the government issued 388 licenses to labour contractors under the Inter-State Migrant Workmen, Regulation of Employment and Conditions of Service, Act for the migration of 26. In 2024, he said, Singkhuntia said his government has set up a high-level task force led by Deputy CM KV Singh Deo to address the issue of distress migration.

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PAPER WITH PASSION

## Junta under siege

Myanmar's Junta is losing grip as rebel gains mount, raising fears of a balkanised future

After years of oppressive rule, human rights abuses, and atrocities against its own people, Myanmar's military rulers are now on the defensive. Their grip on power appears increasingly fragile as armed rebels gain significant ground. A year-long offensive has allowed anti-junta forces to seize much of the 480-km National Highway 3, connecting Mandalay to China, a critical route cutting through northern Myanmar's rugged terrain. This victory denies the military lucrative taxes, threatens its strongholds in the central plains, and boosts rebel morale as the civil war enters its fourth year. Myanmar is teetering on the edge of disintegration as the military junta, which seized power in a 2021 coup, confronts increasingly severe attacks from armed rebel groups across the country. Over the past year, ethnic armed organisations and local militias have intensified their offensives, capturing key regions and heightening the risk of Myanmar splintering into fragmented zones of control. The most biggest challenge to the junta has



come from the alliance between the Arakan Army (AA), the Myanmar National Democratic Alliance Army (MNDAA), and the Ta'ang National Liberation Army (TNLA). Operating primarily in Shan State along the border with China, these groups have launched strategic, synchronised assaults, undermining the junta's control in this crucial region.

The Arakan Army's offensives in Rakhine and Chin States have yielded significant territorial gains, placing vast swathes of land and critical townships under their control. These advances threaten the junta's ability to project authority in regions vital for natural resources and strategic positioning. China, a key stakeholder with significant economic interests in Myanmar, has sought to balance its influence between the junta and rebel groups. As rebel forces secure near-total control over regions such as Rakhine and parts of Shan State, the junta's ability to govern the country as a unified entity is waning fast. This fragmentation could pave the way for the de facto partition of Myanmar into autonomous zones controlled by various factions. The war within has not been easy and the common people are paying the price. Entire communities have been displaced, particularly in the Rohingya-majority regions, where people face violence from multiple fronts. Basic services are scarce, and the humanitarian crisis is deepening. Prolonged conflict has devastated Myanmar's economy, deterring foreign investment and crippling key sectors. Infrastructure projects backed by China and other countries are at risk, compounding economic instability. The instability in Myanmar has broader implications for Southeast Asia, particularly for neighboring countries like Thailand and India. Cross-border violence, refugee flows, and the potential for illicit activities such as drug trafficking pose significant challenges for regional stability. The coming days will be critical in determining whether Myanmar can salvage its unity or succumb to a spiral of fragmentation and perpetual conflict.

holder with significant economic interests in Myanmar, has sought to balance its influence between the junta and rebel groups. As rebel forces secure near-total control over regions such as Rakhine and parts of Shan State, the junta's ability to govern the country as a unified entity is waning fast. This fragmentation could pave the way for the de facto partition of Myanmar into autonomous zones controlled by various factions. The war within has not been easy and the common people are paying the price. Entire communities have been displaced, particularly in the Rohingya-majority regions, where people face violence from multiple fronts. Basic services are scarce, and the humanitarian crisis is deepening. Prolonged conflict has devastated Myanmar's economy, deterring foreign investment and crippling key sectors. Infrastructure projects backed by China and other countries are at risk, compounding economic instability. The instability in Myanmar has broader implications for Southeast Asia, particularly for neighboring countries like Thailand and India. Cross-border violence, refugee flows, and the potential for illicit activities such as drug trafficking pose significant challenges for regional stability. The coming days will be critical in determining whether Myanmar can salvage its unity or succumb to a spiral of fragmentation and perpetual conflict.

### PICTALK



Bullock carts loaded with sugarcane head towards the Sugar Factory for crushing, in Karad

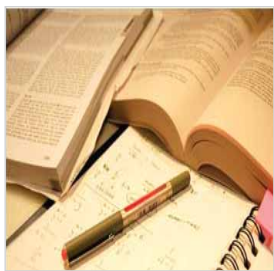
PTI

## One nation one subscription as a catalyst for equitable education

Access to quality academic resources remains a significant challenge for students and researchers, especially in India's remote regions

Access to quality resource materials remains a critical challenge for students and research scholars, particularly in the remote corners of India. While the digital age has transformed the way information is disseminated, physical libraries continue to be the cornerstone of academic excellence.

Yet, these essential knowledge hubs are increasingly becoming relics of the past, accessible only to a privileged few associated with national institutions and selected universities. So far, every agency in the country has subscribed for their digital library resources, UGC have INFLIBNET, which is available in selected universities and colleges, CSIR and DST institutions have the National Knowledge Resource Consortium (NKRC); ICAR institutions have CeRA, etc, paying crores of rupees. In many cases, these e-resources are limited to the users of the host institute alone, though they are funded through public money. The ambitious One Nation One Subscription initiative, if implemented effectively, has the potential to



address this disparity and revitalize the educational landscape. Despite technological advancements, access to quality academic resources has not been democratised in India till now. Libraries in most colleges and universities face an alarming decline for various reasons. The lack of interest among younger generations in visiting libraries and shrinking funds has exacerbated this crisis. Unfortunately, in many public institutions, mainly in visiting libraries and shrinking funds has exacerbated this crisis. Libraries in most colleges and universities face an alarming decline for various reasons. The lack of interest among younger generations in visiting libraries and shrinking funds has exacerbated this crisis. Libraries in most colleges and universities face an alarming decline for various reasons. The lack of interest among younger generations in visiting libraries and shrinking funds has exacerbated this crisis.

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lack of support and an uninviting atmosphere can deter students and researchers from making libraries their go-to space for academic and intellectual pursuits, further eroding the library culture that is already under threat. The One Nation One Subscription initiative aims to address these challenges by providing nationwide access to high-quality academic resources through a centralized system. By negotiating bulk subscriptions to international and national journals, databases, and e-books, the initiative can ensure that every student has the same knowledge regardless of geographic or economic constraints.

What a student or scholar gets in a national institute will be available to a student in a university situated in a remote corner of the country. It's democratising the knowledge resource. However, the success of this initiative depends on more than just access. India needs a parallel effort to rejuvenate its library ecosystem. Even in the digital age, physical libraries are irreplaceable as spaces for reflection and collaboration.

The Government should provide adequate funds to modernise the libraries and also take steps to recruit skilled, motivated librarians who understand the evolving needs of readers and can effectively manage digital and physical resources. To ensure inclusivity, The One Nation One Subscription must provide individual login credentials to every registered student and scholar, enabling direct access to resources anytime, anywhere. This would bypass traditional institutional gatekeeping and foster a more reader-friendly environment. Policymakers must ensure this ambitious plan does not falter due to a lack of implementation or neglect of complementary measures. Knowledge is the cornerstone of progress, and access to it must be recognised as a fundamental right, not a privilege. To fully realise the potential of this initiative, it is essential that the government ensures access to these resources for every student.

(The writer is an adjunct faculty at the National Institute of Advanced Studies; views are personal)



BIJU DHARAMPALAN

The Government should provide adequate funds to modernise the libraries and also take steps to recruit skilled, motivated librarians who understand the evolving needs of readers and can effectively manage digital and physical resources. To ensure inclusivity, The One Nation One Subscription must provide individual login credentials to every registered student and scholar, enabling direct access to resources anytime, anywhere. This would bypass traditional institutional gatekeeping and foster a more reader-friendly environment. Policymakers must ensure this ambitious plan does not falter due to a lack of implementation or neglect of complementary measures. Knowledge is the cornerstone of progress, and access to it must be recognised as a fundamental right, not a privilege. To fully realise the potential of this initiative, it is essential that the government ensures access to these resources for every student.

(The writer is an adjunct faculty at the National Institute of Advanced Studies; views are personal)

## How Nehru targeted his opponents

Nehru targeted Dr Syama Prasad Mookerjee and Dr B R Ambedkar, leaders who had shaped India's Constitution but differed with his vision for the nation



ANIRBAN GANGULY

As the campaign for the first general elections in 1951-1952 played out, the Congress led by Nehru fiercely targeted two leaders. For the fledgling Jana Sangh and Dr Syama Prasad Mookerjee, Nehru came out in open abuse, vowing to 'crush Jana Sangh'. For Dr Ambedkar and the Scheduled Caste Federation, the Congress adopted a ruse.

Nehru deputed his trusted communist friends to ensure Babasaheb's defeat. Jawaharlal was essentially a petty man when it came to his political and intellectual opponents. It did not matter to him that they were his colleagues in the Constituent Assembly till the other day and had contributed to erecting the constitutional edifice of free India.

He wanted both Ambedkar and Syama Prasad defeated. He was allergic to their parliamentary skills and to their vocal advocacy of a new polity for India. He wanted a new Parliament shorn of opponents, except communists, who, in any case, were his ideological co-travellers. Nehru did not put up a candidate against A K Gopalan in Kannur. This camaraderie overflowed especially after Sardar Patel's death. Despite Nehru's flame-throwing blitzkrieg Dr Mookerjee won his Calcutta south seat, with his Jana Sangh just about managing to stay afloat as a national party. Babasaheb lost from Bombay North seat, primarily because of the machinations of the communists who were outsourced by Nehru to carry out the hit-job against him.

It did not matter to Nehru that Dr Ambedkar's health was failing restricting his mobility. It did not matter to him that Dr Ambedkar had completely exhausted himself in the gargantuan task of putting together the Constitution and was therefore worthy of a noble gesture of support. Speaking of his defeat, Dr Ambedkar, one of his most authentic biographers Dhananjay Keer tells us, felt that it 'was due to the machinations of S.A.Dange.'

During the campaign Dange had given out a vicious slogan, he said, 'Spoil your votes but don't vote Dr Ambedkar.' To Dr Ambedkar,



Communism, was 'like a forest fire; it goes on burning and consuming anything and everything that comes in its way.' Nehru deftly fanned that forest fire. Dr Savita Ambedkar, in her reminiscences of her life with Dr Ambedkar, recalling this first election writes how Nehru was 'keeping a sharp eye on the constituency' and of how 'S K Patil (Mumbai boss of the Congress) and S A Dange of the Communist Party had agreed.'

It emerged, writes Savita Ambedkar, that 'Nehru, S K Patil and Dange had decided that they would do all that was required, use whatever strategy suited the occasion, but they were determined not to let Dr Ambedkar win.' The Congress-Communist conspiracy, as Savita Ambedkar describes it, left 'the Constitution-making Doctor Saheb defeated.' It was a terrible psychological blow for Saheb...

It was Congress's manipulation that caused the defeat of the maker of the Indian Constitution. This first defeat, deliberately inflicted on Dr Ambedkar, deeply disappointed him since he was looking forward to returning to Parliament. Parliament, he felt, was his natural arena of work, a forum standing on which he



NEHRU AND CONGRESS ENGINEERED A SECOND ELECTORAL DEFEAT WHEN BABASAHEB LOST THE BY-ELECTIONS TO LOK SABHA FROM THE BHANDARA SEAT

could give his best to his country's regeneration in his remaining years. 'This horrendous defeat in the elections,' writes Savita Ambedkar, 'had an extremely harmful impact on his already debilitated health, melancholy, disappointment, depression and disability returned.'

Nehru and Congress engineered a second electoral defeat when Babasaheb lost the by-elections to Lok Sabha from the Bhandara seat. For this election, Babasaheb chose a young RSS pracharak Dattopant Thengadi as his election convener.

Thengadi would closely work as Babasaheb's understudy for the next two years and would go on to found the world's largest trade union movement Bharatiya Mazdoor Sangh. The Bhandara by-elections were a chance for the Congress to make amends and to give up its pettiness, but Nehru stuck to his blind opposition to Babasaheb.

Dr Savita Ambedkar, ruefully writes that the Congress 'should have displayed the largeness of heart to re-invite [to Parliament] the sculptor of the Constitution with due honour. For the sake of the welfare of the nation, if not for anything else, Nehru should have left the way open for Saheb to be elected to the Lok

Sabha. But quite to the contrary, the Congress shook hands with a person like Dange and applied all its strength and got into all kinds of machinations to defeat Saheb, which proves that Congress cared more for the party than for the welfare of the country.'

During the Bhandara elections, Dr Ambedkar writes Keer, was scathing of Nehru and Congress. He was fighting the elections, he said, 'so that he might give the people the other point of view from the Opposition. It would not have been difficult, he said, for him to be in Parliament if he was prepared to make a compromise with the Congress.' Babasaheb firmly chose not to compromise or succumb before Congress and thus faced political humiliation and insult in his last years.

When Nehru's heirs, thus, comically wield the Constitution today, they must be greeted with loud guffaws. Their action needs to be dismissed as the irrelevant and desperate posturing of the managers of a defeated political cartel.

(The writer is chairman Dr Syama Prasad Mookerjee Research Foundation and member National Executive Committee, BJP; views are personal)

### LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

#### POPULATION GROWTH RATE DECLINES

Madam—The Rashtriya Swayamsevak (RSS) Sarsanghachalak (chief) Mohan Bhagwat raised concerns about declining birth rates, emphasising the importance of maintaining a birth rate of at least 2.1 to ensure the existence of social groups. He underscored unity despite differences and highlighted the inclusivity of Indian culture without caste discrimination. It is, however, true that birth rates are falling in every nation and in the developed West, Japan, South Korea, Taiwan and China.

Population is shrinking because of decreasing incidence of marriages among eligible young bachelors and spinsters and traditional marriages for life are fast getting replaced by live-ins, same-sex marriages, increasing rates of incidence of divorces, consensual/temporary affairs, and above all, spreading birth control measures irrespective of religious opposition to the same due to loosening of popular restraints or fear of religious tenets and prescriptions in all faiths. In India, Middle-class families are finding it difficult to provide better education for even two children and the value of rupees is decreasing and the purchasing power of rupees is going down. No educated person would like to have a third child. Just see how high the inflation is, GDP (gross domestic product) is down, the rupee is weak against the dollar, and we are having more children-who will feed them? Moreover, does Bhagwat have any solutions for real problems like poverty, jobs, and inflation? I feel this statement from Mohan Bhagwat is absurd and illogical.

Bidyut Kumar Chatterjee | Faridabad

#### CONTROVERSY OVER EVM

Madam—The growing controversy over the performance of EVM shows the dire need for a thorough study of its tamper-proof quality. Only when one loses, finds fault with EVMs is it acceptable? Definitely, it is the loser who seeks

#### Earth suffers from plastic pollution



Plastic has become the biggest headache for all living beings on the earth. Because of the chemicals present in it, this garbage is not only polluting the earth and water, but it is also causing problems for the animals in the sea. The talks held in the South Korean city of Busan to find a solution to plastic waste ended inconclusively on Monday. It has been said that all the countries will meet again next year i.e. in 2025. But the way the world has been divided into two parts on this subject in this meeting itself, it does

not seem that there is any scope for any kind of agreement after this. It is estimated that since 1950, more than eight billion tonnes of plastic have been produced worldwide, but less than 10 per cent has been recycled. Due to this, millions of tonnes of plastic have reached the oceans around the world, posing a serious threat to aquatic life and their environment.

While developed countries want a complete ban on its production. A group of 95 countries, including the UK, the European Union, the African Group and many South American countries, has emerged, calling for making Article 6 a legally binding pledge to reduce production levels. But a group of oil-producing countries, including Saudi Arabia, Iran, Kuwait and Russia, strongly opposed it. India too has expressed its concern about including any commitment to cut plastic production, as it could impact its right to development.

Jang Bahadur Singh | Jamshedpur

#### COP29 FALLS SHORT OF EXPECTATIONS

Madam—The COP29 conference held at Baku was disappointing to say the least. It would be an understatement to say that it has delivered a deadly blow to international efforts to restrict global warming and put extra pressure on developing nations that are already struggling to emerge from the economic slowdown due to ongoing wars in West Asia and Europe. How can they put developed nations and developing nations at par and expect the latter to do the heavy lifting? And to make matters worse, we have US President-elect Donald Trump, who has completely different ideas on this critical issue. With developed nations shying away from their responsibilities of helping developing nations to fight climate change, the future outlook for global climate mitigation looks grim. Developed nations will have to stop behaving like big brothers now and accept the reality and responsibility.

Bal Govind | Noida

Send your feedback to: letterstopioneer@gmail.com

A G Rajmohan | Anantapur



## FIRST COLUMN

### THE ETERNAL JOURNEY OF THE SOUL

Life and death are interwoven in an eternal cycle of renewal, granting the soul opportunities for growth



RAJYOGI BRAHMA KUMAR NIKUNJ JI

Very few humans know when death will come, how it will occur and where it will lead because death is inevitable and it keeps no calendar. Life may not be fair to all, but death deals equally with all, whether rich or poor, mighty or meek, deity or demon, saint or a sinner. Death has many shades to it. Dying for a noble cause such as for patriotism, or a social cause brings glory to the dead. Such deaths win over a lot of sympathy and goodwill for the soul.

Then some die a silent death without suffering much illness or pain. Such deaths happen to fortunate souls who perform good actions. There are also violent deaths such as accidents, murders, suicides, executions etc. Such deaths are preceded by suffering and bitterness and followed by more agony for the soul. So! Are there any happy deaths or can death be a rewarding experience? Well!!

To understand this, we have to first understand life. For this, we need to ask a few questions to ourselves as to what is it that lives when a human being is alive. What is it that ceases to exist when death occurs? On one hand, we say that a person has died and on the other hand, we talk of the body as the mortal remains. So what is mortal? The person or the body? In essence, life is a phenomenon that unfolds when a soul enters a body and death is simply a state when a soul leaves one body and enters a new one. Hence the person who passes away is the soul



that was living in the body. So, what is a soul? A soul is a sentient energy that manifests itself in three levels, the mind, intellect and sanskaras. A common saying goes that when you die the world is dead for you. Hence, what ends with death is the soul's connection or attachment to the limited world that it is related to whilst in the body, such as relationships, possessions, roles, etc. However, an amazing trait of the soul is that it carries over the karmic debts and sanskaras into the next life.

We all know that everyone has to die one day yet we never think about our death. This may be because as souls, we have been living in different bodies birth after birth for ages. Our attachment to the body is so strong that even in old age people buy bigger and better properties and continue to invest for the future so that they can live in comfort. Death is not the end of everything but it marks a major turning point in the journey of the soul in the human world.

Death also means newness. It fills the soul with freshness and renewed zest for life and broadens the scope for the soul to enrich itself and evolve with new experiences with different souls in different roles, bodies and places. This renewal is what makes the concept of eternity meaningful. The cycle of life and world drama could not go on eternally if there were no death. For a spiritually enlightened soul, death means final liberation from earthly bondages; it's an ascension to a higher realm of existence where the soul can experience total freedom and bliss because an enlightened soul takes rebirth in a golden age where it will not suffer untimely or painful death.

So, how does one get over the fear of death? For that, we need to understand that the root cause of our fear that leads us to sin & suffering is the consciousness and attachment of the body. Hence the awareness that we are eternal souls is the key to conquering the fear of death. Immortality is the awareness of our eternity and mastery over the body. It does not imply that we will go on existing in the same body forever. NO. A spiritually empowered soul becomes immortal by practising soul consciousness whilst living in the body. On the other hand, for sinful souls life itself is a living death for they die every day out of fear, remorse and suffering but those who die alive i.e. those who live in the world with no attachment to worldly matters are indeed liberated even in life.

*(Writer is a spiritual educator and popular columnist; views are personal)*

# Delhi's pollution crisis: A call for sustainable solutions



RAJDEEP PATHAK

A comprehensive approach to urban mobility, affordability and infrastructure is the need of the hour to reclaim Delhi's air and ensure a healthier, sustainable future



As India aspires to emerge as the world's third-largest economy, it continues to grapple with the challenge of crafting a robust policy framework to combat the persistent environmental crises (read pollution) in its capital city, Delhi. Thankfully, the stubble-burning season officially concluded on November 30, 2024, and it is perceived as the end of the annual apocalypse of Delhi's air pollution. But, it needs to be seen that although the practice was outlawed in 2015, it continues unabated, contributing to approximately 35 per cent of Delhi's pollution. However, the core issue extends far beyond stubble burning, encompassing broader atmospheric and industrial factors. Decisive action in addressing these deeper challenges – and not prolonged silence – is the need of the hour. After weeks of smog and burning eyes and a high Air Quality Index (AQI), on December 2, 2024, Delhi's air quality showed marginal improvement for the second consecutive day, with the AQI that was recorded at 273 in the morning – though still within the 'poor' category. According to the Central Pollution Control Board (CPCB), the city's 24-hour average AQI on December 1 stood at 285, providing a modest reprieve after 32 consecutive days of 'very poor' and 'severe' air quality (AQI levels exceeding 400). However, despite these minor improvements, the Supreme Court on December 2, 2024, refused to ease emergency restrictions under Stage 4 of the Graded Response Action Plan (GRAP) for air pollution in Delhi. The Court emphasised that any relaxation of measures would depend on a consistent and substantial downward trend in AQI levels. The schools have nevertheless opened giving a fresh breath to the students from the online or hybrid mode. Although experts caution that pollution levels could potentially worsen, the past three days have seen clear skies and sustained, stronger winds from the northwest, which have facilitated the dispersion of pollutants. One of the most contributing factors of pol-



THE STATE OF PUBLIC TRANSPORTATION IN DELHI REMAINS DEEPLY INADEQUATE. ACCORDING TO A REPORT DELHI CURRENTLY HAS APPROXIMATELY 45 BUSES PER 100,000 RESIDENTS, BASED ON DATA FROM THE 2011 CENSUS

lution, according to the Centre for Science and Environment (CSE), is 'vehicular pollution' which remains the most significant contributor to Delhi's air pollution, accounting for 51.1 per cent of emissions from all local sources, despite technical interventions aimed at reducing emissions. CSE's analysis highlights a persistent 'mobility crisis' in the city, characterised by systemic shortcomings in the public transport infrastructure despite years of investment. This crisis has driven a sharp increase in the number of private vehicles, which now play a substantial role in fuelling winter air pollution. Notably, even during periods of reduced stubble burning, Delhi's air quality frequently remains in the 'poor' or 'very poor' categories. CSE's report draws attention to several critical issues undermining public transportation, including its lack of reliability. For instance, instances of buses breaking down during transit rose significantly, from 781 in 2018-19 to 1,259 in 2022-23. Furthermore, high waiting times at bus stops reveal a fundamental inefficiency in the system: less than 1 per cent of bus stops offer waiting times of less than 10 minutes, while approximately 50 per cent require passengers to wait over 15 minutes. The state of public transportation in Delhi remains deeply inadequate. According to a report Delhi currently has approximately 45 buses per 100,000 residents, based on data from the 2011 census. This figure is significantly below the benchmark set by the Ministry of Housing and Urban Affairs, which recommends a ratio of 60 buses per lakh of the population. In comparison, major global cities such as London, Hong Kong, Shanghai, and Seoul exhibit considerably higher ratios, ranging from 69 to 90 buses per 100,000

residents, highlighting a significant disparity in Delhi's public transportation infrastructure. While the Delhi Metro has been championed as a cornerstone of urban mobility, its impact remains constrained. With an average daily ridership of only 2,700 passengers per train, the Metro's limited capacity – that poor labourers aren't able to afford – and reach is evident, failing to address the broader needs of the city's commuters. According to The Economic Times, an unskilled daily-wage labourer in Delhi spend approximately 8 per cent of their income on travel via non-air-conditioned buses, 14 per cent on air-conditioned buses, and an alarming 22 per cent on the Metro. These figures underscore the economic burden placed on vulnerable sections of the population. The challenge is addressing the issue of 'affordability'. Data from the 'Economic Survey of Delhi 2023-24' further paints a stark picture of the city's growing vehicle population. Delhi currently has 7.9 million registered vehicles, with an additional 650,000 vehicles added in 2023-24, a figure that surpasses the pre-pandemic (COVID) annual average of 610,000. Moreover, the city experiences a daily influx and outflow of 1.1 million vehicles. The annual growth rate of two-wheelers and cars stands at 15 per cent, contributing significantly to transport-related pollution. Notably, according to the CSE, the transport sector accounts for 81 per cent of nitrogen oxide (NOx) emissions in the capital, further worsening its air quality challenges. There is a reports that the number of vehicles in the capital doesn't correspond to the size of its population, showing how a small proportion of the population has an outsized contribution to the air pollution crisis. According to data obtained in

the latest cycle of the National Family Health Survey, only a small proportion of families residing in Delhi own cars – 19 per cent in its rural areas and 28 per cent in its urban centers. Yet, Delhi streets are often congested by this small proportion of car-owners." However, an equally concerning factor lies in the extensive proliferation of industries across Delhi and the National Capital Region (NCR), which persist as major and consistent sources of pollutants. These industrial emissions subject the residents of Delhi to a form of 'slow violence (read poison)'. Therefore, enhancing public transportation systems is a pivotal strategy for addressing the challenges posed by urban mobility and environmental sustainability in Delhi. Key measures such as improving last-mile connectivity, reducing fares to ensure affordability for a broader demographic, and expanding the public transport fleet to accommodate the city's growing population are essential for reducing the dependence on private vehicles. By prioritising these initiatives, it is believed that a significant decrease in traffic congestion and vehicular emissions can be achieved, contributing to a cleaner and healthier urban environment. Moreover, such measures would improve the inclusivity and accessibility of the city, enabling individuals without personal vehicles to navigate Delhi more efficiently. In the long term, a robust and affordable public transport network would not only promote environmental sustainability but also enhance the overall quality of life for all residents by fostering greater equity and mobility within the city.

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

# The impact of COVID-19 and lessons for preventing future pandemics

By strengthening healthcare systems and fostering global collaboration, we can minimise the risk of future pandemics write SUMER SINGH AHLUWALIA and SAISHA ANAND

COVID-19 has caused over 7,000,000 deaths worldwide, with countless others affected. These statistics barely begin to convey the immense impact of the pandemic, which brought loss to almost everyone. Wearing masks became the norm, schools transformed into virtual classrooms, and homes turned into makeshift workspaces. For a time, the world seemed to turn into a vast cemetery. Addressing and preventing future pandemics requires both personal behavioural changes and strict government regulations. These efforts can significantly reduce the risk of COVID-19 and similar health crises in the future.

The origin of COVID-19 remains controversial, though it is widely believed to have stemmed from an animal sold at the Huanan Seafood Market in China. The consumption of meat, normalised for centuries, has often been linked to the emergence of infectious diseases. Diseases arising from the butchering of animals highlight the need for dietary shifts. Vegetarianism, for instance, is a proactive step that could reduce the likelihood of zoonotic spillovers and the spread of diseases like COVID-19. This also raises an ethical question: is it justifiable to kill animals merely to satisfy human taste preferences? **The Role of Vaccination** Vaccination has long been a topic of debate, and the

COVID-19 vaccines faced significant backlash. Many were hesitant due to concerns about the intentions of pharmaceutical companies and the fact that the vaccines did not provide sterilising immunity. However, vaccinations remain essential to eradicating diseases. According to the National Center for Immunisation and Respiratory Diseases, individuals who received the COVID-19 vaccine were 54 per cent less likely to contract SARS-CoV-2. Achieving herd immunity is crucial, requiring the transmission rate (Rt) to fall below 1, meaning each infected individual transmits the virus to less than one other person. The concept of the "socialism of the microbe" emphasises our responsibility to protect

others by safeguarding ourselves from infectious diseases. For instance, self-isolation, mask-wearing, and vaccination not only protect individuals but also shield vulnerable populations who cannot be vaccinated. **Preventative Measures** Personal precautions, such as wearing masks, self-isolating, and following hygiene protocols, are critical in containing the spread of viruses like SARS-CoV-2. A study in Bangladesh revealed that mask usage significantly reduced COVID-19 infections. As an RNA virus, SARS-CoV-2 evolves quickly, facilitating asymptomatic transmission. Research by Wang and Tong, published in the 'National Library of Medicine,' stresses the importance of strict quar-



antine measures for asymptomatic individuals to control the pandemic. **Government Interventions** Not everyone maintains the same hygiene standards, underscoring the need for government intervention. Investments in research and healthcare infrastructure are essential for pandemic preparedness. Projects like the

Global Virome Project and DEEP VZN aim to identify high-risk regions, animals, and viruses, enabling better predictions and preventive measures. India's 2021 healthcare crisis serves as a stark example of unpreparedness. A lack of oxygen, hospital beds, and essential facilities led to thousands of deaths daily. Despite this, the country still faces a deficit in healthcare infrastructure, highlighting the urgent need for increased healthcare budgets. Economic barriers also prevent many from accessing necessary care. A study published in the 'National Library of Medicine' found that one in six adults avoids healthcare due to cost. Governments could address this by subsidising

basic health insurance, covering vaccines, health check-ups, and screenings. This would ensure equitable access to healthcare and encourage public participation in disease eradication efforts. **Education as a Tool for Change** Education plays a vital role in fostering behaviour change. Courses like "Global Change and Infectious Disease," offered at Wesleyan University, teach valuable skills for reducing infection risks. Such courses should be mandatory to instill a lifelong sense of personal and social responsibility. Teaching hygiene practices, such as proper handwashing, should start at a young age, while mass educational campaigns can raise awareness about infectious diseases across all age

groups. Social media can amplify these messages, encouraging responsible behaviours and helping curb the spread of future diseases. **Conclusion** Minimizing the spread of COVID-19 and preventing future pandemics requires a combination of personal behavioural changes and robust government interventions. These pandemics are a wake-up call, reminding us of the harmful impacts of human activities on the planet. By promoting practices like vegetarianism, personal hygiene, and social responsibility, we can mitigate the dangers of pandemics and build a hopeful future. *(Ahluwalia & Saisha are studying economics at Wesleyan University; views are personal)*





Palestinians say Hamas, Fatah close to agreement on committee to administer post-war Gaza

PALESTINIAN officials say Fatah and Hamas are closing in on an agreement to appoint a committee of politically independent technocrats to administer the Gaza Strip after the war. It would effectively end Hamas' rule and could help advance ceasefire talks with Israel.

There was no immediate comment from Israel. Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu has vowed to continue the war until Hamas is dismantled and scores of hostages are returned.

Fire agreement with Israel, the Hamas official said. American and Arab mediators have spent nearly a year trying to broker such an agreement, but the negotiations have repeatedly stalled.

Floods wreak havoc in Malaysia, southern Thailand; over 30 dead



Severe floods caused by monsoon rains killed more than 30 people and displaced tens of thousands in Malaysia and southern Thailand, officials said Tuesday.

South Korean declares emergency martial law

South Korean President Yoon Suk Yeol declared an "emergency martial law" Tuesday, accusing the country's opposition of controlling the parliament, sympathising with North Korea and paralysing the government with anti-state activities.

Three climbers missing on New Zealand's highest peak

Three mountain climbers from the US and Canada are missing after they failed to return from a planned ascent of New Zealand's highest peak, Aoraki, authorities said Tuesday.

The Americans — Kurt Blair, 56, from Colorado and Carlos Romero, 50, of California — are certified alpine guides, according to the website of the American Mountain Guides Association.

Public Notice

Be it known to all concerned that my client KAPOOR CHAND S/O DEVI RAM R/O 13/290, BLOCK-13, KALYANPURI, DELHI-110091 and his entire family members have severed all his relations with his son Hemraj and debarred him from all his immovable and movable properties...

Public Notice

My client Mrs. Geeta W/o Mr. Balraj owner of built-up Property of Plot no. 86, area measuring 233 sq. yds. i.e. 194.818 sq. mtrs. Signal Storey with roof rights, out of Khyasa no. 109 min. situated in the area of Village Mayur Vihar, Delhi. Through registered gift deed dated 28.11.2024 executed by Mr. Balraj S/o Mr. Shripal in favour of Mrs. Geeta W/o Mr. Balraj Vide Reg. no. 2024/4/11784, at SA-VII Delhi the above-mentioned property is going to be mortgaged with Federal Bank Financial Services Limited.

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Table with 5 columns: S.No., Tender No., Name of Work, Estimated Cost, and Bid Closing Date. It lists various tender items for infrastructure and services.

Public Notice

It is to inform to the public at large that Mrs. Seema had acquired Property bearing No. H-23/2, area measuring 23 sq. yards, Kh. No. 665, situated at Village Chanda Gajan Khadar, in the abadi of H-Block, Gali No. 27, Jai Prakash Nagar, Ghonda, Ilaqa - Shadara, Delhi vide GA Dt. 19.03.2024 along with AT & Sump. Will executed by Mr. Ved Prakash and Now Mrs. Seema is the undisputed owner of the said property.

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ADITYA BIRLA CAPITAL

ADITYA BIRLA FINANCE LIMITED. Registered Office: Indian Rajon Compound, Veraval, Gujarat-362266. Branch Office: First Floor, Vijaya Bank Building, 17, Barakhamba Road, New Delhi-110001. DEMAND NOTICE (US 13/2) OF THE SARFAESI ACT - 2002.

Public Notice

This is for notice of the general public that a political party is proposed to be registered by the name of JANTA PRITI NIDHI MANDAL. The office of the party is located at G1-48, G-7, Karnal Road Industrial Area, Delhi-110033. This Party has submitted application to the Election Commission of India, New Delhi for its registration as Political Party under Section 29A of the Representation of People Act, 1951.

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Office of the Superintending Engineer 1st Circle, Public Works Department, Almora

Letter No. : 5461(i) Nivida-01/2024-25 NATIONAL COMPETITIVE BIDDING (E-Tendering) Short Term E-TENDER NOTICE

The Superintending Engineer, 1st Circle, PWD Almora invites tender through E-Tendering (Two Bid System) on behalf of Honourable Governor of Uttarakhand for following works. All other information will be available from dated 04/12/2024 & onwards on website http://www.uktenders.gov.in

Table with 7 columns: Sl. No., Name of Work, Cost of Tender, Earnest Money, Validity of Tender, Time of Completion, and Contractor's Category of Registration. It lists two tender items for road and building work.

Public Notice

Any person / firm / institution / company having any claim or right in respect of the said Property by way of inheritance, share, sale, agreement, lease, license, gift, possession, legal heirs, partners or encumbrance whatsoever or otherwise is hereby requested to intimate in writing to the undersigned within 07 days from the date of publication of this notice of his/her share or claim, if any, with all supporting documents at below mentioned address.

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Expression of Interest

EOI Notice No. : C/470/AP/OSOP/2023-VIII dated : 29-11-2024. Applications are invited by the undersigned for the following work: Scope of work: Participation in One Station One Product Scheme by showcasing/selling indigenous/local products at 37 Nos. Station over Alipurduar Division. Selected station of the project & commencement date: (1) Alipurduar Jn. (APDJ)=03 units, (2) New Alipurduar (NOQ)=04 units, (3) New Coochbehar (NCB)= 04 units, (4) Dhpuguri (DQG)=02 units, (5) New Mal Jn. (NMZ)=2 units, (6) Kokrajhar (KOJ)=02 units, (7) Hasimara (HSA)= 01 unit, (8) Falakata (FLK)= 02 units, (9) New Maynaguri (NMX)=01 unit, (10) Kamakhya (KAMG)=01 unit, (11) Gulma (GLMA)=01 unit, (12) Fakiragram (FKM)= 01 unit, (13) Binnaguri (BNV)= 01 unit, (14) Dalgao (DLO)=01 unit, (15) Dinhat (DHH)=01 unit, (16) Chalsa (CLD)= 01 unit, (17) Nagrakata (NKB)=01 unit, (18) Banarhat (BNQ)=01 unit, (19) Coochbehar (COB)=01 unit, (20) Bamanhat (BXT)=01 unit, (21) Tufanganj (TFGN) = 01 unit, (22) Mathabhanga (MHA)= 01 unit, (23) Gossaigaon Hat (GOGH)= 01 unit, (24) Oodlabari (ODB)= 01 unit, (25) Hamiltanganj (HOJ)= 01 unit, (26) Golakganj (GKJ)=01 unit, (27) Bagrakot (BRQ)= 01 unit, (28) Madarihat (MDT)= 01 unit, (29) Rajabhatkhawa (RVK)= 01 unit, (30) Dewanhat (DWT)=01 unit, (31) Dhubi (DDB) =01 unit, (32) Altagram (ATM)=01 unit, (33) Salbari (SXX)=01 unit, (34) New Changrabandha (NCBD)=01 unit, (35) Ghoksaadanga (GDG)=01 unit, (36) Salakati (SLKX)=01 unit, (37) Basugaon (BSGN)=01 unit total 49 units at 37 stations. Date of commencement of issue of EOI forms : 03-12-2024; EOI box will be available for dropping of applications at office of the Divisional Railway Manager (Commercial) Office/Sr.DCM/Chamber, Alipurduar Jn. at 15.00 hrs. of 26-12-2024 and EOI box will be opened at 16.00 hrs. of 26-12-2024. The EOI documents will also be available in N.F. Railway website www.nfr.indianrailways.gov.in during the above mentioned period. Divisional Railway Manager (C), Alipurduar Jn. NORTH EAST FRONTIER RAILWAY "SERVING CUSTOMERS WITH A SMILE"

Public Notice

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# Dharavi redevelopment project revolutionises slum mapping with drones and LiDAR technology

PTI ■ MUMBAI

In a first for any slum rehabilitation project in India, the Dharavi Redevelopment Project (DRP) has embraced cutting-edge technologies to survey and document Asia's largest slum, officials said. Drones and remote sensing technology Light Detection and Ranging (LiDAR) are being used to map the 620 acres densely populated Dharavi slums. This is to ensure accuracy, transparency, and efficiency in a redevelopment project of this scale and complexity. The Dharavi Redevelopment Project Pvt Ltd, in which the Adani Group holds an 80 per cent stake along with the state government, plans to turn 620 acres of prime land, about three-quarters of the size of New York's Central Park, into a glitzy urban hub. About 7 lakh living in rickety shanties with open sewers and shared toilets in the densely populated slums, close to Mumbai's international airport, are to be given flats up to 350 square feet free of cost. Officials said advanced digital tools are being used to map the entire area and



better data analysis and decision-making, a Dharavi Redevelopment Project-Slum Rehabilitation Authority (DRP-SRA) official said. LiDAR is an active remote sensing technology which plays a pivotal role in this project. Known for its ability to rapidly capture geospatial data, LiDAR uses laser light to measure distances and create highly accurate 3D representations of terrain, buildings, and objects. A portable LiDAR system, such as a backpack-mounted scanner, is being used to

navigate the narrow and congested lanes of Dharavi. Drone technology supplements this by capturing aerial images of the area, providing an overhead perspective that aids in mapping and planning. On the ground, survey teams use mobile applications for door-to-door data collection. These apps ensure that information is gathered at the actual location of each slum dweller, with all data stored and evaluated digitally. This not only improves

accuracy but also reduces the scope for errors or data loss. "The creation of a digital twin - a virtual representation of Dharavi - marks a significant step forward," the official said. According to him, this is the first time such advanced technologies are being used in a slum rehabilitation scheme in India. The digital model will allow authorities to evaluate data more effectively, especially when determining the eligibility of residents for rehabilitation at the end of the survey. It also enables faster resolution of disputes and reduces the chances of oversight. While an estimated one million (10 lakh) reside in Dharavi, about 7,00,000 are thought to be eligible because of the resident definition of one having proof of living in the area prior to January 1, 2000. The Maharashtra govt had recently approved the acquisition of 256 acres of salt-pan land for the Dharavi redevelopment. The land will be used to build low-cost and affordable housing for residents of Dharavi. A survey of existing residents and businesses is being done to determine who

would be rehoused in Dharavi or be relocated. The survey process, however, is not without challenges. To address concerns of Dharavikars like fear of fraud or misuse of data, the P-SRA is conducting extensive information, education, and communication (IEC) activities. These include meetings, pamphlet distribution, and the establishment of call centres to inform residents about the survey process. Most importantly, the residents are explained about P/SRA which is a government entity overseeing the implementation and monitoring of the project, including the smooth execution of the survey. The field supervisors help residents by ensuring they provide the right documents. If the documents are complete, residents get an acknowledgement slip signed by the P-SRA officer and details about the next steps. Residents, who fail to furnish the correct documents at the time of the survey, are explained about the importance of the survey and are helped in retrieving them.

## Domestic air traffic to rise to 164-170 million in FY25: Ica

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

Domestic air traffic is projected to rise 7-10 per cent to 164-170 million in the current fiscal year, while the aviation industry's loss is pegged at Rs 2,000-3,000 crore during the same period, according to rating agency Ica. In the first half of 2024-25, Ica said domestic air passenger traffic stood at 79.3 million, marking a 5.3 per cent annual growth that was partly impacted by the severe heat wave and other weather-related disruptions. The international passenger traffic growth for Indian carriers increased and stood at 16.2 per cent in the first half of the current financial year. On Tuesday, the rating agency said domestic air traffic is expected to jump 7-10 per cent on an annual basis to 164-170 million in FY25. Ica maintained a 'stable' outlook on the Indian aviation industry, amidst continued growth in domestic and international air passenger traffic. Kinjal Shah, Senior Vice President & Co-Group Head at Ica, said the industry is expected to report a net loss of Rs 20-30 billion in FY25 and FY2026 each, significantly lower than the losses witnessed in the past

supported by improved pricing power of the airlines. "The spread between revenue per available seat kilometre and cost per available seat kilometre saw some moderation in H1 FY2025 over FY2024 due to higher fuel prices and overall increased costs amid grounding of aircraft, while yields moderated marginally as airlines strove to maintain adequate passenger load factors. "Nonetheless, the same is expected to pick up in H2 FY2025, amid healthy passenger traffic," Shah said. Airlines' cost structure is typically driven by two key components - Aviation Turbine Fuel (ATF) prices and the INR-USD movement. On a year-on-year basis, Ica said average ATF prices eased by 6.8 per cent to Rs 96,192/KL in the first eight months of FY2025, though exceeding the levels seen during pre-Covid period (first eight months of FY2020) of Rs 65,261/KL. Fuel costs account for around 30 to 40 per cent of an airline's costs, while about 35-50 per cent of the operating expenses, including aircraft lease payments, fuel expenses and a significant portion of aircraft and engine maintenance expenses are denominated in dollar terms.

## Tata Power-DDL and THDCIL sign MoU to develop skilled professionals for energy sector

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

Tata Power Delhi Distribution Limited (Tata Power-DDL) and THDC India Limited (THDCIL) has recently signed a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) to develop a robust pool of skilled and qualified professionals to meet the needs of both the domestic energy sector and international markets. The MoU was signed by Praveen Agrawal, Chief - Human Resource, Industrial Relations, Facility Management & Health Services of Tata Power-DDL and Dr. A.N. Tripathy, General Manager (HR & A) of THDCIL in the presence of Anoop Nandi, Head (BD & Collaboration), Tata Power-DDL, Ravi Budhlakoti (HRD-THDCIL) and other senior

officials from both the organisations. The MoU aims to establish a mutually beneficial framework for collaboration between Tata Power-DDL and THDCIL to organize leadership, wellness & other training programs, workshops, seminars, research initiatives and consultancy projects with a focus on enhancing skills and knowledge in the energy sector. This strategic partnership will leverage the infrastructure facilities of the HRD Takshshila - SLDC in Rishikesh and the Learning Centre of Tata Power-DDL in Delhi to develop and deliver advanced training programs in cutting-edge domains such as smart grids, grid automation, and complementary technologies.

Speaking about the partnership, Praveen Agrawal, Chief - Human Resources, Industrial Relations, FM and Health Services, Tata Power Delhi Distribution Limited said, "This privileged partnership with THDCIL - an institution of national importance, is indeed a landmark collaboration in the area of cutting-edge training programs for the energy sector. Given the changing landscape of energy sector worldwide, we aim to prepare a highly trained and qualified resource pool both for India and international stakeholders. This initiative also underscores our commitment to enhancing skill development, empowering individuals to meet the dynamic demands of the industry effectively."

## Imposition of additional duty on steel imports to hit exports by MSMEs says Exporters

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

MSME exporters from the engineering sector on Tuesday said that any move to impose additional duties on steel imports would make domestic products uncompetitive and impact the country's outbound shipments from the sector. Hand Tool Association Chairman S C Ralhan said that the MSME engineering exporters are already facing problems on the liquidity front and high prices of steel in the domestic market. "Increasing prices of steel by domestic steel makers are hurting us and now we have seen in the media reports that the government is planning to impose a 25 per cent safeguard duty. This will severely impact MSME exporters," Ralhan said. Federation of Indian Export Organisations (FIEO) Director General Ajay Sahai said that if the government



imposes additional duty, they should ensure that the domestic steel companies do not increase the prices of the inputs. "Increase in input prices will impact exports of value-added steel products," Sahai said. The steel ministry has proposed for a 25 per cent safeguard duty on import of certain steel items into the country. The proposal came at a meeting between Union Minister of Steel H D Kumaraswamy and Commerce and Industry Minister Piyush Goyal here on

December 2. Domestic steel players are raising concerns over rising cheap steel imports from select nations like China. Think tank Global Trade Research Initiative (GTRI) in its report has claimed that thousands of containers carrying imported steel remain stranded at JNPT and other ports due to complex clearance procedures imposed by the Ministry of Steel (MOS). "The Customs clearance delays have disrupted production lines and

tarnished India's global reputation, with even countries like Japan formally requesting the government to release stranded shipments," GTRI said. India's steel imports are neither excessive nor unwarranted, GTRI Founder Ajay Srivastava said, adding half of these imports are critical raw materials for domestic production, while 40 per cent consist of specialised items that India does not produce in sufficient quantities. He said that steel imports are just 6 per cent of domestic production and an estimated over 70 per cent imports are done by large steel firms. An impression has been created that India's steel imports are high, lack quality and supplied at below market prices and hence need iron clad controls and data does not support high import theory, Srivastava said. "In FY2024, domestic

production met 94 per cent of India's steel demand, with imports contributing just 6 per cent. Over half of these imports consist of steel scrap (33.8 per cent) and semi-finished steel (17.3 per cent), both of which support domestic steel production. Such imports are made by large steel producers," he added. The remaining 43.4 per cent imports are of high-end flat-rolled steel products used in critical industries like automotive, construction, and household appliances. "Domestic stainless steel prices are 25-30 per cent higher than comparable imported steel for certain thicknesses, even after accounting for duties. This price disparity, driven by import restrictions, significantly boosts the profit margins of large steel firms while small and medium enterprises (SMEs) bear the brunt," the think tank said.

## Hyundai Motor Group ties up with IITs to advance battery

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

Hyundai Motor Group on Tuesday said it has tied up with three IITs to establish a collaborative research system in the fields of batteries and electrification entailing an investment of USD 7 million over five years. The South Korean group, which has presence across multiple segments including mobility, has tied up with IIT Delhi, IIT Bombay and IIT Madras. Hyundai Motor Group plans to invest around USD 7 million over five years, from 2025 to 2029, to jointly conduct battery and electrification-related research with the IITs. As part of the collaboration, Hyundai Center of Excellence (CoE), will be set up within IIT Delhi and would operate through sponsorships from Hyundai Motor Group, the

group said in a statement. The primary objective of the Hyundai CoE is to take the lead in driving advancements in batteries and electrification, specifically designed to meet the unique requirements of the Indian market, it added. "We believe that Hyundai CoE will cultivate a strong network of talented individuals from India's academic landscape, driving innovation and future growth," Hyundai Motor Group Head of Research and Development (R&D) Planning & Coordination Center Naksup Sung said. The Hyundai CoE will not only conduct joint research on a c a d e m i c - i n d u s t r i a l cooperation tasks but also facilitate technical and human exchanges between battery and electrification experts from Korea and India, the group said.

## Govt should leverage sports industry for economic growth: Report

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

The government should focus on developing a model to leverage the sports industry for economic growth and frame policies to encourage more investment in sports infrastructure, events, and related goods and services, according to a report. The Nangia Nxt- FICCI Knowledge Report, titled 'Future of Sports in India,' also suggested that the government could provide incentives to the private sector to fund large-scale, holistic sports programmes to support talent development as part of their Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) activities. CSR contributions could be leveraged to establish and run high-performance training centres with facilities,

including international coaches, nutritionists, and mental and physical trainers. It said that the government may formulate policies to establish and support comprehensive skill development programmes for sports coaching, sports management, and sports-related ancillary industries to boost employment generation through sports, especially in tier-2 and rural areas. While the sports industry has seen remarkable advancements, challenges such as financial insecurity for athletes, underutilised infrastructure, and the need for greater inclusivity persist. Expanding financial aid programmes, developing robust career transition pathways, and fostering a culture of inclusivity can

address these issues, the report said. "The Indian government should focus on developing a model to leverage the sports industry for economic growth, in addition to developing the capacity of Indian athletes to compete at higher levels," said the Future of Sports in India report. The report also suggested that the government must actively bid for and host international competitions and sporting events. It may also diversify sports offerings in multiple states by promoting winter and traditional sports, thereby also encouraging sports tourism. The Nangia Nxt- FICCI Knowledge Report also said that the Indian sports industry is experiencing a period of dynamic growth, with

projections to expand from USD 27 billion in 2020 to USD 100 billion by 2027. This transformation is driven by various factors, including the commercialisation of sports leagues, technological advancements, and a growing emphasis on diverse sporting disciplines. Sectors such as sports goods, apparel, and media rights are contributing significantly to this growth, with the sports media market alone expected to grow from USD 1 billion in 2020 to USD 13.4 billion by 2027. Additionally, landmark achievements by Indian athletes at the 2023 Asian Games and the 2024 Paris Olympics highlight the nation's increasing competitiveness on the global stage, it added.

## Japanese firms keen to set up semiconductor units in India

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

Japanese firms are keen to set up semiconductor units in India and they have all the expertise and specialisation to partner with domestic firms, Deloitte has said. It also said that skilled workforce, funds and continuation of support measures are key to push growth of the semiconductor sector in India. Japanese firms are "super enthusiastic" about India, Shingo Kamaya, Deloitte AP and SRT Leader, Deloitte Japan said. In July, Japan became the second Quad partner after the US to sign an agreement with India for the joint development of the semiconductor ecosystem and maintain the resilience of its global supply chain. The two countries signed the memorandum for semiconductor design, manufacturing, equipment research, talent development and to bring resilience in the semiconductor supply chain. With around 100 semiconductor manufacturing plants, Japan is among the top five countries to have a semiconductor ecosystem. Japan houses companies that are global leaders in raw form of semiconductor wafers, chemical and gases, lenses that are used in chip manufacturing equipment, and display technologies. India aspires to have 10 semiconductor manufacturing plants in 10 years.

"Given the technology, given the specialization, there is no better partner to get on to developing such an ambitious and a critical ecosystem of semiconductor than Japan," Rohit Berry, President - Strategy, Risk and Transactions, Deloitte India, said. He said that the semiconductor story in the country is not just about setting up one factory, but it is about that entire ecosystem. "And that is where many Japanese companies who have set up such ecosystems in Japan or in any other places are going to be absolutely critical to set it up (in India). So this is the vision. This is a grand plan. This is the investment. This is the commitment," he added. Berry also said that developing the right kind of partnerships between Indian and Japanese firms are fundamental for the growth of the sector. "This is not a one year game, it's not a two year game. This will basically benefit us and Japan for generations," he noted. He also emphasised that the government incentive program on a sustained basis will also be a key factor for the sector's growth in India. When asked if Japanese firms are looking for any specific support measures from states, he said that a "centre-state partnership, together with the private and Japanese partnership, all four of them coming together will be a prerequisite to create a once in a lifetime setup".

## Mother Dairy to market co-operative society NCOL's organic products in Delhi-NCR



PTI ■ NEW DELHI

Mother Dairy on Tuesday said it has signed an agreement with the National Cooperative Organics Ltd (NCOL) to exclusively distribute the latter's organic

products under the 'Bharat Organics' brand in Delhi-NCR. In a statement, Mother Dairy said it has "signed up with 'Bharat Organics' as the exclusive distribution partner for their range of organic

staples to the Delhi NCR market." Under the initiative, Mother Dairy will ensure distribution of packed and certified brand 'Bharat Organics' produce for consumers across NCR through its network of booths across the region. The collaboration marks the launch of 'Bharat Organics Atta' and 'Bharat Organics Sweetener (Jaggery)' in the NCR market. "With this partnership, Mother Dairy aims to build a healthier and more sustainable India. By combining NCOL's expertise in organic farming with our extensive distribution

network and deep consumer trust, we are uniquely positioned to bridge the gap between premium organic products and affordability," Mother Dairy Managing Director Manish Bandish said. Mother Dairy has entered into a memorandum of understanding (MoU) with NCOL to distribute the 'Bharat Organics' brand across multiple channels and geographies. The Bharat Organics range will be made available at 300 Safal stores and around 10,000 general trade outlets in Delhi NCR, as well as through modern trade and e-

commerce platforms. Vipul Mittal, Managing Director of NCOL, said "Atta is just the beginning. Our vision is to offer an entire basket of organic staples that cater to the daily needs, while ensuring fair returns for organic farmers." Mother Dairy was commissioned in 1974. It is now a wholly-owned subsidiary of the National Dairy Development Board (NDDB). Mother Dairy is a leading dairy player which manufactures, markets & sells milk and milk products including cultured products, ice creams, paneer, ghee, etc.

Under the 'Mother Dairy' brand. The company also has a diversified portfolio with products in edible oils under the 'Dhara' brand and fresh fruits & vegetables, frozen vegetables & snacks, unpolished pulses, pulps & concentrates, etc. Under the 'Safal' brand. NCOL is a multistate cooperative society, supported by NDDB, NAFED, NCDC, GCMF Ltd, and NCCF. It has been formed to promote organic farming through the cooperative model, creating organic clusters, and ensuring fair trade practices.

# India to host first ever women's T20 World Cup for Blind in 2025

**PTI ■ NEW DELHI**  
Pakistan will play its share of matches in next year's inaugural blind women's T20 World Cup in either Nepal or Sri Lanka after a hybrid model for the event was finalised at the World Blind Cricket Council's (WBCC) Annual General Meeting in Multan. The development comes a few weeks after India withdrew from the men's T20 Blind Cricket World Cup in Pakistan owing to security concerns. The hosting rights for the women's event were awarded to India last year and affirmed at the AGM on Monday in which 11 member countries were present. India, England and New Zealand joined the meeting virtually. "The hosting rights of the tournament was awarded to India last year (2023) only. It was also decided back then that in case there is visa issue with the Pakistan team's coming to India, the tournament will be held in Hybrid Model. Pakistan will play all its matches at a neutral venue," GK Mahantesh, president of the Cricket Association of Blind in India (CABI), told PTI. Asked where would Pakistan's



matches be held, Mahantesh informed that they have zeroed in on two countries. "Pakistan's visually challenged women's team will be based either in Nepal or in Sri Lanka for the entire duration of the tournament," he stated. "The Indian team will travel to Nepal or Sri Lanka to play against them. The cost of the entire event will be borne by our cricket board. We will pay for Pakistan team's entire stay in either of these two countries," he added.

The CABI is neither affiliated to BCCI, nor the ICC. Several other key decisions were also taken at the AGM, including the appointment of India's Rajanish Henry and Chandrasekhar KN as the Secretary General and Director Finance respectively, for a two-year period. Henry, who previously served as Vice President of WBCC, is also the President of the Cricket Association for the Blind in Kerala. While Chandrasekhar, a founder member of the CABI, has previously served as its Treasurer. It was confirmed that the next men's T20 World Cup will be held in 2027, the date and venue for which will be finalised during the AGM in 2025. The members also decided that all international tournaments for cricket for the blind will now adhere to the International Blind Sports Federation (IBSA) Sight Classification rules, ensuring uniformity and inclusivity across the sport. It was also decided that CABI will lead efforts to promote cricket for the blind in the USA and UAE, facilitating the formation of men's and women's teams in these regions.



## World No. 4 Indian Arjun Erigaisi to compete at Norway Chess 2025

**PTI ■ STAVANGER**  
Grandmaster Arjun Erigaisi, who recently became the second Indian after the legendary Viswanathan Anand to reach the gold-standard ELO rating of 2800, will make his debut at the prestigious Norway Chess tournament next year. Norway Chess 2025 will take place from May 26 to June 6. At just 21 years old and ranked world No. 4, Arjun is expected to bring youthful ambition and exceptional talent to one of the most premier tournaments in the chess calendar. Reflecting on his style and growth, Arjun remarked, "I used to lose games because of over-ambition and a lack of objectivity, but now I strive to channel my ambition in a balanced way." As anticipation builds up for the tournament, Arjun expressed his enthusiasm about the event's innovative format. "There are a lot of exciting things about Norway Chess, but for me, I would say the time control and Armageddon format stand out the most to me," he said. Arjun's journey to the top has been nothing short of phenomenal, with 2022 being his breakout year, when he claimed several high-profile victories. In January, he won the prestigious Tata Steel Chess Challengers, and by March he was crowned the national champion. That summer, he dominated the 28th Abu Dhabi International Chess Festival, showcasing his ability to thrive in various formats. To cap off the year, Arjun claimed victory at the Tata Steel Chess India Blitz, strengthening his reputation as a rising star. He continued in same vein in 2023 and emerged as the outright winner of the Sharjah Masters, and later in the year he reached the quarterfinals of the World Cup. This year, Arjun reached new heights as he began with victories at the Menorca Open A, the Stepan Avagyan Memorial, and the WR Chess Masters Cup in London, proving his consistency and dominance in competitive play. In September, Arjun led Team India to gold at the Chess Olympiad, delivering a standout performance on board three with a breathtaking rating performance of 2968. The remarkable performance also earned him an individual gold medal. The same month, Arjun became India's top-rated player, reaching a career-high live rating of 2801 in December. By crossing the prestigious 2800 threshold, joining an elite club of players. The Norway tournament brings together the top male and female players in a distinctive six-player double round-robin format. The introduction of Norway Chess Women in 2024, with equal prize funds for men and women, underscores the event's commitment to gender equality and innovation in the sport.



## Australian Tennis Legend Neale Fraser Passes Away At 91

**AP ■ MELBOURNE**  
Neale Fraser, who won three Grand Slam singles titles and guided Australia to four Davis Cup titles during a 24-year career as team captain, has died at 91. Tennis Australia released a statement Tuesday saying the sport "has lost one of its giants." Fraser beat Australian tennis great Rod Laver to win Wimbledon in 1960, in between sweeps at the U.S. Open where he won the singles, men's doubles and mixed titles in 1959 and '60. He won 11 major men's doubles titles, including at least two at each of the four Grand Slam tournaments. Laver, the only man to twice win all four singles majors in a calendar year, posted a tribute to his "dear mate and fellow lefty" on X, formerly known as Twitter. Fraser "was a true gem in a golden era of Australian tennis legends -- an incredible World No. 1, a Grand Slam

## Al-Sadd clinches Asian Champions League playoffs spot after beating Al-Nassr

**AP ■ RIYADH**  
Cristiano Ronaldo was absent when Al-Nassr lost for the first time in the AFC Champions League Elite, to Al-Sadd of Qatar 2-1 on Monday. Al-Nassr was already guaranteed a place in the round of 16 so Ronaldo, who has five goals in his last three matches, was rested. He watched from the sidelines. Al-Sadd took the lead through Akram Afif, named the Asian player of the year in November, eight minutes after the break. While Sadio Mane and Anderson Talisca went close for Al-Nassr, an own goal from close range by Romain Saiss made it 1-1 with 10 minutes remaining. However, Afif was brought down in the area and, in the ninth minute of added time, Algeria's Adam Ounas converted the penalty. The win ensured 2011 champion Al-Sadd booked a place in the round of 16, moving into fourth in the 12-team group, a point behind Al-Nassr in third. The top eight from each of the two groups progress to the knockout stage. "It was a tough and close game," Al-Sadd coach Felix Sanchez said. "We worked hard to stop Al-Nassr having the ball, and to win at their home stadium. The players showed their character." Al-Ahli was first in the group after the Saudi Arabian side was held by Esteghlal of Iran to 2-2. Ivan Toney scored both goals for the host in Jeddah. Raphael Silva opened the scoring for the Tehran team after 42 minutes but Toney made it 1-1 just before the break from the spot. Mohammad Hossein Eslami restored Esteghlal's lead six minutes after the restart but Toney scored his second penalty four minutes from the end, a fourth goal in Asia for the England striker in the space of a week. Elsewhere, Persepolis of Iran beat Al-Shorta of Iraq 2-1, while Al-Wasl of the United Arab Emirates drew with Al-Rayyan of Qatar 1-1.



# Mollie Marcoux Samaan stepping down as LPGA commissioner

**AP ■ FLORIDA**  
Mollie Marcoux Samaan is resigning in January as LPGA commissioner, a surprise announcement Monday after record growth in prize money along with criticism the LPGA wasn't gaining in popularity during the surge in women's sports. Marcoux Samaan is leaving on Jan. 9, three weeks before the LPGA begins its 75th season. Liz Moore, the chief legal and technology officer, will be interim commissioner until a search committee hires a new one. Marcoux Samaan did not cite a specific reason for resigning except to mention spending more time with her three children. She will serve the third-shortest stint among nine LPGA commissioners dating to 1975, behind only Jim Ritts (1996-99) and Bill Blue (1988-90). "With the LPGA positioned for continued growth, it's time for me to have more time to cheer on our three amazing children as they live their dreams while I continue to pursue my passion for building leaders, uniting communities and creating value through sports, particularly women's sports," Marcoux Samaan said in a statement. The LPGA said prize money increased by more than 90% under Marcoux Samaan, a big part of that the major championships. The five majors had a combined prize fund of \$23.4 million in 2021. Next year, the majors combine to offer at least \$47.8 million in prize money. She announced the end of her tenure a week after the season-ending CME Group Tour Championship awarded \$4 million to the winner, Jeeno Thitikul, from an \$11 million purse. "Since joining the LPGA in 2021, Mollie has been instrumental in solidifying our position as the global leader in women's professional golf, realizing record growth in player earnings and fan engagement," said John B. Veihmeyer, chairman of the LPGA board. "Mollie has been a steadfast advocate for equity in the sport and has worked tirelessly to expand opportunities for women and girls through the game." The LPGA said the average earnings for the top 100 players topped \$1 million this year, compared with an average of just over \$570,000 in 2021. Women's sports across the



landscape has seen a spike in money and interest, though Marcoux Samaan was criticized for the LPGA not getting enough attention behind remarkable story lines this year. Nelly Korda tied an LPGA record with five straight wins, and Lydia Ko won Olympic gold to qualify for the LPGA Hall of Fame, and then won another major at the Women's British Open at St. Andrews. The Americans also won the Solheim Cup, but not without a transportation mess on the opening day at the Robert

## Arne Slot aims cheeky dig at Manchester City

**AP ■ LIVERPOOL**  
Days after leading Liverpool to a convincing win over Manchester City, Arne Slot aimed a cheeky dig at the beleaguered English Premier League champion over its charges for allegedly breaching financial rules. Slot was asked at a news conference on Tuesday for the latest news about the future of Mohamed Salah, who is out of contract at the end of the season and said on Sunday that the 2-0 victory over City might be his last game against Pep Guardiola's team at Anfield. Smiling, Slot replied: "Maybe Mo knows more about the 115 (charges) that are done, so he expects them not to be in the Premier League next season." He immediately emphasized that was a joke. City faces more than 100 charges, ranging over the period from 2009-18, for financial breaches allegedly committed when the club was trying to establish itself as the biggest force in English soccer. Punishment could be as extreme as expulsion from the league.



City denies the charges and a closed-door hearing is taking place. A verdict is not expected until early next year. Slot has kicked City while it is down. The champion has lost four straight games in the Premier League amid a seven-match winless run, easily its worst streak in Guardiola's tenure that started in 2016. Slot was speaking ahead of Liverpool's match at Newcastle on Wednesday. The Reds hold a nine-point lead in the league after 13 games, and are 11 clear of fifth-placed City.

## India women's team heads to Oman for Junior Asia Cup title defence

**PTI ■ BENGALURU**  
The Indian junior women's hockey team departed for Muscat on Tuesday to defend its Asia Cup title which would also help the side qualify for next year's FIH Junior World Cup. The Junior Asia Cup is scheduled to be held from December 7 to 15 and India will begin their campaign against Bangladesh on Sunday. The top three teams in the showpiece will make the cut for the World Cup scheduled in Santiago, Chile. India will be up against China, Malaysia, Thailand, and Bangladesh in Pool A while Pool B will feature South Korea, Japan, Chinese Taipei, Hong Kong and Sri Lanka. India's campaign will be spearheaded by captain Jyoti Singh along with vice captain Sakshi Rana and the squad also features players who have had the experience of playing with the senior side. These players are Vaishnavi Vitthal Phalke, Sunelita Toppo, Mumtaz Khan, Deepika and Beauty Durgdung. The team is being coached by former India captain Tushar Khandker. "We are very confident and upbeat about our campaign. We have a good, experienced team. We have worked hard over the past few months and the team is quite eager to do our best in Muscat, Oman," Jyoti said ahead of the team's departure. "It's heartening to see the men's team enter the knockout stage and they are cruising towards the title. We have been following their matches and we will be there to cheer for them in the remaining matches," added Sakshi, referring to the men's continental event currently being held in Muscat.



# Carey backs Australia's 'world-class' batters to counter Bumrah threat

PTI ■ ADELAIDE

Alex Carey on Tuesday maintained Australia are a "united group", confident that their "world-class" batters will come up with better plans to counter India's pace threat Jasprit Bumrah in the upcoming pink-ball Test here.

With their backs against the wall, India came out all guns blazing in the Border-Gavaskar Trophy series opener at Perth to win by a massive 295 runs with Bumrah (5/30 and 3/42) ripping apart Australia's batting in each innings.

The heavy margin of defeat left Australia looking for answers as their batters flopped collectively, leaving their famed bowling attack with a lot to do.

"He's obviously a fantastic bowler; (he) has been for a number of years. Our batters are world class as well and always find ways to come up with

solutions," Carey told the media. "We've had a look at him now. Hopefully we can combat that first, second spell. Get him bowling a little bit deeper in the innings with an older ball."

"We saw Travis (Head) sort of counterpunch a bit (in the second innings). I trust our batters, we'll find a way not only (against) Bumrah. They played a couple of other debutantes who bowled well as well," Carey said.

After Australia were set an improbable 534 to win, Josh Hazlewood had invited the media to ask their batters how they planned to go about in the second innings, sparking rumours of a rift between the batting and bowling groups.

Carey, however, declined there was any tensions in the dressing room.

"If you ask the batters, we all want to perform better and (as) cricketers, you go out there to score a hundred and if you don't



do that, I think you're at times disappointed," Carey said. "But we're a very united group. We all do get the opportunity to bat and we're all keen to continue to put those big runs on the board and I trust the guys to do that," he added.

Carey said Australia's resounding loss at Perth sparked a "big reaction externally" but maintained that the team will stick to its processes.

"It's quite a big reaction externally for one Test loss. Internally, we don't feel that. We didn't play the way we would have liked to have played."

"We know (that) over four or five Test matches, (if) we keep rocking up and playing our style of cricket we will have the success. We've had that success to, I guess, call upon the method does work."

"We're calm internally, we're excited to get back out and play a better style of cricket and we've

got that opportunity come Friday."

Carey did not want to draw much attention to the last contest here in which India were shot out for their lowest-ever Test total of 36.

"There are obviously amazing days in cricketing history but we don't expect to go out there and do that again. We have a process and a plan that we try to execute and whatever happens, happens. I was not here for that Test match."

Australia have never lost a pink ball Test in Adelaide, in fact they have only lost once in day and night fixture.

"We are excited. We take a lot of confidence for our record in pink-ball cricket — it doesn't mean we will have the success but (with) our methods, our style of play and the experience we have in this group we'll bounce back from Perth," he added.

The two teams will take on each other in the second Test, starting here from Friday.



## Gilchrist advises Australian batters to stay longer at crease

PTI ■ ADELAIDE

The legendary Adam Gilchrist has advised the beleaguered Australian batters to stay longer at the crease to nullify the threat posed by the Jasprit Bumrah-led Indian bowling attack in the pink-ball second Test here.

The swashbuckling former keeper-batter also backed the out-of-sorts Marnus Labuschagne to regain form. After Bumrah scythed through the Australian batting line-up, taking eight wickets including a five-for in the first innings at Perth, Gilchrist advised the hosts to "weather the storm".

Steve Smith and Labuschagne, the team's two batting mainstays, flopped in the series opener and that did not help Australia's cause.

"Marnus had the onus to do that (stay at crease) and tried at good effect to nullify 50-odd deliveries. So, if you face an average of 50 deliveries every Test innings, you're probably going to be on the right side of the ledger more than you're on the wrong side of it," Gilchrist was quoted as saying by Nine's Wide World of Sports.

"He just couldn't find a way to score and maybe that's what (the Australians) as a collective will look to try and do.

"It will bring with it risk, for sure, but it is a risk for reward."

Queenslander Labuschagne has been struggling for runs in recent months and now finds himself under immense pressure to retain his place in the side.

Gilchrist attributed Labuschagne's poor run of form to conditions and the quality of bowlers in the opposition camp, and didn't see it as a technical issue.

"I'm sure the people around him are already doing this but he needs to be reminded that he is a class act," Gilchrist said of Labuschagne.

"He's got a game that has been able to tolerate and withstand everything that the cricketing world has presented, and he's dominated for a number of years."

The former star added, "Most players that have played long enough will have been in this situation at some point in time and it's about not letting any self-doubt creep in and understanding you don't lose that skill — you don't lose that edge — (and) certainly not in a short space of time."

Gilchrist urged Labuschagne to "trust your training, get out there, see the ball and play it."

The second Test, a day/night affair, will begin on Friday at Adelaide Oval.

India lead the five-match series following their 295-run victory in the opener at Perth last week.

## New Zealand penalised WTC points, drop to fifth in table

PTI ■ DUBAI

New Zealand's aspirations of qualifying for the World Test Championship Final suffered a setback after they were docked three penalty points due to slow over-rate against England leading to a drop in the ranking table, the ICC stated on Tuesday.

The deduction is a welcome news for India, who enjoy pole position with 61.11 percentage points.

New Zealand now have a points percentage of 47.92 percent and can only move as high as 55.36 per cent with victories from their remaining two fixtures against England. South Africa (59.26), Australia (57.26) and Sri Lanka (50) are placed second, third and fourth respectively.

"The race to feature at next year's ICC World Test Championship Final at Lord's has taken a twist with



New Zealand and England sanctioned for maintaining a slow over-rate during the opening Test of their series in Christchurch," the ICC said in a statement.

"Both teams were fined 15 percent of their match fees and penalised three crucial World Test Championship competition points, adding more intrigue to the thrilling final stages of the ongoing cycle," it further stated.

While England are already out of contention of reaching next year's final despite the impressive eight-wicket triumph at Hagley Oval, the loss in competition points is a major blow to New Zealand who drop from equal fourth to outright fifth on the standings as a result.

It means the inaugural World Test Championship winners face a tough ask to qualify for next year's one-

off Test in June 2025, with two wins against England and several other results also needing to go their way if they are to reach the Lord's decider.

New Zealand and England were both found to have three overs short of the target after time allowances were taken into consideration, with sides penalised one point for each over they were found to be short.

Both captains - Tom Latham of New Zealand and Ben Stokes of England - pleaded guilty to the offence and accepted the proposed sanction, so there was no need for a formal hearing.

On-field umpires Ahsan Raza and Rod Tucker, third umpire Adrian Holdstock and fourth official Kim Cotton levelled the charges, with David Boon of the Emirates ICC Elite Panel of Match Referees imposing the sanctions.



## World Chess Championship: Gukesh squanders advantage to settle for draw in Game 7

PTI ■ SINGAPORE

The youngest-ever challenger to the world crown, D Gukesh let go of a very promising position and had to settle for a fourth consecutive draw against defending champion Ding Liren of China in a marathon seventh game of the World Chess Championship here on Tuesday.

The stalemate, which came after five hours and 22 minutes of nerve-racking play, left both players on an identical tally of 3.5 points each, still shy of four more points in order to win the championship.

The two players signed peace after 72 moves.

It turned out to be a tough day in office again for Liren, who was staring at a losing position for a long time, till Gukesh blundered. The Indian, playing white, got a huge advantage but miscalculated to let the Chinese off the hook in what was the longest game of the match thus far.

It was a miraculous save by Liren after getting into what the chess pundits termed as a lost rook and minor piece endgame.

Earlier in the day, Gukesh yet again tightened the noose in the opening. He has clearly been the better player when it's come to springing opening surprises.

Moving his knight forward on the first move, the Indian faced the Neo Grunfeld defense from Liren, and as early as on the seventh turn, Gukesh came up with a surprise idea.

Liren, who seemed to have

solved his opening problems in the last couple of games, was at the receiving end on Tuesday, and even though he chose normal continuation, white's position remained preferable.

Gukesh exerted pressure through the centre and got a dangerous-looking passed pawn in the early stages of the middle game, with the advantage of the bishop pair only adding to Liren's woes.

The middle game saw inaccuracies from both sides, and it seemed that Liren was close to obtaining equality. However, the process had yet again eaten up most of Liren's available time as the players are required to make the first 40 moves in two hours without any increment.

Gukesh went for the trade of queens after fracturing black's pawn structure on the king side as the Indian got an indisputable advantage.

As has happened so many times in the past, the 40th move proved to be jinxed yet again as Liren lost a pawn. The Chinese either underestimated Gukesh's chances or it was an oversight. Despite the advantage, Gukesh still had to go through the technicalities, which has not been his forte here.

Gukesh's 45th move was not the best and Liren slowly clawed back into the game with some really resourceful play.

The tenacity of the Chinese came to the fore in the second time control also after he was left with just four minutes with a 30-second increment after each move is made.

## Todd Greenberg appointed new Cricket Australia CEO

PTI ■ MELBOURNE

Former National Rugby League boss Todd Greenberg will succeed Nick Hockley as the chief executive officer of Cricket Australia next year, the governing body announced on Tuesday.

Green, who is the current chief executive officer of the Australian Cricketers' Association, will assume the role from March.

Hockley, who was appointed in 2020 initially on an interim basis, had announced in August that he would step down from the post at the end of the current domestic season.

Greenberg has previously worked with Cricket New South Wales. A top-order batter, he played 10 seasons for Randwick CC in Sydney.

Apart from serving as the CEO of NRL, Greenberg also worked with NRL club Canterbury-Bankstown Bulldogs before joining the ACA in January 2021.

"This is an extremely exciting time for cricket with the rapid growth of the



game across the globe creating fantastic opportunities, while also presenting some challenges to ensure Australian cricket retains its position at the very peak of the game," Greenberg was quoted as saying by cricket.Com.Au.

"Thanks to the work of the current administration the game has strong fundamentals in place. I want to ensure we build on this momentum so Australian cricket continues to thrive -

from local parks to the nation's biggest stadiums," he added.

As CEO of the ACA, Greenberg worked closely with Hockley and the two reached an amicable agreement on the current Memorandum of Understanding for cricket, which outlines the distribution of wealth within the game and resulted in a significant increase in women's remuneration.

"We are entering a period of great opportunity and the recruitment panel and CA Board was enormously impressed by Todd's passion for cricket and his vision to build on the achievements of the past few years and continue the game's growth," CA chairman Mike Baird said.

"I would like to thank Nick Hockley who will leave the game in a position of great strength at the end of the season with important foundations including our broadcast rights deal, MOU and seven-year content strategy in place," he added.

## Former England captain Alastair Cook Praises India for being 'Brave' in Perth Test

PTI ■ LONDON

Opting to go in without a proven performer like R Ashwin and batting first in an opening Test of a high-pressure series in Australia are reflections of an Indian team that is brave and supremely confident in its ability to win from any situation, feels England's all-time great Alastair Cook.

Cook, a former captain and the first England batter to make 10,000 runs in Test cricket, praised India for their remarkable comeback after getting bowled out for just 150 in the first Test at Perth.

"I thought India was so brave. I thought that first, you know, they win the toss

and bat on that wicket, you look there, even though there's only 150 they got, the thought process to say, 'we're going to take Australia on there. We know it's going to be hard, but we think it's going to be hard for both sides only, and then it'll be a one-innings game,'" Cook said on TNT Sports.

He added, "I think most captains would have bowled first, certainly would have done and probably got the end of a bad result, like normally in Australia. But India took it on brilliantly. It was just an all-round fantastic performance."

"You think... Bowled out for 150, you think we're struggling here, but to bounce back when you've got

Boomer (Jasprit Bumrah) up with the new ball on those kinds of wickets, he's always going to be outstanding and backed up by team."

Captaining the team in the absence of Rohit Sharma, pace spearhead Bumrah came up with a magnificent performance to grab eight wickets, including a first-innings five-for, to lead India to a memorable win.

Speaking about India's move to exclude the senior off-spinner Ashwin from the playing XI, Cook said, "... Just think of how brave they were? They didn't bother playing Ashwin who has got 500 Test wickets. They're kind of played a couple of like, not makes you spinners, but you know, I thought



Ashwin would have been outstanding, but you know, great thinking by them.

"And isn't it nice to see

Australia get thrashed?" Cook lauded the "classy" Yashasvi Jaiswal for the manner in which he

dominated the formidable Australian pace attack and said he wouldn't have told the menacing Mitchell Starc he is bowling too slow even if he was.

After failing to open his account in the first innings of the series opener, Jaiswal adapted to the conditions beautifully and played a brilliant 161-run knock in the second essay, his maiden century on Australian soil.

During the second day of the match, Jaiswal told Starc, "It's coming too slow", with his confidence attracting the attention of many in the cricket world, including the former England captain, who had been a prolific scorer in Tests for a prolonged period.

"We've seen his celebration enough here, but it's more enjoyable against Australia than England, certainly," Cook said, referring to Jaiswal's phenomenal run in the Test series against England, when he amassed over 700 runs.

He added, "And sledging Mitchell Starc, saying at a certain stage, I think he wasn't on 100, he wasn't on anything on a major score, but he's telling him you're bowling slow."

"And I've faced Mitchell Starc and he certainly doesn't bowl slow. And if he was bowling slow, I'd keep my mouth shut and not wind him up, but have the confidence to do that as a 22-year-old."

"I think he scored the most runs as any Indian player up to after 15 Test matches at the top of the order, which I'll keep saying it, no one else believes me, it's the hardest place to bat. What a classy player he is."

India thrashed Australia by 295 runs in the five-match series opener and Cook said he was pleasantly surprised by the result.

"I was surprised. I was surprised that India have gone there and hammered Australia in what normally is a very hard place to go and play cricket. Perth. I know it's not the WACA. I know it's the new stadium, but still, historically, Australia don't lose many games there," Cook said.