

Hot words singe Winter Session

DEEPAK KUMAR JHA ■ NEW DELHI

The fate of the ensuing Winter Session of the Parliament continued to be under stalemate with both the Bharatiya Janata Party-led ruling parties and Congress led Opposition taking turns to lock horns, both in and out of the Parliament, over the Adani Group controversy and now the grand old party's alleged links with "forces to destabilise the country". The BJP has alleged that Congress leaders led by their tallest leader Sonia Gandhi are "colluding with foreign billionaire investor George Soros to destabilise the country" to which Opposition termed the ruling party's attempt to divert the attention from the Adani issue that has rocked the Parliament ever since it started on November 25. The heat was turned up last Thursday against the Opposition who till then were belligerent after BJP member Nishikant Dubey sought to draw some links between Soros, Sonia and Rahul, as he went on with his claims of an international conspiracy was afoot to derail India's success story under Prime Minister Narendra Modi. While both, Lok Sabha and Rajya Sabha, witnessed acrimonious scenes on Monday as BJP and Congress traded charges against each other, Congress members staged protest outside the Parliament. Special session to debate to mark celebrations of Constitution Day is



Leader of Opposition Rahul Gandhi takes a mock interview of Congress MPs Manickam Tagore and Saptagiri Sankar Ulaka, wearing face masks of Prime Minister Narendra Modi and Adani Group Chairman Gautam Adani, at a protest demanding a probe into the bribery case in the US involving the billionaire industrialist

INDIA Bloc to seek VP's removal

DEEPAK KUMAR JHA ■ NEW DELHI

The turbulent relations between Rajya Sabha Chairman Jagdeep Dhankhar and the INDIA Bloc came to a head on Monday with opposition camp sources saying they are considering submitting a notice "very soon" for moving a resolution to remove the Vice President from his office. They said the Opposition parties had required signatures from all INDIA Bloc parties in August itself but did not move as they decided to give Dhankhar "another chance but his conduct on Monday" convinced them to go ahead with it. INDIA Bloc parties had in August this year also considered submitting a notice for moving a resolution to

remove the Vice President from his office. Sources said Congress had taken the lead on the issue and the TMC and the Samajwadi Party, besides other INDIA Bloc parties, were supportive of the move. On Monday morning when the Rajya Sabha resumed, Congress MPs Digvijaya Singh, Jairam Ramesh accused Dhankhar of being partisan. Dhankhar said forces within or outside India cannot be allowed to "sacrilege our unity, integrity and sovereignty", and asserted that all must unite to neutralise the evolving "deep state", amid uproar in the Upper House over BJP's allegations of Congress leaders colluding with billionaire investor George Soros to destabilise the country.

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scheduled this weekend which will also see participation by the Prime Minister. The proceedings of the Parliament were washed out in the first week of the Winter Session starting November 25 due to protests by opposition members demanding discussion on issues like the indictment of industrialist Gautam Adani in a US court and Sambhal violence. Last week, the House functioned properly for only two days, Tuesday and Wednesday. Both sides attempts for smooth functioning has turned futile with no relenting from either the treasury bench or Opposition which emerged stronger in this General Elections by improving their margins to be led by Leader of Opposition Rahul Gandhi.

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Hoax bomb threats target city schools again

STAFF REPORTER ★ NEW DELHI

Bomb threats once again targeted prominent Delhi schools on Monday, and over 40 institutions across the national Capital reportedly received emails threatening to cause injury to the students. This led to panic and fear among the children and their parents. The bomb threat, which turned out to be hoax, prompted immediate evacuations and emergency responses. The e-mail, which was sent by the id 'scottielanza@gmail.com' and username 'Scottie Lanza11', was delivered to the different schools in a single mail on Sunday night at 11.38 pm when the schools were closed, according to the sources.

The email read, "I planted multiple bombs (lead azide) inside the building. The bombs are small and hidden very well. It will not cause very much damage to the building, but many people will be injured when the bombs detonate... You all deserve to suffer and lose limbs. If I do not receive \$30,000, I will detonate the bombs. The group 'KNR' is behind this attack."

The threat was received by prestigious schools including DPS RK Puram; GD Goenka, Paschim Vihar; The British School, Chanakyapuri; The Mother's International, Aurobindo Marg; Modern School, Mandi House; DPS Vasant Kunj; Delhi Police Public School, Safdarjung; Bal Bharati Public School, Ganga Ram Hospital Marg; Bharat National Public School, Karkardooma; Golden Bells Top Pre School,



Police personnel outside DPS RK Puram, New Delhi during an investigation after the school received a bomb threat

Ashok Vihar; Cambridge School, Srinivaspuri; DPS East of Kailash and Salwan Public Schools. With the news spreading across Delhi and guardians receiving messages from school authorities about the threats, parents rushed to the schools, their faces etched with anxiety, to ensure the safety of their children. Expressing his concerns, a parent Vipin Bhatra said, "I rushed to the school as soon as I received the message about the bomb threat. If situations like this persist, how can we send our children to school with peace of mind?" Another parent, Anuradha shared similar concerns saying that she took her child home but she is still tense. "Education is important but incidents like these are terrifying to all parents. Schools should be safe, not a place of constant threats," she said. With fears gripping among children waiting anxiously to

be picked up, chaotic scenes were witnessed at different schools as anxious parents led their children away from the institution premises. Teachers and staff managed the crisis by gathering students to safe locations before coordinating their dispersal once the parents arrived. Akanksha Soni, a parent, expressed concerns about the long-term impact of such incidents on children. "These threats don't just disrupt the day they plant fear in the minds of our children. How will they focus on their studies when safety feels uncertain?," Soni said. Other schools that received the emails include Richmond Global School (RGS), Paschim Vihar; Delhi International School Edge, Dwarka; DAV Public School, Daryaganj; Don Bosco school, Alaknanda; St. Thomas' Girls Senior Secondary School, Dwarka among others.

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AAP list reflects anti-incumbency election stress

RAJESH KUMAR ■ NEW DELHI

In a move to counter the anti-incumbency factor against sitting Members of the Legislative Assembly (MLA), the Aam Aadmi Party (AAP) on Monday announced its second list of 20 candidates, dropping 13 sitting MLAs, for the upcoming Delhi Assembly polls. Two sitting MLAs, former Deputy Chief Minister Manish Sisodia from Mangolpuri, and Deputy Speaker of Delhi Assembly Rakhi Bidlan from Mangolpuri, have been shifted out of their current constituencies and fielded from fresh seats. Sisodia has been shifted to Jangpura Assembly seat which was once considered as a stronghold for the Congress. Bidlan has been shifted to the reserved seat Madipur. Bidlan had contested and won the Mangolpuri seat thrice. Rakesh Javat Dharamrakshak has been nominated from Mangolpuri seat.

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PIONEER SENIOR JOURNALIST VIPUL NAUTIALY PASSES AWAY

The world of journalism lost one of its brightest stars on December 8, with the untimely passing of Vipul Nautiyal. And that too at an age when many are at the peak of their career, his departure has left a profound void. His relentless dedication to his craft and his humanity touched the lives of all who knew him.



India calls for peaceful Syrian-led political process

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

A day after rebel forces overthrew President Bashar Assad's authoritarian government in Syria, India on Monday called for a peaceful and inclusive Syrian-led political process to bring stability to that country. The Ministry of External Affairs (MEA) said it is monitoring the unfolding developments in Syria while underlining the need for all parties to work towards preserving the unity, sovereignty and territorial integrity of the Arab Republic. The Syrian government collapsed on Sunday as the rebels seized control of the capital Damascus. Assad fled the country for an undisclosed location, marking the end of his family's 50-year rule. "We are monitoring the situation in

Syria in light of the ongoing developments. We underline the need for all parties to work towards preserving the unity, sovereignty and territorial integrity of Syria," the MEA said in a statement. "We advocate a peaceful and inclusive Syrian-led political process respecting the interests and aspirations of all sections of Syrian society," it said. The MEA said the Indian embassy in Damascus is in contact with the Indian community in Syria for their "safety and security". Hours after the rebels captured power, official sources in Delhi on Sunday said all Indian nationals in Syria are safe. Many leading countries have also welcomed the fall of the nearly 14-year-long Assad regime that witnessed civil strife across Syria.

India expresses concern over safety of minorities in B'desh

PTI ■ DHAKA

India raised its concerns over the safety of minorities in Bangladesh, flagging "regrettable incidents of attacks on cultural, religious and diplomatic properties" as Foreign Secretary Vikram Misri met his counterpart here on Monday. Misri, the first high-level Indian official to visit Bangladesh after August 5 when prime minister Sheikh Hasina fled to India following massive protests against her government, expressed New Delhi's desire for a "positive, constructive and mutually beneficial" relationship with Dhaka. "Today's discussions have given both of us the opportunity to take stock of our relations. I appreciate the opportunity today to have had a frank, candid and constructive exchange of views with all my interlocutors," Misri told reporters after meeting Foreign Secretary Mohammad Jashim Uddin. "I emphasized that India desires a positive, constructive and mutually beneficial relationship with Bangladesh," he said. Misri said they discussed



Foreign Secretary Vikram Misri during talks with his Bangladeshi counterpart Mohammad Jashim Uddin and other delegates, amid strained bilateral ties since August following the ouster of prime minister Sheikh Hasina, in Dhaka

"certain recent developments and issues." "I conveyed our concerns, including those related to the safety and welfare of minorities. We also discussed some regrettable incidents of attacks on cultural, religious and diplomatic properties..." Misri told reporters. He said India expected an overall constructive approach on all these issues by the Bangladesh authorities and looked forward to moving the relationship forward in a positive and constructive direction. Misri said he underlined India's desire to work closely with the interim government of Bangladesh.

He also called on Interim Government Chief Adviser Muhammad Yunus and Foreign Affairs Adviser Md. Touhid Hossain. During these meetings, Misri highlighted India's support for a democratic, stable, peaceful, progressive and inclusive Bangladesh, said a statement issued by the Ministry of External Affairs (MEA) in New Delhi. "He reiterated India's willingness to build a positive and constructive relationship with Bangladesh, based on mutual trust and respect and mutual sensitivity to each other's concerns and interests," it said.

Sanjay Malhotra appointed new RBI Governor

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

The Government on Monday appointed Revenue Secretary Sanjay Malhotra as the 26th Governor of the Reserve Bank of India. Malhotra, a 1990 Batch Rajasthan Cadre IAS Officer, will replace Shaktikanta Das, whose tenure ends on Tuesday. The Appointments Committee of the Cabinet cleared Malhotra's name, who has been appointed as the RBI Governor for three years, starting Wednesday. Malhotra is an engineering graduate in computer science from the Indian Institute of Technology, Kanpur, and has a Master's in Public Policy from Princeton University, US. In his career of over 33 years, he has worked in multifarious sectors, including power, finance and taxation, information technology, and mines, among others. Before becoming Revenue Secretary, Malhotra held the post of Secretary in the Department of Financial Services under the Ministry of Finance. He has extensive experience in finance and taxation at the state as well as the central government levels.

Common University Entrance Test to undergo several changes in 2025

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

The Common University Entrance Test (CUET) for admission to undergraduate and postgraduate courses is set to undergo several changes in the 2025 edition following a review by an expert panel for which the university watchdog UGC had constituted an expert committee to review the conduct of CUET-UG and PG. UGC will soon release a draft proposal detailing the revised guidelines for conducting CUET-UG and CUET-PG 2025, inviting feedback and suggestions from students, parents, teachers and institutions. "Based on feedback from past years, it is also essential to continuously improve the examination process to provide a better, more efficient and conducive environment for students taking CUET. In this spirit, the UGC has constituted an expert committee to review the conduct of CUET-UG and CUET-PG for 2025," University Grants Commission (UGC) Chairman Prof M Jagadesh Kumar said. Sources said the committee



has examined various aspects of the test, such as its structure, number of papers, duration of test papers, syllabus alignment and operational logistics and the commission has considered the recommendations. In the first edition of the exam in 2022, CUET-UG was plagued by technical glitches. Also, as a result of tests for a subject being conducted over multiple shifts, the scores had to be normalised during the announcement of results. The exam was conducted in hybrid mode for the first time in 2024. It was cancelled across Delhi a night before it was to be held citing logistical reasons.

RAJESH KUMAR ■ NEW DELHI/NOIDA

Noida International Airport Limited (NIAL) successfully conducted its first flight validation test on Monday, marking a significant step toward the airport's commercial launch scheduled for April 2025. An IndiGo passenger flight, with a full crew and staff from the Airports Authority of India (AAI), carried out the crucial trial run between 1-2 pm after the Directorate General of Civil Aviation (DGCA) approved all security checks. According to officials, the flight from Delhi to Noida remained airborne for about two hours before landing. Officials added the trip undertook "close coordination between the pilot and the air traffic controller (ATC)" and was closely monitored. Supervising staff included officials from the DGCA, Ministry of Civil Aviation (MoCA), NIAL and the UP Civil Aviation Department. A validation flight is conducted to verify that an airport meets safety,

operational, and regulatory standards. The data collected during the exercise will be reviewed by the Directorate General of Civil Aviation (DGCA) for further evaluation. Upon DGCA approval, the airport authorities will apply for an aerodrome license, which is a mandatory step before commencing full operations. Validation flights, also known as proving flights, are a key part of the certification process. They are conducted to verify that the airport meets safety, operational, and regulatory standards. At the event, Union Minister for Civil Aviation Kinjarapu Rammohan Naidu said, "With the validation flight happening today, we are committed to finishing the airport project before the end of April." "Today marks a very important occasion in the progress of the airport and definitely whatever support is required from the Ministry of Civil Aviation we will continuously provide so that the early operations from the airport can begin," he said. Naidu

Validation flight lands at Jewar Airport



The first test flight being accorded a ceremonial water cannon salute upon its landing at Noida International Airport amid the ongoing trials, at Jewar in Gautam Buddha Nagar district, Uttar Pradesh

noted that this project has so far had 50 million man-hours and not a single incident has happened. "I don't think any other project in the country of such scale can boast of that record so I congratulate the whole team who has made this possible," the minister said. Noida International Airport CEO Christoph Schnellmann said the successful completion of validation

flights reflects the dedication and meticulous planning that has gone into ensuring the airport is ready for commercial operations. "We are gearing up for the airport's opening and look forward to welcoming passengers to the airport," he added. The validation flight is being conducted on an Airbus A-320 to test the RNP (Required Navigation Performance) procedures and ILS

(instrument landing system) approach procedures. The RNP is a set of navigation specifications that allow aircraft to fly precise flight paths with high accuracy. Meanwhile, Naidu said the country is witnessing exceptional success in the civil aviation industry because of Prime Minister Narendra Modi. In the last 10 years, the number of airports in the country has almost

doubled, he added. The minister lauded Gautam Buddha Nagar Lok Sabha MP Mahesh Sharma and Jewar MLA Dharendra Singh for the progress of the airport project. "Everyone has worked together as a team to see that the stream becomes reality. From the ministry I can tell you that Jewar International Airport is the most prestigious project in the whole country especially because of the idea that it is catering to the Delhi NCR territory and also for the Western Uttar Pradesh," Naidu said. "In the future also, it is going to be a wonderful airport. Not only India but the whole world is going to be proud of the airport," he said. "I need to especially thank the farmers who have made this airport a reality and all the workers who have worked day and night to ensure that the timeline is also met," he added. The greenfield airport is being built in the Jewar area of Gautam Buddha Nagar district in Uttar Pradesh, some 75 km off Delhi and will be the national capital region's second international airport. Yamuna

International Airport Private Limited, a fully owned subsidiary of Swiss firm Zurich International Airport AG, is building the airport for the Uttar Pradesh government in a public-private partnership model. The airport's first phase-comprising one runway and one terminal-will have a capacity to handle 12 million passengers annually. Ultimately, with the completion of future phases, the NIA will be able to accommodate up to 70 million passengers per year. In a statement, the Uttar Pradesh government said, "The successful landing at Jewar, dubbed to be Asia's largest international airport, marks another milestone for Uttar Pradesh, now home to the highest number of airports in India." "Prime Minister Narendra Modi had laid the foundation stone for the airport on November 25, 2021. Following this, Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath made several visits to oversee progress, ensuring that work was carried out with the highest quality standards," it added.

Modi made farmers' issues part of political agenda: CM Yogi

PNS ■ LUCKNOW

Uttar Pradesh Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath on Monday said that while many played politics in the name of farmers after independence, Prime Minister Narendra Modi made a sincere effort in 2014 to make their issues part of the political agenda.

Addressing a programme, 'Krishika - From Farming to Prosperity', at Indira Gandhi Pratishthan here, Adityanath said the Central government is committed to ensuring the farmers become self-reliant, according to an official statement. He also honoured 11 farmers with cheques, shawls and mementoes. "Key initiatives such as issuing soil health cards and launching schemes like the PM Fasal Bima Yojana and PM Krishi Sinchayee Yojana have significantly benefited the farming community," the chief minister said.

While many played politics in the name of farmers after independence, Prime Minister Modi made a sincere effort in 2014 to make their issues part of the political agenda, he said. Adityanath said India has long



been recognised as a nation with a predominantly rural economy. "Even today in Uttar Pradesh, approximately 70 per cent of the land is tied to the rural economy, serving as a vital source of income and employment. With 17 per cent of the country's population residing in Uttar Pradesh, the state contributes significantly to the national food supply," he said. "Although Uttar Pradesh has only 11 per cent of India's cultivable land, it produces over 20

per cent of the nation's foodgrains. Of the 235 lakh hectares of land in the state, 161 lakh hectares is cultivated, with 86 per cent of it being irrigated and extremely fertile. "This allows Uttar Pradesh farmers to produce nearly double the quantity of foodgrains compared to other states," he added. Highlighting the achievements of the state, Adityanath said Uttar Pradesh expanded irrigation coverage and warehousing capacity. The sugarcane sector,

once plagued by farmer protests, now boasts of 120 operational sugar mills, 100 of which make payments to farmers within a week. "Uttar Pradesh ranks first in sugarcane, sugar and ethanol production, while also accounting for 25 per cent of India's potato production and 30 per cent of its maize output. The state's farmers have set records in the cultivation of paddy, wheat, pulses, and oilseeds," he said. He also noted that Uttar Pradesh leads the country in cattle rearing, with over 12 lakh stray cows being cared for in government shelters. Uttar Pradesh Animal Husbandry and Dairy Development Minister Dharmpal Singh, Minister of State for Agriculture Baldev Singh Aulakh, Vice Chancellor of Acharya Narendra Dev Agriculture and Technology University Bijendra Singh, Vice Chancellor of Chandrashekhar Azad Agriculture and Technology University Anand Kumar and Director General of State Agricultural Research Council Sanjay Singh were among those who attended the event, according to the statement.

Pugmarks of wild animal spark fear in Malihabad

PNS ■ LUCKNOW

A 12-year-old girl student of a madrasa was allegedly assaulted by a teacher in Kakori police station area after she was asked to strip. After the incident came to light, police initially opted for getting the aggrieved party to strike a truce. However, this move made the public displeased, as the incident warranted strict action against the accused. Consequently, the police registered a case in view of the public outcry.

As per the victim girl's account, "This was not the first time. Earlier too, other children and I have been given such dangerous punishments. The teachers beat me for every small thing. They use foul language in front of everyone. I just did not memorise the lesson, so they took off my clothes in front of my friends and beat me. They kept beating me till I fell unconscious." The girl said that the teacher had given homework and told her to memorise the lesson but did not explain anything about the lesson. "Because of this, I could not memorise the lesson. When I reached the madrasa, he started asking questions. When I could not recite the lesson, he beat me badly," she alleged. After regaining consciousness, the student told the entire inci-

Girl student beaten by madrasa teacher

PNS ■ LUCKNOW

dent to her family. As per reports, the 12-year-old girl studies in Class 2 in Darul Farooqia Madrasa. It was alleged that after beating the girl, the accused teacher, Abdul Qari Mabood, banged her head on the seat. Due to this, she fainted. The teachers and staff of the madrasa called and informed the family that she had fainted. After this, the family took her to a private hospital. The girl regained consciousness after treatment. When asked the reason for her fainting, she said that the teacher beat her badly and banged her head against the seat as she did not remember the lesson. The girl said that the teacher made her stand on a bench and asked her to remove her clothes in front of everyone. "When I refused to remove my clothes, he started beating me with a stick. He often threatens us. He says that if you do not learn the lesson, he will hang you upside down in front of everyone in the class," she alleged. Another student studying in the same madrasa alleged that they are made to stand like a rooster. "We are made to stand outside the class. A few days ago, another girl was beaten badly, after which she went home crying," the student said. Tears welled up in the eyes of

the girl's father, who said, "I was shocked to hear the news of my daughter fainting. I immediately rushed to the madrasa and got her admitted to the hospital. After regaining consciousness, my daughter told me everything. I was terrified to see my daughter's condition." He said, "We are poor, but we want to give good education to our children. If there are such teachers in the madrasa, how will anyone be able to educate their children? The madrasa management will have to improve the level of education." A complaint was made at the Kasba police post of Kakori police station area. But initially, the Kasba police post in-charge, Raj Bahadur Yadav, called both the parties and got the matter settled. After this, people expressed their displeasure. Seeing the pressure increasing, the police registered an FIR at night and sent the girl for medical examination. The girl's father said, "The police first tried to suppress the matter. We were scared. The police had pressurised us to settle the matter." Madrasa administration wore a silence in the matter. It is the biggest madrasa of the area, and more than 200 students study there. Local people are demanding strict action from the administration in this matter.

Nursing student hangs self to death

PNS ■ LUCKNOW

A 22-year-old nursing student allegedly hanged herself to death at her rented accommodation in Dubagga on Monday. The deceased, Anjali Kumari, was found hanging from a ceiling fan by her landlord Suman Singh, who immediately informed police. Anjali, the daughter of farmer Santosh Kumar and Vimla Devi from Gausganj Naya Gaon in Hardoi district, had been residing in Mohan Vihar Colony for the past two years and had a half. She was pursuing an Auxiliary Nursing and Midwifery (ANM) course at the Charak Suruchi Institute on Jehta Road. According to the landlord, Anjali's mother had called her late on Sunday night after being unable to reach her despite repeated attempts. Concerned, Suman Singh went to check on Anjali and found the door bolted from the inside. Upon peeking through the

window, she discovered Anjali's body hanging. Vimla Devi said she had spoken to her daughter several times between 8 pm and 10 pm on Sunday. Anjali had mentioned her phone's battery was low and promised to call back after charging it. However, when her calls went unanswered, Vimla contacted the landlord. Anjali's uncle Arvind shared that she had recently cleared her final year ANM examinations, the results of which were declared on December 6. Alongside her studies, she had been gaining practical experience at a private hospital. SHO, Dubagga, Abhinav Kumar Verma said no suicide note was recovered from the scene. "The reason behind her taking such an extreme step is being investigated," he said. Anjali is survived by her parents, Vimla and Santosh Kumar, sister Anamika, and brother Akash. The body has been sent for a post-mortem examination, and the police are probing the circumstances surrounding her death.

GANG BUSTED

A gang specialising in conning individuals by posing as astrologers was busted by Chinhat police. The trio, consisting of two brothers and their brother-in-law, targeted elderly victims, deceiving them into handing over their valuables under the guise of solving personal and family issues. The arrested individuals were identified as Aslam (41), Akram (28), both sons of Yaar Mohammad, and their brother-in-law Amjad Ahmed (35), residents of Deva in Barabanki district. According to the police, the gang's modus operandi involved one member approaching potential victims, usually elderly individuals, under the pretense of asking for directions. Shortly after, another gang member, posing as an astrologer or saint from Haridwar, would join the conversation and offer to resolve family misfortunes or problems. The conmen would then trick the victims into removing their jewellery for a supposed

"ritual" or spiritual solution. They instructed the victims to walk 50 steps without looking back, and by the time the victims turned around, the fraudsters would have fled with the jewellery. The gang's activities came to light on December 2 when Nitesh Mohan, a resident of Vastu Khand in Gomti Nagar, filed a complaint after his father was targeted. The gang stole his father's gold ring and chain. Police immediately formed three teams and used CCTV footage and technical surveillance to track down the suspects. During interrogation, the gang members confessed to another similar crime on October 5, when they duped Pushpa Pandey of her jewellery and mobile phone in Madhan Green City, Chinhat. The police recovered three gold rings and a gold chain from the suspects. DCP, East, Shashank Singh said that the gang frequently travelled from Barabanki to Lucknow to carry out their crimes. Aslam, who is physically disabled, would often play on the sympathy of victims.

Brother-in-law booked after woman assaulted by him succumbs in hosp

PNS ■ LUCKNOW

A disturbing video showing the brutal assault of a woman from Bihar surfaced on Monday, prompting police to register a case against the accused, her brother-in-law. The victim, identified as Amrita, succumbed to injuries on Friday while undergoing treatment at a private hospital in Lucknow. The accused, identified only as 'Bullet', reportedly uploaded the video of the assault to Amrita's Instagram account, accompanied by the captioned 'Har dam yad kaareng tujhko chahne waale'. Bullet remains at large, and police have launched a manhunt to apprehend him. According to Amrita's family, Bullet had brought her to

Lucknow under the pretext of an outing, leaving his wife Asha in Bihar five months earlier. On Wednesday, an altercation led to Bullet brutally assaulting Amrita. Neighbours intervened after hearing the commotion, but Bullet fled the scene, allegedly threatening them. Neighbours rushed Amrita to a hospital, but she succumbed to injuries on Friday. Family members, who travelled from Bihar to Lucknow with the help of donations, alleged that Bullet forcibly obtained Amrita's social media account password. He reportedly filmed the assault and uploaded it to Instagram to further humiliate her. Amrita's mother Sumera Devi expressed her anguish, revealing that her daughter had been taken away under

false pretences. The family has filed a formal complaint at Ashiyana police station. Police have registered a case and are actively searching for the accused. Meanwhile, a man who allegedly molested a 13-year-old girl in Ashiyana police station area was arrested on Monday. The accused, Shiva Sharma, had been allegedly harassing the girl for several days while she was on her way to school, sending her obscene messages and teasing her. The girl finally confided in her family about the harassment, and her father filed a written complaint against Sharma at the Ashiyana police station. Inspector Chhatrapal Singh confirmed that a case was registered, and the accused was taken into custody.

the pioneer

CLASSIFIEDS

सूचना

मैं अनिता गुप्ता पत्नी श्री अतिन गुप्ता ,मेरे पासपोर्ट में अनिता राज दोषर दर्ज है जब कि अन्य सभी प्रपत्रों में अनिता गुप्ता दर्ज है, भविष्य में मुझे अनिता गुप्ता के नाम से ही जाना जायेगा। व्हेट संख्या 504 ,ओनेक्स टावर, एन आर आई सिटी, कानपुर

NOTICE

I am Arjit Rastogi, my name is written as Arjit in my high school intermediate mark sheet, PAN and other documents, both these names are mine, from today I have changed my name to Arjit Rastogi son of Govind Prasad Rastogi resident of 638 B Harjender Nagar Kanpur and I would like to be known by this name in future

NOTICE

Father name Mohammad Sadiq Khan wrong in school record Kendriya Vidhyalya no.1 air Force Station Chakeri Kanpur in my son Mohammad Yunus Class 9, which correct name Mohd Sadiq Khan, R/o 37/11 HAL Colony Harjinder Nagar Kanpur Nagar K1459

NOTICE

I have changed my name from MAHBOOB AKHTAR ANSARI To MAHBOOB AKHTAR ANSARI S/o Mohammad Sabeel R/o 140- Ganga Nagar National Public School, New PAC Lines Kanpur Nagar. In future I would be known & recognise by this name only.

NOTICE

I have changed my name from Prem Kumar to Mahboob Elahi S/o Ram Sajeewan R/o158, near Priti Medical Centre Asaam Bangal Area Katri Piper Khara Unnao

NOTICE

It is to be informed that in the mark sheet and certificate issued by ICSE Board SPRING DALE COLLEGE INDRANAGAR LUCKNOW of my son shreyas anand singh high school passing year 2024 unique id 8301131, my name is mistakenly written as RAM BOOJH SINGH whereas my correct name is RAM BOOJH. RAM BOOJH S/o B-101, Rajkiya colony boothnath market Indira Nagar,Lucknow-226016

NOTICE

Date of birth and name in my Aadhaar card have wrongly been mentioned as 06.08.2002 and Ashutosh Kumar. My correct date of birth and name are 06.08.1994 and Rakesh Kumar respectively.I should be known and identified by this name. Rakesh Kumar S/o Radha Krishna, Vill.Railway Station Sarsaul, Tehsil Narval, Kanpur Nagar.



Kumar urges participation in karate for self-defence

Lucknow (PNS): Bihar's Rural Development Minister Shrawan Kumar attended the closing ceremony of a karate competition in Bhadohi as the chief guest. The event, held at Prem Bahadur Singh Bhadohi Public School, Hariyanv, Bhadohi city, celebrated the accomplishments of the winners, with Kumar presenting trophies and medals to the victorious players. In his address, Kumar expressed pride in the achievements of Bhadohi, emphasising the significance of karate in promoting self-defence, especially for girls. He encouraged further participation in the sport, particularly among young girls, and urged all players, including those who did not win medals, to prepare with renewed enthusiasm for future competitions. Kumar also highlighted the

Bihar government's commitment to encouraging sports, noting that sports infrastructure is being developed from the district to block and village levels to provide opportunities for local athletes to shine at national and international levels. The minister congratulated the Gujuro Karate Federation of India for organising the event, and celebrated the Indian team's achievement, having won 49 medals, including 25 golds, topping the medal tally. Nepal and Bhutan finished second and third, respectively. The event was also attended by Bihar Janata Dal (U) state secretary Badri Bhagat, district president of Technical Cell Ramakant Singh, JD (U) leaders Shivakant Patel, and Sarvesh Rai, along with other local leaders.

RLD leader expresses support for ongoing protests by farmers

PNS ■ LUCKNOW

Rashtriya Lok Dal (RLD) National spokesperson Anil Dubey expressed his support for the ongoing farmers' protests, emphasising that their demands are legitimate and should be addressed through dialogue with the government. Speaking to mediapersons after being warmly welcomed by workers and supporters in Jajmau Gangapur, Kanpur, Dubey stated that in a democracy, everyone has the right to voice their concerns. He stressed that the government must fulfil the promises made to farmers during past talks and resolve their issues. Dubey highlighted the issue of sugarcane farmers in Uttar Pradesh, stating that although

sugar mills have been operational since November 3, the state government has yet to declare the support price for sugarcane. As a result, farmers are being forced to sell their produce at significantly lower prices. He demanded that the state government declare the support price at Rs 400 per quintal, citing the rising costs farmers face. Addressing criticism from Congress, Dubey claimed that despite Congress's claims of being farmer-friendly, their historical record has been anti-farmer. He contrasted this with the efforts made under the leadership of Uttar Pradesh Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath and RLD president Jayant Chaudhary, including increas-

ing support prices for crops, expanding crop insurance, and introducing the Kisan Nidhi initiative, which honors farmers for the first time in history. Regarding the Kanpur Ghatampur sugar mill, Dubey assured that the matter would be discussed with Jayant Chaudhary, who is also the Minister of Skill Development, and steps would be taken to ensure its operation. Dubey also praised the public welfare initiatives by both the state and central governments, particularly highlighting Jayant Chaudhary's efforts to improve education and skill development for farmers, youth, labourers, and weavers through the establishment of Navodaya and Kendriya Vidyalayas.

CITYBRIEFS

ANNUAL DAY

The 9th Annual Day of Seth Anandram Jaipuria School, Shaheed Path, was a vibrant celebration of academic excellence, creativity, and ethics. The event began with a ceremonial lamp lighting and Ganesh Vandana. Attended by Chairman Shishir Jaipuria, Vice-Chairperson Sunita Jaipuria, Lucknow DM Surya Pal Gangwar, and other guests, the event highlighted the theme 'Excellence with Ethics'. Principal Poonam Kochitty shared the school's achievements, while chief guest Nivesh Raj inspired the audience. The guest of honour was Steven Samuel Devassy, who dazzled with a drum performance. The evening featured cultural performances, a prize distribution ceremony, and a grand finale. The cultural extravaganza featured a mix of dynamic performances, including a Hindi skit on ethics, another on Shakespeare's Merchant of

Venice, a global Garba dance and musical performances. The song called 'Dreamers' focused on what the current generation can achieve if they dream big.

SBI CARD

SBI Card has reached the milestone of 2 crore cards in force, emphasising its commitment to innovation and enhancing customer experiences nationwide. Since its founding in 1998, SBI Card has been a pioneer, offering a variety of products, from core cards to co-branded partnerships and lifestyle offerings. The company has experienced a robust growth of around 25% CAGR in cards and 26% CAGR in spends between FY19 and FY24. Abhijit Chakravorty, MD&CEO, stated, "This achievement reflects customer trust, our focus on innovation, and our vision of providing secure, rewarding payment solutions."

Fall of Assad in Syria a warning to dictators: Dr Rajeshwar Singh

Lucknow (PNS): Sarojininagar MLA Dr Rajeshwar Singh described the recent fall of Bashar al-Assad's regime in Syria as a significant moment marking the end of over two decades of oppressive rule. He stated that this event not only represents a historic turning point for Syria but also serves as a warning to autocratic regimes around the world. The fall of Assad, he pointed out, is a direct result of the widespread violence and repression his regime imposed on the Syrian people, which led to over 500,000 deaths and displacement of more than 13 million people. Dr Singh emphasised that this event is a clear reminder that no dictatorship is permanent, and the consequences of such regimes are inevitable. He highlighted several critical lessons drawn from the downfall of Assad's regime. He explained how the violent repression of peaceful protesters in 2011 triggered a civil war, leading to the rise of extremist groups like ISIS. The initial use of force and terror to suppress dissent ultimately bred more extremism, exacerbating the conflict. He also noted that while Assad's regime initially relied on short-term tactics to maintain control, such as using terrorist

groups to his advantage, these actions resulted in long-term chaos, including ISIS seizing over 40% of Syria's territory by 2015. Dr Singh pointed out that the fall of Assad's regime was also a consequence of the inevitable decline of dictatorial rule. Despite receiving backing from Russia and Iran, Assad's grip on power weakened over time, exacerbated by internal dissent and economic collapse. The use of chemical weapons by his government further led to a loss of international support, signalling the unsustainability of his rule. He added that repression only fuels further rebellion, something that became evident as the country endured 12 years of brutal conflict, resulting in severe economic destruction. Dr Singh compared Assad to other fallen autocrats like Saddam Hussein and Muammar Gaddafi, noting that Syria, under Assad, has been left in ruins, with 80% of its population living in poverty. Dr Singh stressed that Assad's downfall is a clear demonstration of the importance of democracy for ensuring stability. He expressed hope that Syria's future would now be shaped by a democratic framework, providing stability and hope to the people.

DEBTS RECOVERY TRIBUNAL		Form No.5
600/1, University Road near Hanuman Setu Mandir, Lucknow		
(Area of Jurisdiction: Part of Uttar Pradesh)		
SUMMONS FOR FILING REPLY & APPEARANCE THROUGH PUBLICATION		
O. A. No. 928 of 2024 DATED: 13.11.2024		
(Summons to defendant under Section 19(4) of the Recovery of Debts Due to Banks and Financial Institution Act 1993 read with rules 12 and 13 of the Debts Recovery Tribunal Procedure Rules 1993)		
HDFC BANK LIMITED	Applicant Bank
Versus		
GMDM GLOBAL ENERGY PRIVATE LIMITED & OTHER		
To, 1. GMDM Global Energy Private Limited Through its directors Add: C-410, RSM Nagar, Indira Nagar, Near Metro Station, Indira Nagar, Lucknow-226016, Uttar Pradesh. 2. Mr. Gaurav Maheshwari, Sic, Deepak Kumar Maheshwari Add: KHA 350, Shakti Nagar, A Block, Indira Nagar, Lucknow-226016, Uttar Pradesh. 3. Mr. Prateek Singh, S/o Mr. Rajendra Singh, B-1311, Ground Floor, Indira Nagar, Lucknow-226016, Uttar Pradesh.DEFENDANTS		
In the above noted Application, you are required to file reply in Paper Book Form in two sets along with documents and affidavits (if any) personally or through your duly authorized agent or legal practitioner in this Tribunal, after serving copy of the same on the Applicant or his counsel/ duly authorized agent, after publication of the summons and thereafter to appear before the tribunal on 13.01.2025 at 10.30 A.M. failing which the application shall be heard and decided.		
Registrar		
Debts Recovery Tribunal Lucknow		

Sashakt Bharat only possible with Swasth Bharat: Yogi

PNS ■ GORAKHPUR

Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath emphasised on Monday that a 'Sashakt Bharat' (Empowered India) is only possible with a 'Swasth Bharat' (Healthy India). He highlighted that both the Central and state governments are working with unwavering commitment to ensure the health and well-being of every citizen. Speaking at the Ayushman Vay Vandana Card distribution ceremony for citizens above 70 years of age at Mahant Digvijaynath Park, the chief minister remarked, "From Ayushman Bharat Pradhan Mantri Jan Arogya Yojana and Mukhyamantri Jan Arogya Yojana to the Pandit Deendayal Upadhyaya State Employee Cashless Medical Scheme, Ayushman Vay Vandana Yojana, and financial aid through the Chief Minister's Relief Fund, all these initiatives reflect our dedication to creating a strong and empowered India through a healthy India." The chief minister distributed Vay Vandana Cards to 19 beneficiaries, interacting warmly with them to inquire about their well-being and wishing them a long and healthy life. Highlighting the government's strides in strengthening the health and medical sector, Yogi noted, "Before 2017, in the 70 years since independence, Uttar Pradesh had only 12 government medical colleges. Today, the double-engine government has established medical colleges in 65 out of 75 districts in the state."



He added, "This year alone, 16 medical colleges have commenced operations—13 under government management and three on a PPP model. Additionally, two new private medical colleges have also been inaugurated, further expanding the state's healthcare infrastructure." Discussing the transformation in the health sector in eastern Uttar Pradesh, Yogi highlighted the significant strides made since 2017. He recalled how, before 2017, encephalitis claimed the lives of a large

number of children annually in Gorakhpur and surrounding areas. "Post-2017, the double-engine government has effectively controlled and eradicated this deadly disease," he stated. Drawing comparisons to the past, the chief minister remarked, "Before 2017, the only medical institution in eastern Uttar Pradesh was BRD Medical College in Gorakhpur, which itself was in a dilapidated state. Today, under the double-engine government, AIIMS has been

established in Gorakhpur, and BRD Medical College has been upgraded to offer super-specialty services." He further emphasised the expansion of medical infrastructure in the region, pointing out that districts like Deoria, Kushinagar, Maharajganj, Siddharthnagar, Basti, Balrampur, Gonda, and Bahraich had no medical colleges in the past. "Today, medical colleges have been built or are under construction in all these districts, ensuring accessible healthcare

for the people of eastern Uttar Pradesh," he added. Yogi highlighted the government's efforts to provide advanced healthcare facilities across the state. He stated that government hospitals in every district are now equipped with state-of-the-art facilities such as ICUs, dialysis units, CT scans, colour Doppler, MRI, blood banks, and blood component units, benefiting a large number of citizens. "Along with controlling encephalitis, the government made significant efforts to

CM interacts with beneficiaries

PNS ■ GORAKHPUR

During the programme, Yogi interacted with six beneficiaries who had received financial assistance for the treatment of serious illnesses through the Ayushman Yojana, Deendayal Cashless Yojana, and the Chief Minister's Relief Fund. These beneficiaries expressed heartfelt gratitude to the chief minister for the government's support in covering their treatment costs. Israwati Devi from Rustampur, a beneficiary of the Mukhyamantri Jan Arogya Yojana Ayushman Card, shared that she had her eye surgery done without spending a single rupee, thanks to the card she obtained just a

month ago. Sandhya Rai from Nakha, a beneficiary of the Deendayal Cashless Scheme, explained that she underwent gall bladder surgery through the scheme and didn't have to bear any expenses. Sharda Devi from Nakha, an Ayushman Bharat beneficiary, shared that she received a free stone operation after getting her Ayushman card in August. Ashutosh Sharma, another Deendayal Cashless Scheme beneficiary, told the chief minister that he had his leg operated on and didn't have to pay anything due to the scheme's benefits. Bhuwari Devi from Gulriya Bazaar, who received cancer treatment support through the

Chief Minister's Relief Fund, expressed gratitude for the Rs 1.75 lakh assistance, which is helping her continue her treatment. When she mentioned not having an Ayushman card, the chief minister assured her that the government would ensure her treatment remains uninterrupted until her card is issued. Sudhir Singh from Hasa Hussain, another recipient of assistance from the Chief Minister's Relief Fund, shared that he is undergoing treatment for mouth cancer and received Rs 3 lakh in financial aid. The chief minister assured him of continued support as needed for his ongoing treatment.

Lok Adalat across all UP dists on Dec 14

PNS ■ LUCKNOW

The Yogi Adityanath government, in collaboration with the District Legal Services Authority, will organise a National Lok Adalat on December 14 across all 75 districts of Uttar Pradesh. This initiative aims to provide citizens with a simple and efficient method for resolving disputes. The National Lok Adalat will address pending cases in civil, criminal, and revenue courts, as well as pre-litigation matrimonial disputes, through amicable reconciliation. It will facilitate the resolution of various disputes, including compoundable criminal cases, issues related to electricity and water bills, cheque bounce cases under Section 138 of the NI Act, bank recovery matters, revenue cases, motor accident compensation claims, and other civil disputes. The goal of the National Lok Adalat is to foster harmony between disputing parties while saving time and money. The decisions made during the Lok Adalat are final and cannot be appealed in any other court. Additionally, the court fees paid are refunded to the parties, making the process cost-effective. The rulings of the Lok Adalat carry the same legal weight as those of a civil court. For convenience, traffic-related challans can be resolved online through

e-payment on the website vcourts.gov.in. Residents of the state who wish to resolve pending cases through reconciliation can approach the presiding officer of the relevant court or contact the office of the District Legal Services Authority in their district to have their cases included in the National Lok Adalat.

What is pre-litigation marital dispute?

A pre-litigation marital dispute refers to conflicts between a husband and wife that arise before any legal proceedings are initiated. To resolve such disputes, either spouse can submit an application to the District Legal Services Authority, providing a brief description of the issue. Upon receiving the application, the opposing party will be notified and called for reconciliation. A bench, comprising a family court judge and a mediator advocate, will be constituted to facilitate the resolution. The bench will work towards reconciling the parties by bringing them together for discussions. If an agreement is reached, the bench will pass a decision in the Lok Adalat. This decision is final and cannot be appealed in any other court. This process helps preserve family harmony, prevents the breakdown of relationships, and ensures that disputes are resolved amicably.

UP DGP unveils blockade plan for law enforcement

Lucknow (PNS): Uttar Pradesh's Director General of Police (DGP) Prashant Kumar on Monday issued instructions for a comprehensive new blockade plan across all districts in the state, aimed at improving law enforcement and curbing criminal activities. The plan focuses on ensuring swift action in response to crimes by sealing city borders and sensitive areas immediately. In the event of a crime, the borders of the city will be sealed, and a blockade will be set up to prevent the criminal from escaping. To support this effort, police forces will conduct continuous day and night patrolling at key points, with additional resources such as the Uttar Pradesh 112 Police Response Vehicles (PRVs) deployed to assist in quick responses. The DGP emphasised the importance of including newly built routes in the blockade plan and instructed that all police personnel be equipped with the necessary security tools, including government weapons and body-worn

cameras. Regular mock drills will be conducted to ensure readiness and efficiency in implementing the plan. All officers will be briefed on the blockade procedure prior to its rollout to ensure uniformity and preparedness across all police units. In addition, the plan includes special instructions to prevent the spread of rumours or misinformation, particularly concerning the locations of checkpoint activities, by coordinating with the police control room, social media cells, and Local Intelligence Units (LIUs). The DGP also tasked the inspectors general (IGs), deputy inspectors general (DIGs), and district police chiefs to prepare and implement the blockade plans in their respective areas, with outpost in-charges also being asked to brief their teams accordingly. Through this initiative, the Uttar Pradesh Police aim to enhance their ability to respond quickly to criminal incidents, maintain law and order, and ensure the safety and security of citizens across the state.

MPSP Founder's Week: Prizes to be given away today

PNS ■ GORAKHPUR

A grand festival and prize distribution ceremony will mark the conclusion of the 92nd Founder's Week celebrations of Maharana Pratap Shiksha Parishad, scheduled for Tuesday (December 10) at the Maharana Pratap Inter College grounds. The event will be presided over by Gorakshapeethadishwar and Uttar Pradesh Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath, with Nobel Laureate Kailash Satyarthi, founder of Bachpan Bachao Andolan, as the chief guest. The highlight of the ceremony will be the recognition of excellence across various sectors within the institution, including teachers, employees, and students. A total of 800 students will be honoured with trophies, medals, and cash prizes for their exceptional performances in competitions held throughout the week. The event will begin at 9:30 am. The Maharana Pratap Shiksha Parishad, established in 1932 by Brahmaling Gorakshapeethadishwar Mahant Digvijaynath to promote educational renaissance in eastern Uttar Pradesh, launched its 92nd Founder's Week on December 4. The inaugural event, chaired by CM Yogi, featured Madhya Pradesh Assembly Speaker Narendra Singh Tomar as the chief guest. The celebrations, which included a variety of competitions and programmes, will conclude with an award ceremony recognising the most outstanding performers. During the closing ceremony, the MP

Kanya Inter College in Ramdattpur will receive the prestigious Mahayogi Shri Gorakshanath Gold Medal for Best Institution. Other awardees include Brijanand from MP Inter College (Civil Lines), selected for the Brahmaling Mahant Gopalnath Gold Medal for Best Attendant; Brijesh Vishwakarma from DVNPG College, selected for the Yogiraj Baba Brahmanath Gold Medal for Best Employee; and Dr Sumit Kumar from Guru Gorakshanath Institute of Medical Sciences, selected for the Baba Gambhirnath Gold Medal for Best Teacher. The Brahmaling Mahant Digvijaynath Gold Medal for the best postgraduate student will be awarded to Sagar Chaudhary of DVNPG College. Nimish Singh of MPPG College Jungle Dhusar will receive the Brahmaling Mahant Avidyanath Gold Medal for the best undergraduate student. Gauri Gaur of MP Balika Inter College, Civil Lines, will be presented with the Maharana Mewar Gold Medal for the best High School/Intermediate student. In addition, 12 meritorious students will be honoured with memorial awards, including cash prizes in memory of various notable personalities. Nine students with exceptional achievements in boards and university examinations will also be granted special scholarships. A key highlight of the Founder's Week programme will be the release of Shipra Singh's book, Indian Concept of Education.

Sports, cultural contests kick off at PM SHRI schools in UP

PNS ■ LUCKNOW

In a significant initiative aimed at promoting the holistic development of children, the Uttar Pradesh government, led by Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath, launched sports and cultural contests in PM SHRI schools on Monday. These events, taking place from December 9 to 14 at the school level and from December 16 to 20 at the district level, are designed to foster physical, mental, and social growth among students while promoting community engagement. With a budget allocation of Rs 2.5 crore, the government has approved financial support of Rs 6,000 per school and Rs 2,00,000 per district for organising these events, which include two-day annual festivals, sports competitions, and one-day district-level programs. The initiative is aligned with the Ministry of Education's guidelines for PM SHRI schools, emphasising the importance of physical and cultural development. The objectives of the initiative are to engage parents and the community with school activities, develop students' physical, mental, and social skills, promote teamwork, discipline, and a sense of responsibility. The objectives also include providing talented students with opportunities to participate in state and national-level competitions. At the school level, students will participate in various sports and cultural competitions. The sports events will include races, relay races, kabaddi, kho-kho, football, and volleyball. Cultural activities will feature dance, singing, drama, and poster competitions, aiming to enhance students' creativity and confidence. At the district level, the winners from school competitions will compete in events such as athletics, chess, table tennis, and yoga in sports. In the cultural arena, there will be contests in speech, drama, story writing, and poetry recitation. Each district has been allocated a budget of Rs 2 lakh to support these activities. All students participating in the competitions will receive certificates, with winners receiving prizes. Exceptional performers will also be specially honoured. Minister of State (Independent Charge) for Basic Education Sandeep Singh said that the initiative aims to involve parents and the community in school activities actively. By focusing on the physical, mental, and social development of children, the programme seeks to instill moral values, discipline, and teamwork, preparing students for future challenges.

Devotees, seers to get sandalwood, rudraksh saplings along with mahaprasad

PNS ■ MAHAKUMBH NAGAR

Devotees and seers visiting the Maha Kumbh in Prayagraj will be given a sapling of sandalwood and rudraksha along with the special prasad from the iconic Bade Hanuman temple, an official said. Organised after a gap of every 12 years, the Maha Kumbh will be held in Prayagraj from January 13 to February 26. On the instructions of Uttar Pradesh Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath, the Ministry of Forest and Environment has initiated this special campaign aimed at enriching the spiritual and ecological significance of this grand gathering, according to an official statement. As part of the campaign, devotees and shankaracharyas coming from across the globe will receive a special prasad from the iconic Bade Hanuman Temple (Lete Hue Hanuman Mandir) in Prayagraj, it said. Along with the mahaprasad, Baghambari Gaddi Math and the Forest Department will present sandalwood and rudraksha saplings to the devotees and seers in attendance. Around 45 crore visitors are expected during the congregation this time, according to official estimates. This gesture underscores the event's commitment towards promoting environmental sustainability while honouring spiritual leaders, the statement said. The state government has created a new district Mahakumbh Nagar, having 66 villages of four tehsils — Sadar, Soraon, Phulpur and Karchhana.

The work of beautifying the main intersections of Mahakumbh Nagar and the highways leading to it with natural landscaping is currently underway. A total of 1,49,620 saplings are to be planted, with 1,37,964 already in place. These include species such as tulsi, agastya, apamarg (Chichida), durva, bel, and shami. They have been chosen for their cultural and ecological significance, the statement said. Highlighting the meticulous planning behind the initiative, Prayagraj's Divisional Forest Officer (DFO) Arvind Kumar Yadav said, "Preparations are being made to make Maha Kumbh grand and an elevating experience. The planting of these saplings is just one of the steps to create a memorable and eco-friendly event." The Mahant of Bade Hanuman Temple and Shrimath Baghambari Peethadheeshwar, Pujya Balveer Giri Maharaj, emphasised the temple's commitment to creating a unique and cherished experience for devotees. "Given the special attachment of devotees to the temple and its spiritual significance, this year we decided to do something different. Devotees will not only leave with spiritual blessings but also with saplings that embody the values of harmony and growth," he said. The Forest Department's IT Head Alok Kumar Pandey said Maha Kumbh will be made a "global cultural landmark". Special directives have been issued to ensure seamless arrangements and create a memorable experience for all

MAHA KUMBH 2025

attendees, he added. "The goal is to set a new standard of grandeur, making this Maha Kumbh an inspiration for future generations," Pandey said.

SIX FIREBOATS TO ENSURE SAFETY

Preparations for the Mahakumbh 2025 are progressing rapidly, with the Uttar Pradesh Fire and Emergency Services Department making significant efforts to ensure the safety of millions of devotees. In a historic move, six fireboats will be deployed in the fair area, marking the first-ever such initiative in the history of the Kumbh and the country. This initiative aims to make the Mahakumbh a fire-accident-free zone. The fireboats will remain stationed along the ghats of the fair area, ensuring a swift response to fire emergencies. Equipped to accelerate the response process, these boats will help prevent fire incidents on the riverfront ghats and also act as shields to safeguard firefighters during high-risk operations. To maintain the Mahakumbh as a fire-accident-free zone, a total budget of ₹131.48 crore has been allocated for vehicles and equipment, including ₹66.75 crore for the fire department and ₹64.73 crore from the departmental budget. Chief Fire Officer and Mahakumbh Nodal Officer, Pramod Sharma, confirmed that ₹1.38 crore is being spent on the six advanced fireboats, which will be deployed at the Sangam and other ghats by the last week of

December. "Fireboats are known for their quick response and ability to navigate rivers swiftly, ensuring fast fire control. They are particularly effective in fire prevention and rescue operations on riverfront ghats," he explained. "A key feature of these boats is the inclusion of remote-controlled fire-fighting robots, capable of reaching areas beyond the range of water cannons and conducting fire suppression with precision." He added that these boats are invaluable in extreme temperature zones or when explosive materials are involved. In such cases, they not only protect lives and property but also serve as shields to ensure the safety of firefighters during rescue missions. Deputy Director Aman Sharma stated that, in line with CM Yogi's vision, the Mahakumbh 2025 will feature strong fire safety measures, including the deployment of over 351 specialised fire-fighting vehicles, more than 2,000 trained personnel, and the construction of over 50 fire stations and 20 fire posts across the fairgrounds. "To further enhance safety, fire-fighting equipment is being installed in the tents of each akhara. Additionally, 30 final-year students from the National Fire Services College, under the Ministry of Home Affairs in Nagpur, will serve as fire volunteers during the event. Many of these students are from Uttar Pradesh and will play a critical role in advanced fire-fighting operations and conducting awareness drives to

ensure public safety," he added. Moreover, Mahakumbh, a grand celebration of spirituality and Indian culture, is deeply rooted in the timeless wisdom of the Vedas. In January 2025, the Mahakumbh area will be filled with the sound of Vedic hymns, as over 20,000 Vedic students from Prayagraj and surrounding districts will gather to recite them. The Yogi government is working hard to transform the upcoming Mahakumbh into a magnificent spectacle. Large camps for saints and akharas are being set up, with the fair administration coordinating the logistics, while spiritual leaders bring the essence of Vedic traditions to their camps. These camps will be places of Vedic mantras, kathas, Bhagwat recitations, and spiritual discourses. Preparations are in full swing for Vedic recitations by students from Veda schools.

UP GOVT REVIVING 7 GHATS ALONG YAMUNA, GANGA

In a significant step to enhance the spiritual and cultural splendor of Prayagraj ahead of Mahakumbh 2025, the Yogi Adityanath government has undertaken the revival of the city's seven ancient ghats along Yamuna and Ganga with Rs 11 crore investment. Drawing inspiration from the transformation of Kashi's Baba Vishwanath Corridor, these ghats are being restored to their pristine glory. The project is set to be completed before Prime Minister Narendra Modi's much-anticipated visit on December 13, showcasing Prayagraj as a beacon of Sanatan culture and

heritage. Since the ghats of the Ganga and Yamuna rivers are central to the activities of devotees and tourists visiting Maha Kumbh, as they serve as the sacred spots where pilgrims take holy dips, the Yogi government has undertaken this significant initiative to give the ghats a facelift. The construction and design division of Jal Nigam is leading the project. Project manager Rohit Kumar Rana stated that the rejuvenation work, costing Rs 11.01 crore, is nearing completion and will be fully ready by December 11, ahead of Prime Minister Modi's visit. The seven ghats undergoing transformation are Balua Ghat, Kalighat, Rasulabad Ghat, Chhatnag Ghat Jhuns, Nageshwar Ghat Jhuns, Mauj Giri Ghat, and Purana Arail Ghat. The beautification and rejuvenation work has almost been completed with final touches currently being given. The Mela administration is prioritising top-notch facilities for the devotees and tourists visiting the Maha Kumbh. To enhance the experience, the ghats are undergoing beautification efforts alongside the development of green belts to ensure cleanliness and visual appeal. Inspired by the arrangements in Kashi, these ghats are being equipped with umbrellas, high-mast lighting, and drinking water facilities. RO systems have been installed to provide clean water, and mobile toilets along with changing rooms have been set up for convenience. Additionally, benches have been installed to offer comfortable seating for visitors.

Temples not safe under Yogi govt, claims UPCC president

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ VARANASI

Uttar Pradesh Congress Committee (UPCC) president Ajay Rai strongly criticised the state government following the recent theft in the historic Maa Bhadrakali Temple located in Sarawan village (Badagaon). “In this Yogi government, the temples are not safe. The government talks about Sanatan and Hindutva, but thefts are constantly happening in temples and the administration is silent”, he said, terming it as a sign of the government’s dual character and incompetence. State Congress chief visited the spot here on Monday after the theft in the Maa Bhadrakali Temple that took place recently. He said that this temple dates back to the time of Maharaja Vikramaditya, which is located at the confluence of Varuna and Basuhi rivers. Ajay Rai gave information



State Cong chief Ajay Rai offering prayers at Maa Bhadrakali Temple, Sarawan (Badagaon) in Varanasi on Monday

about the theft in the temple, in which the thieves also stole the crown, nose ring, trident and eye of the goddess. He alleged that this incident highlights the failure of the Uttar

Pradesh government and the inaction of the administration. “This incident is not an isolated one, but incidents of theft have also taken place in five temples prior to this, especial-

ly in the parliamentary constituency of the Prime Minister Narendra Modi in Varanasi. Along with Ajay Rai, dozens of Congress workers, including Shailendra Singh, Omprakash Ojha, Sri Prakash Singh, Surendra Singh, Bachaun Singh Shafak, Amit Pathak, Sujit Singh, Vinay Singh Pintu Tiwari, Sujit, Shubham, Anand, Durgesh, Sanjay Gupta were present on the occasion. Meanwhile the Congress is not in a mood to leave any opportunity to criticise the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP)-ruled Central and state governments and keeping in mind the reconstruction of the party organisation and the 2027 assembly elections, recently party’s national president Mallikarjun Kharge accepted the proposal of the state leadership to dissolve the current state, district, city and block committees.

Metro successfully completes track construction up to Kanpur Central

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ KANPUR

The Kanpur Metro has successfully completed track construction on the ‘downline’ up to Kanpur Central, marking another significant milestone. With this achievement, the train route is now fully prepared on both lines from IIT to Kanpur Central under Corridor-1 (IIT to Naubasta). In the coming days, the installation of the Third Rail on the ‘downline’ to Kanpur Central will also be completed. The construction of track slabs on the Baradevi-Naubasta elevated section is also progressing rapidly. During his visit to Kanpur on Sunday, UPMRC Managing Director Sushil Kumar inspected various underground stations and held a meeting with senior officials to review the progress of works across all departments. The track construction for Kanpur Metro is advancing alongside the civil construction of stations. After completing



IFFCO MD receives prestigious award



tilisers, which save foreign exchange while protecting the soil and environment. He urged Sahakar Bharati workers to actively promote the benefits of nano fertilisers, emphasising their potential to make India self-reliant in agriculture. Dr Awasthi also stressed the importance of cooperation among cooperatives, advocating for larger cooperatives to support smaller cooperatives to strengthen the cooperative movement. He remarked that organisations like Sahakar Bharati focus on grassroots level mobilisation, while business-oriented entities like IFFCO have a duty to help them achieve their goals. Senior Executive Director (Unit Head) of IFFCO Phulpur Unit Sanjay Kudesia, HOD Human Resources Shambhu Shekhar, IFFCO Officers’ Association president Anurag Tiwari and general secretary Swyam Prakash, IFFCO Employees’ Sangh president Pankaj Pandey and general secretary Vijay Kumar Yadav expressed joy and happiness on the occasion.

plaque). In his speech, Dr Awasthi expressed gratitude for the honour and praised the extraordinary grassroots work of Sahakar Bharati. He stressed the urgent need to reduce India's dependence on imports for essential fertilisers like rock phosphate, potash and natural gas. To address this challenge, Dr Awasthi highlighted IFFCO's pioneering efforts in the development of nano fer-

tilisers, which save foreign exchange while protecting the soil and environment. He urged Sahakar Bharati workers to actively promote the benefits of nano fertilisers, emphasising their potential to make India self-reliant in agriculture. Dr Awasthi also stressed the importance of cooperation among cooperatives, advocating for larger cooperatives to support smaller cooperatives to strengthen the cooperative movement. He remarked that organisations like Sahakar Bharati focus on grassroots level mobilisation, while business-oriented entities like IFFCO have a duty to help them achieve their goals. Senior Executive Director (Unit Head) of IFFCO Phulpur Unit Sanjay Kudesia, HOD Human Resources Shambhu Shekhar, IFFCO Officers’ Association president Anurag Tiwari and general secretary Swyam Prakash, IFFCO Employees’ Sangh president Pankaj Pandey and general secretary Vijay Kumar Yadav expressed joy and happiness on the occasion.

Jay Chaudhary to deliver BHU convocation address

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ VARANASI

The 104th convocation ceremony of Banaras Hindu University (BHU) will be organised in Swatantrata Bhawan, BHU, on December 14 in which Zscaler founder and CEO Jay Chaudhary and an alumnus of BHU will be the chief guest who will deliver the convocation address. In a message, Jay Chaudhary, an accomplished global entrepreneur and a pioneering figure in the security technology sector, said, “Banaras Hindu University was the catalyst where my career aspirations began to take shape—a place that challenged me, inspired me, and connected me with lifelong friends and mentors”. Crediting BHU for shaping his career, Chaudhary stated, “It was here that I learned the importance of perseverance and collaboration, lessons that stayed with me as I built companies and fostered bold ideas”. Chaudhary, named among Goldman Sachs 100 Most Intriguing Entrepreneurs, emphasised two guiding principles from his time at BHU: “Uncover your passion and pursue it relentlessly and never be afraid to take risks and dream big. These values helped me create not only businesses but enduring innovations, and I hope they inspire students and entrepreneurs to build something lasting as they embark on their own journeys”, he added. Chaudhary obtained his Bachelor of Technology in Electronics Engineering from the Institute of Technology

BHU to institute new gold medal for IM student

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ VARANASI

The Banaras Hindu University (BHU) will institute a new gold medal to be awarded to a meritorious student of Institute of Management Studies (IM-BHU). Amarjeet Singh Bhambra, an alumnus of the institute has made a generous donation for the purpose. Bhambra met Vice-Chancellor Prof Sudhir Kumar Jain on Monday, and handed the cheque of donation. The V-C acknowledged the spirit and affection of the alumnus for the growth of BHU. Bhambra graduated with a degree in Management (MBM) in 1979 from the institute. The medal is being established in honour of his mother Gurchain Kaur. During the meeting with the V-C, Bhambra reminisced about his time at BHU and the role the university played in shaping his life and career. Director, Institute of



BHU V-C Prof Sudhir Kumar Jain receiving donation from an alumnus Amarjeet Singh Bhambra in Varanasi on Monday.

Management Studies, Prof Ashish Bajpai, and Dean, Faculty of Management Studies, Prof SK Dubey, were also present during the meeting. The donation reflects BHU’s strong alumni network and the university’s commitment to fostering a culture of giving back to the community. The contribution has been made

under the Pratidana initiative of the university aimed at supporting scholarships for meritorious students, need-based financial aid, enhancing learning opportunities, promoting excellence in teaching and enabling impactful research among others. The university has instituted many new scholarships from the contributions received under Pratidana.

MS in Industrial Engineering, from the University of Cincinnati. He has also completed the Executive Management Programme from Harvard Business School. Meanwhile, convener of convocation Prof AD Singh said after the main convocation ceremony, all those students of Institute of Science (Graduate, Postgraduate and PhD), who qualified for the degree in the Examination of 2024, may receive their degrees in the function which will be organised from 2 pm onwards. These students are requested to submit their consent forms by login on the Student Portal (using User ID and Login Password) at bhonline.in and deposit the non-refundable fee of ₹200 at the earliest. Further, it is also requested to report to their respective subject teachers and join the Convocation on December 14 at 1 pm in the Swatantrata Bhawan (after the closing of the University Main function) in formal attire as is fixed for male/female students to receive the degree in person. The female students will be attire in white saree with red border, red blouse or white kurta and white salwar, including the dupatta and safa while male students in white kurta, white pajama/dhoti, dupatta and safa. Prof Singh said of the above formal attire, only the distribution of dupatta and safa to the participants will be done at Mahamana Hall, Seminar Complex, Institute of Science, from December 11 to 13 between 11 am to 4 pm on production of online paid receipt for obtaining the formal attire.

Body of unidentified youth found

Prayagraj (PNS): The body of an unidentified youth was found lying near Ganga Ghat of Lilapur Khurd under Sarai Inayat police station area here on Monday. There were marks of wounds on the body of the youth and a rope was tied around his waist. The villagers informed the police. People from nearby villages reached the spot but

failed to identify the youth. Station House Officer (SHO) Sarai Inayat police station Sanjay Prasad Gupta said the body has been sent to the post-mortem house. Police is trying to ascertain the identity of the youth through inquiries in the nearby villages. Meanwhile, glass trader Maqsood Ahmed (36) was found dead under mysterious

circumstances on Sunday night in a hotel in Civil Lines. **ARRESTED:** The police arrested the main accused Atul Pratap Singh and his accomplice, who were absconding in the advocate Akhilesh alias Guddu Shukla death case, on Sunday night. The advocates of the District Advocates Association were on a strike for 20 days demanding Atul’s arrest.

Advocates’ welfare awareness camp held

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ KANPUR

The Adhivakta Kalyan Sangharsh Samiti organised an advocates’ welfare awareness camp at the Kanpur Bar Association (KBA) gate on Monday which was inaugurated by KBA general secretary Amit Singh. Covenor Pt Ravindra Sharma said the objective of organising the camp every year was to apprise lawyers of all welfare schemes. He said forms of all schemes were distributed free of cost. He said on Monday 231 lawyers took membership of the Welfare Fund Scheme while the membership of 16 other lawyers was reinstated. Three forms of death compensation scheme were also delivered. Prominent members present at the camp were Uma Shanker Gupta, Chairman, Eldera Committee, Ram Naval Kushwaha, Arvind Dixit, Sanjiv Kapoor, Shivam Gangwar, Navneet Pandey, Gurmeet Singh, Ankur Goel, Pankaj Dixit, CK Saraf, Sandeep Verma, Kanchan Gupta, Atul Singh, Vinay Mishra, Anand Sethi, Indresh Mishra and KK Yadav. **PANIC:** Panic prevailed in the collectorate compound on Monday when a criminal who had come for hearing in a court was found in possession of a country-made pistol. The incident came to light when lawyers saw the pistol suddenly falling off his waist. The accused was immediately handed over to the Kotwali police. During

probe, it was revealed that his accomplice had also reached the court with the pistol AND managed to escape after the arrest of the accused. The Kotwali police took the accused into custody for quizzing. ACP Kotwali Ashutosh Kumar said Anurag of Karankheda, Maharajpur, was an accused u/s 308 IPC (attempt to murder) in Maharajpur police station. He was out on bail in this case and had come to the court on Monday to attend the hearing. After attending it when he was collecting information about the next date of hearing, his pistol suddenly fell off his waist. On seeing the pistol, panic prevailed among the lawyers who immediately caught hold of the accused and informed the Kotwali police. Kotwali incharge and Kutcheri outpost incharge rushed to the spot and took the accused into custody. Lawyers informed that Anurag’s accomplice, present in the court, managed to escape from there. The Kotwali police launched raids to nail the absconding accomplice of the accused. After lodging a first information report (FIR), action will be taken against the accused, ACP said. In another incident a youth committed suicide by hanging himself during a video call with his girlfriend in Nazirabad police station late on Sunday night. Police sent the body for autopsy. SHO Aman Singh said he had asked the kin to submit complaint of the incident.

Polio drops given to kids on second day

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ VARANASI

On the second day of the six-day Pulse Polio campaign on Monday a total of 1,265 teams apart from 36 transit teams went door to door in different parts of the city to administer polio drops to the children up to five years of age who could not reach the booth on the first day. Earlier, under the campaign, polio doses were administered to children from birth to five years on the Booth Day which was inaugurated by Varanasi Cantt MLA Saurabh Srivastava by administering polio medicine to the children at the booth set up in Swami Vivekananda Memorial (SVM) Hospital, Bhelupur campus. On the occasion the MLA said that as our neighbouring countries Pakistan and Afghanistan have not yet been declared polio free, anti-polio medicines are being administered in the country. He appealed to all of parents to administer polio drops to their children up to five years of age so that the district can be kept polio free. Chief Medical Officer (CMO) Dr Sandeep Chaudhary said a total of 2,65,066 children have taken polio doses in the district on the Booth Day and in this six-day-long campaign, as many as 5,68,511 children will take the medicine. A total of 1,265 teams have also been deployed for door to door visits and 36 transit teams have been formed. For children who are unable to reach the booth, polio doses will be administered by going door to door from December 9. He said even after door to door campaign, if any child is deprived of medicine he/she will be given polio doses on December 16 so be alert and make sure that polio doses are administered to children. District Immunisation Officer (DIO) Dr AK Maurya, Superintendent SVM Hospital, Bhelupur Dr Kshitij Tiwari, WHO’s SMO Dr Chelsea, UNICEF’s DMC Dr Shahid, UNDP’s VCCM Reena Verma and people from the community along with hospital staff were present on the occasion.

Nazareth Hospital’s foundation day a blend of cultural celebration & recognition of service

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ PRAYAGRAJ

The Nazareth Hospital on Sunday evening celebrated its 49th foundation day with a vibrant cultural programme in the presence of dignitaries. The event was graced by the Justice Saurabh Srivastava, the Administrative Judge of Sonbhadra district, as the chief guest and presided over by Most Rev Louis Mascarenhas, Chairman of Nazareth Hospital. The guests of honour included Dr Ashu Pandey, Chief Medical Officer and Sr Lata CSN, Provincial Superior of the Congregation of the Sisters of Nazareth. The celebration began with a prayer dance and was followed by the ceremonial lighting of the lamp. The administrator Rev Fr Isidore D’Souza welcomed the dignitaries, guests and well wishers to the cultural extravaganza. The cultural programme featured a series of captivating performances. A highlight was



Bollywood Dhamaka, which added a vibrant, contemporary flair to the event. The dances on the themes of cyber security, environmental preservation and organ donation kept everyone spellbound. The visually impaired girls from Divya Jyoti Niketan sent a strong message of the need for educating the less fortunate children with their rhythmic feet. The cultural fusion depicted unity in diversity with rich culture. In his address, Justice Srivastava commended

Nazareth Hospital for its unwavering commitment to healthcare and community service over nearly five decades. The Chairman, Most Rev Louis Mascarenhas, also addressed the gathering, reflecting on the hospital’s rich legacy and its continued mission to serve humanity with compassion and excellence. One of the highlights of the event was the presentation of the prestigious Nightingale Award 2024 to two nurses — Preeti Arya, staff nurse, and Rashmi Munda, ANM Nurse, in recognition of their outstanding dedication and contributions to patient care. The event concluded with Dr Prashant Tripathi proposing the vote of thanks, expressing gratitude to all who contributed to the success of the day. Nazareth Hospital’s 49th foundation day was a perfect blend of cultural celebration and recognition of service, leaving the audience inspired and united in spirit.

Cash, jewellery worth lakhs stolen

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ KANPUR

Cash and jewellery worth lakhs of rupees were stolen from a house in Ghatampur police station area. All the family members had gone to attend a marriage ceremony. They came to know about the incident on return. On being informed the police rushed to the spot and carried out investigation. According to a report, Rizwan of Katra, Ghatampur, in his complaint lodged at the Ghatampur police station on Monday, said he had gone to attend a marriage ceremony at his uncle’s house with wife and children on

November 28. On return he found the locks of rooms and almira broken and household goods ransacked. He said apart from cash of ₹13,000, miscreants stole jewellery worth lakhs of rupees from the house. Inspector Dhananjay Kumar Pandey said a probe was on in the matter and claimed that the case would be worked out soon. Meanwhile a motorcyclist was fatally knocked down by a speeding car near Miyaganj chauraha under Asiawan police station area of Unnao on Sunday night. His kin took the seriously injured youth to a hospital where the doctors declared him dead.

Conference on human rights today

Varanasi (PNS): On Human Rights Day, Progressive Foundation of Human Rights, (Gandhinagar, Gujarat) is organising a national conference on the topic ‘Human Rights and Social Justice’, at Hotel Ramada (Katesar Ramnagar) here on Tuesday at 3 pm, in which eminent personalities of the country and representatives from 27 states will participate. This national conference is being organised

by Progressive Foundation of Human Rights for the last 18 years. The keynote speakers of this programme will be UP Minister of State (Independent Charge) for Stamp and Court Fee and Registration Ravindra Jaishwal, UP Minister of State for AYUSH (Independent Charge) Dr Dayashankar Mishra ‘Dayalu’, former Home Minister (Gujarat) Naresh Rawal, former MP Rajya Sabha Raju Parmar, Mayor Ashok Tiwari, former

secretary of Supreme Court Bar Association Rohit Pandey, president Bharatendu Natya Academy (Uttar Pradesh) Dr Rati Shankar Tripathi and others will participate. The programme will be presided over by president of Progressive Foundation of Human Rights Rakesh Pandey. The programme will be conducted by ‘Bharat Gaurav’ Dr Anita Sehgal Vasundhara (national anchor and well-known writer).

PROGRAMME: The programme of Infectious Disease Update-2024 will be held on Tuesday at the K.N. Udupa Auditorium, IMS-BHU. The event is being organised under the guidance of Prof Shyam Sundar (organising chairman) and Prof Jaya Chakravarty (organising secretary), supported by joint organising secretaries Prof LP Meena (head of Medicine department) and Prof Manaswi Chaubey.

Didi's lollipop barb for Bangla netas' 'annex Bengal' threat

SAUGAR SENGUPTA ■ KOLKATA

Bengal Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee on Monday lobbed a tart "lollipop" at Bangladesh leadership advising them to "stay calm and have peace of mind" and hold down their "occupy Bengal" dreams because India would not sit quiet if they resorted to any kind of misadventure. Speaking on a recent aggressive remark made by a senior Bangladesh Nationalist Party leader who said that their country had a legitimate right over three Indian States, Banerjee said, "it is unusual for us to speak on the foreign affairs a responsibility that has been entrusted with the Ministry of External Affairs and it is our declared stance that we will abide by all the advisories from the

Government of India... "But we have heard about some politician from Bangladesh saying that they have a right over Bengal, Bihar and Odisha ... I wish them mental peace and health and advice them to stay calm ... but at the same time I will remind them that we will not lick lollipops while their forces will try to occupy our land," Banerjee said to a thumping roar inside the House. Amid ongoing attacks on the minority Hindus and vandalisation of their religious places a section Bangladesh Ulama and the political leaders have been pouring venom on India asking people to boycott Indian consumer products and preaching Gazba e Hind (subjugate India). The BNP leader in that context had told a gathering that his country



had "a legitimate right over Bangla, Bihar and Odisha as they were once ruled by our Nawab Siraj ud Daulah." The Chief Minister's statement came on a day when Indian Foreign Secretary met his counterpart during when he made a candid expression of India's stand on the repression of minorities. Accordingly Banerjee said, "We are quite conscious and active enough. We also test patience because we learnt it from Rabindranath Tagore," reminding India's patience was not to be misconstrued as its weakness. "I don't say that our politics should match theirs ... I don't say that the politics of the two countries should be interconnected but I can forcefully say that India and its Constitution is emphatically

secular and we will practice secularism," advising the people on this border against walking into the "communal traps being set up by some vested interests." She said, "I ask all and sundry to act rationally and stay calm and not get influenced by communal forces," she said. Bengal Opposition Leader Suvendu Adhikari however "refuse" to take Banerjee's speech "on face value." He said, "the Chief Minister knows that the people on this side of the border are tremendously agitated about what is happening in Bangladesh ... she also knows that the people in Bengal are angry with her appeasement politics ... so she has made such statement as a face saving measure." Wondering why the Chief Minister would not take any

action against her senior Cabinet colleague Siddiquillah Chowdhury who had allegedly praised Bangladesh interim Chief Advisor Md Yunus the Opposition Leader said, "if she is really concerned about the Hindu minorities of Bangladesh then why she has not dismissed and taken action against her own Cabinet colleague Siddiquillah Chowdhury who openly praised Md Yunus and criticised Prime Minister Narendra Modi ... and why her Government refuses permission to Sanatani protesters to organize rallies whereas it gives permissions to communal people like Firhad Hakim and Twaha Siddiqi... I think Mamata Banerjee's statement will have no bearing on the people ... they will never believe in her."

CPI(M) files intervening application in SC on Places of Worship Act, 1991

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

The CPI(M) on Monday filed intervening application in Supreme Court opposing the petitions which challenge the constitutionality of the Places of Worship Act, 1991. The party's petition represented by polit bureau member Prakash Karat, said the Act preserves India's secular fabric and sought the top court's intervention in stopping survey orders on mosques by several courts across the country. The polit bureau in a statement cited that many such surveys of ancient mosques to verify the presence of temple ruins lying underneath is creating communal tensions in many places. "After Varanasi and Mathura, in Sambhal, a survey was ordered of a 16th century mosque by a lower court. This resulted in vio-



lence in which four Muslim youth were killed. Following this, a similar petition has been entertained in the civil court in Ajmer regarding the Ajmer Sharif Dargah," the party said. In a statement here after a two-day meeting of the CPI(M) Politburo on December 7-8, the Left party said it is unfortunate that the Supreme Court has not intervened to put a stop to such lit-

igations. "The 2019 five-member bench judgment of the Supreme Court on the Ayodhya dispute had categorically upheld the validity of the law and its enforcement. Given this direction, it is incumbent on the apex court to intervene to put a stop to legal proceedings, which are violative of the Act," the CPI(M) said. Several litigations filed in various courts related to tem-

ple-mosque disputes have come into the limelight, including on Gyanvapi Mosque in Varanasi, Shahi Idgah Mosque in Mathura, Shahi Jama Masjid in Sambhal, Ajmer Dargah of Sufi saint Moinuddin Chishti and Budaun's Jama Masjid Shamsi, where petitioners have claimed that these were built after destroying ancient temples and sought permission to offer Hindu prayers there. The Supreme Court has constituted a special bench to hear a batch of PILs challenging the validity of certain provisions of the Places of Worship (Special Provisions) Act, 1991 law that prohibits filing a lawsuit to reclaim a place of worship or seek a change in its character from what prevailed on August 15, 1947. The headed by Chief Justice of India is scheduled to hear the matter on December 12.

Manipur violence: SC asks State to give details on arson, property encroachments

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

The Supreme Court on Monday directed the Manipur Government to submit a detailed sealed cover report on the number of properties that were fully or partially burnt, looted, or encroached upon during the ongoing ethnic violence in the State. The bench comprising Chief Justice Sanjiv Khanna and Justice Sanjay Kumar emphasised the need for the State to address the grievances of the displaced persons and take steps to restore their properties. The Bench asked the Manipur government, represented by Solicitor General Tushar Mehta, to provide specific details such as "buildings burnt or partially burnt, buildings looted, buildings trespassed or encroached upon". The report should also provide information about the owners and current occupants



of these properties, along with the details of any legal actions taken against trespassers, the CJI said. "We also direct the State Government to provide the following details: 1. Buildings burnt and partially burnt, 2. Buildings which are looted; and (3) the buildings trespassed and encroached upon," the SC order stated. The bench further directed, "In all these, give details of the name and address of the owner as well as the person, if any, in occupation of the

property. The report shall also indicate the steps taken by the state government to ensure that the persons who have trespassed are proceeded against as per the law. The said list be given in a sealed cover." "You have to take a decision on how you want to deal with it or in terms of criminal action as well as to ask them (encroachers of the properties) to pay 'mesne profits' for the use of the occupation..." noted the apex court. Mesne profit is the com-

pensation paid to a rightful owner of a property by a person who is in unlawful possession of it. The top court further asked the state government to respond to the issue of release of funds for temporary and permanent housing as flagged by the three judges panel headed by Justice Gita Mittal, the former chief justice of the Jammu and Kashmir High Court. Senior advocate Vibha Makhija, appearing for the judges panel, said it took several steps with the support of some officials on the rehabilitation, skill-building, and resettlement of the displaced individuals. Makhija said the committee filed over 34 reports addressing the crisis beginning 2023 and lauded its pro bono efforts. The bench directed for the committee's reports to be shared with the Union Home Ministry and the Manipur Government to facilitate further remedial actions.

NMC issues new guidelines to identify 'fake patients' in medical colleges

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

In a first the National Medical Commission (NMC) has issued new guidelines aimed at identifying "fake patients" in medical colleges and institutions seeking approval for new establishments or an increase in undergraduate (UG) and postgraduate (PG) seats. The guidelines are aimed at addressing concerns about medical institutions admitting fake patients—individuals who do not require inpatient treatment—just to meet bed occupancy requirements. These guidelines are being introduced after instances were reported where some medical institutions or colleges admitted fake patients (i.e., individuals who do not require treatment or inpatient care) to fulfill bed occupancy and investigation requirements. According to the guidelines, admission of large numbers of patients on the day of inspection or the previous day, admission of multiple patients from the same family or the admit-

ted patients having no or minor problems which can be treated on OPD basis with oral medications, could be a parameter for identifying "fake patients". Patients, who are admitted without any evidence of investigations like X-ray, blood tests etc. (before or after admission) or treatment which is generally done for admitted patients like intravenous (IV) fluid, injections, catheterization, giving medicines etc can also be an indication. Another parameter assessors should keep in mind is if most of the admitted children are found to be playful and joyous without any significant problem in the paediatric ward or if they observe that patients were admitted in large numbers through preventive health checkups or camps. The NMC has laid down the guidelines while inviting applications for establishment of new medical colleges/institutions intending to offer undergraduate courses and increase in the number of UG seats in established medical/institutions for the Academic year

(AY)2025-2026. "The Commission said "fake patient practice" will be considered as a serious violation and will invite punishment as per the regulations. For the purpose of training the students, certain minimum clinical exposure of patients have been defined in the minimum standards of requirements criteria of undergraduate and postgraduate in the form of bed occupancy requirements, etc. "It has been observed for a long time that some medical institutions/colleges indulge in admitting fake patients (people who do not require any treatment or inpatient treatment) to fulfil the requirement of bed occupancy, investigation, etc," the NMC said. As per the guidelines, the Medical Assessment and Rating Board (MARB) will choose the best possible team of assessors for optimal output. For UG courses, assessment will be conducted for one or more days and for PG courses, assessment will be conducted for one or more days.

'More than 24 lakh cases registered by NHRC since its inception'

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

More than 23 lakh cases have been registered by the NHRC since its inception in 1993 and total relief amount worth Rs 256.57 crore has been recommended to victims of human rights violations during the period, the rights panel said on Monday. President Droupadi Murmu will be the chief guest at an event on Tuesday to mark the Human Rights Day, the National Human Rights Commission said in a statement. Human Rights Day is observed on December 10 every year to commemorate the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR), which was adopted and proclaimed by the United Nations General Assembly in 1948. The UDHR serves as a global benchmark for the protection and promotion of human rights. The NHRC said it views Human Rights Day as an opportunity for various stakeholders worldwide to reflect on their actions and responsibilities, ensuring that they do not contribute to the violation of human rights.



"The UDHR embodies the principle that all human beings are born free and equal, with the right to life, liberty and security, and equality before the law, and freedom of thought, conscience, religion, opinion, and expression," the statement said. This principle is also reflected in India's Constitution and the Protection of Human Rights Act (PHRA), 1993, which provided the legal framework for the establishment of the NHRC on October 12, 1993. "During more than three decades, it registered a total of 23,14,794 and disposed of 23,07,587 cases, including 2,880 cases based on suo motu cognisance, and recommended about Rs 256.57 lakh as monetary relief to the victims of human rights violations," the rights panel said. During the last one year, from December 1, 2023 to November 30, 2024, the NHRC registered 65,973 cases and disposed of 66,378 cases, including those carried forward from previous years, the statement said. "It took suo motu cognisance in 109 cases and recommended Rs 17,24,40,000 in monetary relief to victims of human rights violations during this period of the last year," it added. The Commission also held a camp in Vijayawada, Andhra Pradesh.

To mark Human Rights Day, the NHRC is organising a programme at the Vigyan Bhavan here. NHRC's acting chairperson Vijaya Bharathi Sayani, Secretary General Bharat Lal, along with senior officers, members of statutory commissions and SHRCs, diplomats, civil society, and other dignitaries will be present on the occasion. The event will be followed by a national conference on 'Mental well-being: Navigating stress from classroom to workplace'. The three sessions include 'Stress among Children and Adolescents', 'Mental health challenges in institutions of higher learning', and 'Stress and burnout at workplaces'. The conference aims to explore the psychological impacts of stress at various stages of life - from education to employment and propose recommendations to promote mental well-being across different sectors, the NHRC said. The theme for this year's Human Rights Day -- 'Our Rights, Our Future, Right Now' -- emphasises that human rights are not just aspirational but also a practical tool for

empowering individuals and communities to create a better future. Embracing the transformative potential of human rights can help build a more peaceful, equitable, and sustainable world. Now is the time to renew global action for a future rooted in human dignity, it added. "The Commission has consistently worked to ensure the protection of both civil and political rights, as well as economic, social, and cultural rights. It has made significant contributions to mainstreaming a human rights-centred approach in government policies and programmes, and in raising awareness among public authorities and civil society through various initiatives," the statement said. It continues to foster human rights discussions at national and international fora and engages in dialogue with civil society, NGOs, human rights defenders, experts, statutory commission members, state human rights commissions, and government officials. The NHRC, India has conducted numerous spot investigations, open hearings, and camp sittings since its inception.

Fifth edition of IYC spokesperson talent search competition launched

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

Indian Youth Congress on Monday launched the 5th edition of its flagship program 'Young India Ke Bol'. On this occasion, National President of Indian Youth Congress Uday Bhanu Chib and National AICC Incharge of NSUI Kanhaiya Kumar launched the poster of the program and appealed to the youth across the country to join the program. Speaking on the occasion, Bhanu Chib said that this year the event will focus on two of the most serious and worrying problems that our country is facing today – the alarming rise in unemployment and the rampant drug menace, which are deeply affecting the youth of India and future generations. "The rampant problem of unemployment and drug addiction is hollowing out the roots of our society. The

scourge of these problems is affecting the lives of the youth and hampering the development of the entire society. We have to make united efforts to find solutions to these challenges," he said. "The BJP had promised to provide 2 crore jobs every year to tackle unemployment, but the reality is that in the last decade, since the Modi government came to power in 2014, only 0.3% of the candidates who applied have got government jobs. That is, only 3 out of every 1,000 applicants got permanent government jobs," Bhanu said. He further said, "In 2022, Union Minister Jitendra Singh admitted in Parliament that out of the 22 crore applications received by the government since 2014, only 7,22,311 candidates were appointed. This statement makes it clear that the Modi government is not giving 2 crore jobs every year. The government has completely

failed to fulfill its promise of 2 crore jobs. The number of 22 crore applications reflects the deplorable state of employment in the country. The BJP has taken only electoral posturing and superficial steps to deal with the problem of unemployment, which exposes its careless mindset towards this serious issue," said the IYC chief. Before the Lok Sabha elections, the BJP made a false promise of filling government vacancies in the name of 'Rojgar Mela', but what was the result of it? The situation has become more frightening. Not only unemployment, but the problem of drug addiction in the country has also taken a serious turn, Bhanu mentioned. "Mudra Port, which is under the control of Adani, has become a major route for the entry of drugs into India. In 2021 alone, 3000 kg of heroin (the country's largest drug seizure case so far) and another



consignment of 75 kg was seized in 2022. This problem is continuously increasing. After all, by whom and why is Adani being protected? These facts not only highlight the failures of the BJP government, but also confirm its far-reaching negative impact on the youth and society of the country," Bhanu added. Talking about the Young India Ke Bol program, Bhanu Chib said the horrific national inci-

dents have inspired the Indian Youth Congress to involve the youth of the country in the struggle against the BJP government. Under this idea, a spokesperson search program called 'Young India Ke Bol' was started. This year, the main focus of the 5th edition of 'Young India Ke Bol' will be on the complete failure of the BJP government to deal with the problem of drug addiction

and unemployment. This program is in line with the national campaign of Indian Youth Congress 'Naukri Do, Nasha Nahi', which aims to provide a platform to youth, students, professionals, grassroots workers and political enthusiasts, so that they can raise their voice and reach this irresponsible government," stated an IYC statement. The application process for this competition will start from 15 December 2024 through 'With IYC App'. Interested participants will have to submit their videos on both these issues. Participants of this program will be invited at the state and national level, and they will be given the unique opportunity to become the state and national spokesperson of the Indian Youth Congress. Also, they will get a chance to express the party's views on relevant issues, further said the statement. Bhanu appealed to the youth

of the country to participate in this program in large numbers and force the government to take effective steps to control the problem of unemployment and drug addiction. This is a golden opportunity to raise your voice and be a part of the change," he said. NSUI's national in-charge Kanhaiya Kumar said that Youth Congress constantly fights for the issues of the youth of the country. "We have been doing many creative programs to change the situation of the youth in the country, to solve their problems. 'Young India Ke Bol' is a platform for the youth of the country to present their side and join us. In this platform, the youth will express their views against unemployment. Today, the youth in the country do not have employment. The situation is such that even those from IIT-IIM are not getting employment," Kanhaiya said.

He also said that India is the youngest country in the world. 55% of the population is young, every fifth youth in the world is an Indian. "India has never been so young. Such a young population, educated people, but what is the reality? Two youths are committing suicide in an hour. Youth suicide has also crossed the farmer suicide rate. It is such a painful thing that the suicide rate has overtaken the population growth. Why is this happening? The reason for this is that on one hand, an educated youth does not have a job of Rs 5000, while on the other hand, Rs 5000 crores are being spent on the marriage of another youth. As part of a conspiracy, these youth are being pushed into drugs. If the youth is in his senses, he will ask for a job. That is why a conspiracy is being hatched to push him into drugs," Kanhaiya added.

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PAPER WITH PASSION

Renewed vigour

PM Modi and the King Wangchuck's meeting strengthens ties with the Himalayan kingdom and lays the groundwork for future collaboration

India and Bhutan share a relationship rooted in historical ties, cultural affinity and a deep commitment to mutual progress. This bond was reaffirmed during a recent high-level meeting between Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi and Bhutan's King Jigme Khesar Namgyel Wangchuck. The meeting underscores the enduring importance both nations place on their friendship amidst a dynamic geopolitical landscape. The foundation of India-Bhutan relations was laid with the signing of the Treaty of Friendship in 1949, which established perpetual peace and friendship, free trade and mutual cooperation. This treaty was updated in 2007 to reflect evolving dynamics. It continued to emphasise close cooperation on defence, trade and cultural exchange. India has been a steadfast partner in Bhutan's development journey, assisting in key sectors such as hydropower, infrastructure, education and health. Bhutan, in turn, has been a reliable neighbour, sharing India's security concerns and supporting its diplomatic endeavours.



The recent interaction between PM Modi and King Jigme Khesar sought to address emerging challenges and explore avenues for deeper collaboration. Hydropower is a cornerstone of India-Bhutan relations. Bhutan exports surplus electricity generated from its rivers to India, a mutually beneficial arrangement. Discussions focused on scaling up hydropower projects, ensuring sustainable energy practices, and addressing financial challenges related to project execution. India remains Bhutan's largest trading partner and the leaders explored ways to diversify trade and enhance connectivity. Emphasis

was also placed on digital infrastructure and technology transfer to support Bhutan's aspirations for modernisation. Geopolitical developments, particularly in the Indo-Pacific and Himalayan region, were key discussion points. Both leaders reaffirmed their commitment to regional stability and countering security threats, including transnational crimes and emerging cyber risks. Recognising the importance of fostering people-to-people ties, leaders pledged to expand scholarship programmes, skill development initiatives and cultural exchanges. These efforts aim to empower the youth and deepen cultural understanding. The dialogue between India and Bhutan holds broader geopolitical significance. As China increases its outreach in South Asia, including in the Himalayan region, India's proactive engagement with Bhutan reaffirms its commitment to its smaller neighbours. Bhutan's strategic location makes its partnership vital for India's security and regional influence. India's support for Bhutan's participation in global forums reflects its willingness to amplify Bhutan's voice on international issues, including climate change. As both nations work toward common goals, their relationship serves as a model for regional cooperation based on trust, benefit and mutual respect.

PICTALK



Farmers carry harvested cauliflower at a field on a winter morning, in Kolkata

Superpower retreats and their fallout

Russians abandoning Assads is a stark reminder of the fact that promises of steadfast allegiance can falter when geopolitical will and resources wane

The Vietnam War was fought between the forces of the North (supported by the Soviet Union and China) and those of the South (supported by the United States of America). While it lasted twenty years (1955 to 1975) the direct involvement of the American troops lasted about a decade from 1965 onwards. The scars of 58,281 US fatalities and 303,644 wounded had tired the spirits, emotions and morale of the Americans, and they secretly negotiated a pull-out plan under the garb of the Paris Peace Accords that the Americans knew would not hold up.

The Americans made many insincere and knowingly immoral promises to intervene on behalf of its ally, the Southern side, but when the push came to shove, it pushed the Southern side under the bus with non-intervention or support. Later day US President Ronald Reagan was to coin the term 'Vietnam Syndrome' to suggest a reluctance to support an international military intervention, beyond a point. A similar renege of support after almost a decade of direct military intervention was to face the Soviet-propped puppet government of Afghanistan, under Mohammad Najibullah.

Ultimately the political and popular will of the Soviets had waned as the human and financial cost of continuing the war in Afghanistan had waned. A few years later, exactly as it had happened in Vietnam, the Afghan government was ousted in a bloody offensive and Najibullah's corpse was dragged behind a truck through the streets of Kabul. Eventually, the Soviets left him to his fate. It was the sort of end of a regime that was far less than ideal as the land of many 'Great Games' earlier i.e., Afghanistan, had seen similar consequences of bloodlust with the British troops leaving Afghanistan in Jan 1842 (only one survivor had managed to reach the British controlled township of Jalalabad). Sadly, even Najibullah's ouster wasn't to be the last of the 'abandonment' of Bashar Al Assad cannot be compared to the Vietnam or Afghanistan situations, as the principal power



its ally i.e., the Ashraf Ghani government, in Kabul on the pretext of a deal signed between the Taliban and the US in Doha.

Everyone knew that the deal would not hold up and lo behold the Taliban stormed into Kabul, soon after. The 'longest war in US history' with a two trillion financial cost, a no-win situation, and mounting pictures of 'US body bags' had yet again forced the Americans to push their ally under the bus. By blindsiding its purported ally, the Americans had unilaterally let down its ally after making promises to defend the same. Afghan Vice President Amrullah Saleh was left mocking the US on its pusillanimous stand, "when a superpower decided to become a mini power".

Recently, and yet again, it was the decisive reluctance of a major power and ally i.e., Russia and Iran, that left the beleaguered Syrian Government of Bashar Al Assad, to its inevitable fate and within days of some token support, the Syrian capital of Damascus fell to rebels, who routed the Russia-Iran supported Bashar Al Assad regime. To be fair, the 'abandonment' of Bashar Al Assad cannot be compared to the Vietnam or Afghanistan situations, as the principal power



AFTER THE SYRIAN REBELS HAD TAKEN OVER IDLIB AND WERE DASHING THE NEXT PROFILE TARGET OF HOMES, THE RUSSIAN FIGHTER PLANES DID BOMB SOME REBEL STRONGHOLDS, BUT IT SIMPLY WASN'T ENOUGH

behind the Syrian regime no longer had the wherewithal to continue supporting, even if they wanted to.

Russia is already bleeding and reeling under the humiliating and costly stalemate on the Ukrainian front, whereas the Iranians and their strategic regional proxies (e.g. Hezbollah and the Houthis) were getting systematically decimated and attacked with literal impunity.

After the Syrian rebels had taken over Idlib and were dashing the next profile target of Homs, the Russian fighter planes did bomb some rebel strongholds, but it simply wasn't enough. Soon, the Syrian rebels made the kill for Damascus, and the isolated and unsupported forces of Bashar Al Assad simply couldn't hold on. History repeated itself and in the face of supporting foreign allies failing the regime, it was tantamount to pushing the same under the bus!

The lessons are substantial for other regions facing similar belligerence or circumstances i.e., counting on declared allies cannot be assumed, definitely and certainly not, infinitely. When there were grave tensions on Indo-Sino borders in 2020, then President Donald Trump (author of a book aptly titled, 'The Art of Deal') made mean-

ingless offers to 'negotiate' between the two sides, as opposed to denouncing Chinese expansionism and aggression, unequivocally. While certain military orders with Delhi were indeed signed and expedited - the same made great transactional and commercial sense to the American defence sector. This is something that the already cornered Ukrainian President Zelensky must be fearing as President-elect Donald Trump sheepishly talks about yet another 'deal' to supposedly end the Russia-Ukraine war. History is instructive of the consequences that await whenever similar 'deals' (read, abandonment) are made by a Superpower, be it the Americans or most recently, the Russians in Syria. Reveling on the latest situation in Syria, Donald Trump tweeted, "Assad is gone. He has fled his country."

His protector, Russia...led by Vladimir Putin, was not interested in protecting him any longer" - while it is true, it has been no different for the US, throughout history. Trump too has the blood of letting down Afghanistan on his hands.

(The writer, a military veteran, is a former Lt Governor of Andaman & Nicobar Islands and Puducherry. The views expressed are personal)

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

WEST ASIA IN TURMOIL

Madam — This refers to the editorial on the developments in Syria (December 9). In West Asia, mostly countries are dominated by Muslims, the people have hardly anything to feel elated about. The hate against the subjects of the same religion is dominating the scene in most of the countries there. Each group is in constant war against the other not for economic benefits but for an upper hand over the other group. In the process the struggling groups have taken the path of terrorism forgetting that the one who wins is not the permanent winner and victories are purely ephemeral.

In Syria also the number of such groups divided by sub-divisions of the same religion, culture, etc., is too many, and this makes it clear that whoever has won now is only for a temporary period, as the deprived groups will always be waiting to take revenge and capture power. In this entire game, the real beneficiaries are the developed nations whose main plank of economy is weapon trade. Selling weapons to every terrorist and warring group is a flourishing trade. Therefore, either of the groups is provoked, promoted, and equipped with enough weapons and the fire is kept alive. In the case of Syria, though Assad has fled the country, bowing to the rebels, the civil war among the groups will continue to be there. But all the groups call it a jihad meaning I am killing you to satisfy the same God whom we both worship piously. Terrorism knows no economy, no logic, no rationality, and no ideology, and it is simply a mental affair capable of destroying anything and nothing constructive.

A G Rajmohan | Anantapur

AUSTRALIA DEFEATS INDIA

Madam — Indian cricket is not in the pink of health and the second test at Adelaide was a highly disappointing one for the fans by this indigestible defeat. The scores of 180 and 175 in the first and second innings, respectively, by Indian batters were a little more than 19 runs behind the chase for the Aussies in the second innings, winning this

World Meditation Day declared



Meditation is a timeless element that connects the soul's depth, offering humanity a path to mental peace, physical health, and spiritual growth. Recognising December 21 as World Meditation Day honours this ancient practice and symbolises global recognition of India's cultural heritage. In modern life, med-

itation has evolved as a science for holistic development, offering hope to those grappling with stress and spiritual unrest.

The winter solstice, marking the start of Uttarayan in Indian tradition, is especially sacred for meditation, as the flow of energy in nature fosters spiritual awakening. Amid personal, social, and economic challenges, meditation offers mental stability, reduces stress, and enhances concentration while alleviating disorders like anxiety and depression. Its benefits extend to physical health, stabilising blood pressure, heart rate, and boosting immunity. World Meditation Day, endorsed by the UN, reflects India's cultural strength and influence.

R K Jain | Barwani

test by 10 wickets. The coach, Gautam Gambhir, has got no time to spare except to bring in fresh changes to boost the morale of the team, which is certainly too low at the moment. The colour of the ball shouldn't make them blind by coming out with lame excuses for their grand failure. Skipper Rohit Sharma, by batting lower down in this test, has signalled his poor form. Except for N K Reddy, the other batters took a stroll to the wicket by spending more time at the pavilion.

Why did they drop Washington Sundar? He has no clue. It's not good for Indian old horses to rest on old laurels to continue their guest appearances in the team. While going by retaining them despite single-digit scores on the board creates a serious doubt about whether they have been retained to promote their commercials in their ongoing contract, The selection policy needs more transparency, and there shouldn't be format-based selections. The head coach must look for consistent performers by taking into account players like 'Head' to be in our team rather than overlooking young talents at this crucial phase of Indian

cricket. With 1 win each, the remaining tests will be the test of time for the future of Indian cricket.

A P Thiruvadi | Chennai

MORE SCHOOLS FOR RURAL AREAS

Madam — PM Modi's Saturday-X post, stating the Cabinet decision to open the 85 new Kendriya Vidyalayas and 28 Navodaya Vidyalayas across the country and make accessible school education maximal, is a top-notch contribution. From the vantage point of the present, it seems that, ostensibly, rural students are still under scrutiny over facilities as compared to urban. There are far fewer schools, poorly qualified teachers, and miserable schools, grinding the little students' study zeal and future immeasurably. The government must consolidate the correlation of urban development with rural. Pull up its socks to upgrade the situation of being more adept.

Jakir Hussain | Kanpur

Send your feedback to: letterstopioneer@gmail.com

Be receptive to contrary point of view!

As social beings, our lives are deeply intertwined with communication, but the same can often become a source of conflict

We are social beings. Communication with others is as integral to us as breathing. We often find conflicting conversations blowing out of proportion, sometimes leading to even a break in relationships. Unpleasantness can be avoided if we are mindful of others. We had lived in bungalows in well-planned colonies for a better part of our lives.

It was easy to be more social in such surroundings when we met only on social occasions. We, and more like us, have moved to condominium complexes only over the past few years. Private spaces are diminishing as neighbours fall over each other, literally and figuratively. This is a new life that we are still adjusting to. I noticed something different about a neighbour recently as we gathered for a meeting. We indulged in some idle banter before the start of serious business. It was a light-hearted conversation, over which we could smile or chuckle. Or so I thought, till I received his call the next day. I got the message loud and clear that he was upset over



the reference to his receding hairline. I apologised profusely for the faux pas. He does not seem to have forgiven me and has stopped greeting me when we cross each other during walks. He is the same person who does not think twice before breaking into a sarcastic verse on the community WhatsApp group, without considering the hurt he might cause to the intended victim. We have regular meetings with the governing body of our welfare association.

There are arguments galore on any subject, which would not be such a bad thing, and may sometimes even be considered as a humorous interlude in an otherwise charged environment, were it not

for the seriousness with which the adversaries try to push their viewpoint to the exclusion of even listening to the other's perspective.

One morning, one of the members told me that it was good that he was now a part of the management body, otherwise he would have vehemently opposed some of the proposals. I could not fathom the logic. A wrong could not have been right only by his being inside the team. In yet another instance recently, two ladies insisted that they were right in their respective contentions.

As the arguments went back and forth, I could see the gradual stubborn look on the faces of both, an indication that they were no longer listening to each other. As an independent observer, I realized that both were talking the same, albeit in different words.

They were not taking the time to pause and reflect before responding. There is one more incident that I may not forget easily. I felt aggrieved enough to write to the promoter of our condominium complex about the

supposed transgressions of a neighbour in handling the community affairs. The latter was still working as an employee with the builder. I was upset and did not deem it fit to consider the latter's point of view or the adverse impact that it might have on his professional prospects. I apologised to him in later years. He has moved on and continues to accord me respect. However, I could have avoided the unpleasantness had I taken the time to talk to him about my grievances. It would be good for everyone to be more respectful and less impulsive in an argument.

If only we could follow the words of Chinese philosopher Zhuangzi, "We cling to our own point of view, as though everything depended on it. Yet our opinions have no permanence; like autumn and winter, they gradually pass away."

(The writer is an author, speaker, coach, arbitrator and strategy consultant. He conducts workshops on creative writing for young adults and corporate executives. The views expressed are personal)




SANJAY CHANDRA

FIRST COLUMN

BRAIN ROT IN THE DIGITAL AGE


There is alarming cognitive decline linked to overindulgence in mindless digital content



SAKSHI SETHI

In a world saturated with endless entertainment, constant notifications and superficial distractions, the human brain faces unprecedented challenges. The term brain rot refers to the perceived decline in cognitive abilities or intellectual engagement due to excessive consumption of mindless or unproductive content. While it is colloquial and not a clinical diagnosis, it describes mental fog, reduced attention span and diminished problem-solving abilities often linked to prolonged screen time or low-value content. Studies suggest that heavy screen usage can correlate with reduced grey matter in the brain, which may impair critical thinking and memory, particularly among younger individuals. It also contributes to mental health issues like anxiety and depression, driven by constant comparisons and exposure to idealised online content. The rise of social media, streaming platforms and short-form content has revolutionised how we consume information and entertainment.

While these platforms offer unprecedented access to global knowledge, they also foster habits of passive consumption. Endless scrolling and binge-watching also lead to mental fatigue and reduced attention spans, making it harder for individuals to engage with more complex ideas or tasks. Brain rot can also stem from a lack of intellectual stimulation. Activities that challenge the brain such as reading, problem-solving, or engaging in creative pursuits are often sidelined in favour of easier, low-effort distractions. Over time, this neglect can lead to a decline in critical thinking, memory retention and problem-solving skills.



The modern lifestyle, characterised by high levels of stress and constant multitasking, can contribute to cognitive decline. It is often said that chronic stress impairs brain function, particularly in areas responsible for memory and learning which creates a vicious cycle where individuals turn to mindless activities to escape stress, further exacerbating mental stagnation. Moreover, a sedentary lifestyle, coupled with a diet lacking in nutrients essential for brain function, can also lead to cognitive decline. In maintaining mental clarity and overall brain health, physical exercise and a balanced diet play crucial roles.

The effects of brain rot are far-reaching and can manifest in various aspects of life. A lack of focus and motivation often results in decreased efficiency and the inability to complete tasks effectively. Overindulgence in passive entertainment stifles the ability to think creatively or generate original ideas. The overuse of escapist media can lead to a disconnect from real-world emotions and experiences, fostering feelings of emptiness or dissatisfaction. Excessive reliance on digital communication can impair interpersonal relationships and the ability to engage in meaningful, face-to-face interactions.

Addressing brain rot requires a multifaceted approach that emphasises mindfulness, discipline and a commitment to personal growth. Setting boundaries for screen time and being intentional about the type of content consumed can help reduce the effects of brain rot. By choosing educational or thought-provoking material over passive entertainment the mind can be stimulated; by prioritising physical health such as regular physical exercise, a balanced diet and setting goals for personal and intellectual growth learning can help foster mental resilience and creativity. They will also help reduce stress and combat mental inertia.

(The writer is an educator; views are personal)

Addressing Hindu persecution in Bangladesh

India must take decisive action to safeguard the persecuted and assert its role as a defender of minority rights, cultural identity and regional stability



PRASHANT TEWARI



The escalating persecution of Hindu minorities in Bangladesh cloaked under the guise of political shifts and regime change, underscores an alarming resurgence of communal violence. With reports of systematic targeting and atrocities emerging over months, the role of the current regime, reportedly influenced by Jamaat-e-Islami, demands scrutiny. India, as the world's largest Hindu-majority nation and a protector of minority rights, cannot afford to stand as a passive observer. Instead, it must respond with decisive and proactive measures to safeguard not only the Hindu minority in Bangladesh but also its own cultural and historical ethos. Reports of widespread violence against Hindus in Bangladesh reveal a pattern of calculated aggression. From desecration of temples and destruction of property to orchestrated violence, these acts are not isolated incidents but part of a broader, systematic campaign. The roots of this antagonism can be traced back to the Great Bengal Partition of 1905 when radical elements sought to establish an Islamic dominion in the region. Although temporarily disrupted by Bangladesh's liberation in 1971, the vision of Darul-ul-Islam—a dominion governed by Islamic law—has been rekindled.

Under the current regime, these historical grievances have been weaponised to erode Hindu culture and population. What makes the situation more alarming is the reported nexus between the Bangladeshi government, Pakistan's ISI, radical jihadi groups, and influential ideologues like Jamaat-e-Islami. These forces seek united in their goal of reshaping Bangladesh's demographic and cultural landscape to align with extremist ideologies.

Mohammad Yunus and the Shadow of Global Influence

Central to this crisis is the controversial figure of Mohammad Yunus, a Nobel laureate who reportedly plays a significant role in the regime's ideological alignment. While his global reputation as a microfinance pioneer lends him an aura of credibility, his alleged affiliations with anti-Hindu policies and his ties with external powers, including China and certain factions in the United States, raise concerns. These alignments have not only emboldened the regime but have also enabled it to criticise India under the pretext of democracy and human rights violations. This geopolitical manipulation, leveraging both soft power and hard alliances, directly challenges India's sovereignty and its role as a regional stabiliser. India must counter these narratives with truth and assert its position as a defender of minority rights. The current crisis mirrors the challenges faced by India in 1971. The liberation of Bangladesh under Indira Gandhi was driven by humanitarian and strategic imperatives—protecting millions of refugees and dismantling a regime that perpetuated genocide. Today, the targeting of Hindus in Bangladesh represents a similar humanitarian catastrophe and a strategic threat. India, home to the largest Hindu population in the world, bears a unique responsibility to safeguard its diaspora and kin. The Narendra Modi government has a historic opportunity to emulate the bold decisions of 1971, reaffirming India's role as a protector of justice and a regional powerhouse.

A Strategic Path Forward

India's response to the crisis must be multifaceted, encompassing aggression, diplomacy, and strategic recalibration. India's security apparatus must transcend reactive measures. By identifying and dismantling rogue elements within Bangladesh that orchestrate attacks on minorities, India can send a strong message. Targeted strikes, similar to Israel's precise

tation as a microfinance pioneer lends him an aura of credibility, his alleged affiliations with anti-Hindu policies and his ties with external powers, including China and certain factions in the United States, raise concerns. These alignments have not only emboldened the regime but have also enabled it to criticise India under the pretext of democracy and human rights violations. This geopolitical manipulation, leveraging both soft power and hard alliances, directly challenges India's sovereignty and its role as a regional stabiliser. India must counter these narratives with truth and assert its position as a defender of minority rights. The current crisis mirrors the challenges faced by India in 1971. The liberation of Bangladesh under Indira Gandhi was driven by humanitarian and strategic imperatives—protecting millions of refugees and dismantling a regime that perpetuated genocide. Today, the targeting of Hindus in Bangladesh represents a similar humanitarian catastrophe and a strategic threat. India, home to the largest Hindu population in the world, bears a unique responsibility to safeguard its diaspora and kin. The Narendra Modi government has a historic opportunity to emulate the bold decisions of 1971, reaffirming India's role as a protector of justice and a regional powerhouse.

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India's response to the crisis must be multifaceted, encompassing aggression, diplomacy, and strategic recalibration. India's security apparatus must transcend reactive measures. By identifying and dismantling rogue elements within Bangladesh that orchestrate attacks on minorities, India can send a strong message. Targeted strikes, similar to Israel's precise

tion operations, could serve as a deterrent and emphasise India's commitment to protecting its Hindu diaspora. Bangladesh's economic reliance on India provides a powerful tool. By imposing strategic trade sanctions and mobilising international opinion, India can isolate the current regime, pressuring it to reconsider its policies. Efforts must also focus on highlighting the human rights abuses faced by minorities in Bangladesh, garnering global support for the cause. Long-term stability in Bangladesh hinges on a government that respects minority rights and values democratic principles. India must support the emergence of a favourable and inclusive regime that can counter extremist ideologies. This approach, while controversial, aligns with India's strategic and humanitarian interests. A bolder proposition involves addressing the demographic realities of 1971 when Hindus comprised around 21 per cent of Bangladesh's population. Securing territories proportional to this demographic could provide a haven for minorities while addressing historical injustices. Such a solution would echo the decisive territorial realignments of 1947 and 1971, albeit adapted to contemporary challenges. The Hindu community worldwide must unite against these atrocities. India, with its population of over one billion Hindus, should lead by example, adopting a robust stance to counter persecution. Strengthened solidarity, coupled with decisive government action, can set a precedent for minority protection globally.

Rebuilding Regional Stability

The crisis also necessitates a reevaluation of India's relationship with Bangladesh. Despite India's pivotal role in Bangladesh's liberation, successive regimes have displayed hostility and indifference. This lack of gratitude underscores the need for a recalibration of India's foreign policy toward its neighbour. Through a combination of economic, social, diplomatic, and military strategies, India must assert its dominance in the region. The message should be unequivocal: any violence against Hindus or hostile actions will be met with resolute action. Israel's unwavering commitment to its sovereignty and people offers valuable lessons for India. Despite being a small nation, Israel has consistently demonstrated the effectiveness of decisive measures in safeguarding its citizens. India, with its vast resources and geopolitical influence, must adopt similar strategies to protect its minorities and assert its regional leadership.

A Turning Point for India

The Bangladesh crisis represents more than a regional issue; it is a defining moment for India's foreign policy and its identity as a nation. By taking bold and proactive measures, the Narendra Modi government can reaffirm India's role as a defender of justice and humanity. Protecting Hindus in Bangladesh is not just about addressing a humanitarian crisis—it is about asserting India's sovereignty, preserving its cultural identity, and ensuring regional stability. Instead of hoping for UNHRC intervention, the Indian government must rise to the occasion, transforming the crisis into an opportunity to redefine India's role in South Asia. With decisive action, India can prevent history from repeating itself, ensuring that justice prevails and that the legacy of protecting minorities endures.

(The writer is prominent columnist and Public Policy Expert; views expressed are personal)

The imperative of continuous learning in India's AI-driven future

The rapid growth of AI, has intensified the demand for skilled professionals. Yet, a stark talent gap threatens this progress



SUMIT SHUKLA

Technology has become an integral part of our daily lives and work, making continuous learning essential to stay relevant. The rapid adoption of automation and advanced digital technologies, such as artificial intelligence (AI), is not just transforming industries but also reshaping the skills employers expect from their workforce. By 2027, it is projected that 80 per cent of engineering roles will require employees to undergo training and development to meet the changing demands brought about by AI advancements, according to Gartner.

In India, the demand for skilled professionals in technology-driven fields, especially AI, is growing significantly. Reports by BCG and NASSCOM indicate that the AI market in the country could grow to \$17 billion by 2027, with an annual growth rate of 25–35 per cent. However, this growth is accompanied by a stark shortage of experts in advanced technologies. NASSCOM estimates that over a million skilled engineers specialising in AI and related technologies will be needed in the coming years. Alarming, the talent gap could rise from 25 per cent to nearly 30 per cent by 2028, emphasising the critical need for skill development among both new graduates and experienced professionals.

One significant challenge is the disconnect between formal education and the practical skills required in the job market. Every year, approximately 1.5 million engineering graduates enter the workforce in India, yet only a fraction secure jobs aligned with their field of study. This mismatch is not due to a lack of opportunities but stems from the gap between the theoretical knowledge imparted in academic institutions and the hands-on skills sought by employers. Beyond technical expertise, companies now prioritise candidates with interpersonal skills and emotional intelligence, essential for thriving in collaborative and dynamic work environments.

The India Skills Report 2024 highlights this concern, noting that while some states, such as Telangana, have made strides in job preparedness among the 18 to 21 age group, critical skill gaps persist. For roles reliant on AI and emerging technologies, the gap ranges from 60 per cent to 73 per cent. These statistics underscore the urgent need for educational institutions to revamp their curricula to better align with industry demands.

Updating academic programmes is vital to bridging this gap. Universities and colleges must incorporate industry trends and practical learning experiences into their courses. Today's workforce needs to think critically across disciplines and understand the broader implications of technology on economic, social, and cultural contexts. Flexible and continuous education plays a pivotal role in closing the divide between academic knowledge and the realities of the job market. Digital learning platforms offer a promising solution in this context. With over 50 per cent of Indians actively using the internet, online education provides accessible opportunities to acquire new skills. Edtech platforms specialising in skill enhancement allow individuals to enroll in tailored courses and programmes, preparing them for rapidly evolving job landscapes.

The benefits of continuous learning extend beyond career advancement. Employees who are adaptable and committed to enhancing their knowledge contribute to organisational innovation and help businesses navigate shifting market dynamics. For instance, as AI becomes more integrated across industries, the demand for experts in these technologies will continue to rise.

Forward-thinking companies are already investing in employee training programs to stay competitive and ensure their teams are equipped to handle emerging challenges. Despite these efforts, many traditional educational institutions struggle to meet industry needs. Relying heavily on lecture-based teaching, these institutions often focus on theoretical knowledge at the expense of practical skills. Students have limited access to industry-standard equipment or opportunities for hands-on problem-solving, leaving them ill-prepared for the workforce. Integrating real-world applications into academic learning bridges the gap between theoretical instruction and practical expertise, ensuring graduates are ready to meet employer expectations.

Upskilling is not just about addressing current deficiencies—it involves cultivating a mindset of continuous improvement. In a world where industries evolve rapidly and the shelf life of skills is shrinking, professionals must adapt to new technologies and methodologies quickly. Skills once considered indispensable can become obsolete within a few years, making the ability to learn and relearn critical for success in today's professional environment. For individuals and organisations alike, embracing continuous education is a strategic move to navigate the present and excel in the future.

(The writer is CEO at Scholars Merit, views are personal)

Fadnavis wins trust vote in Maha Assembly

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ MUMBAI

Chief Minister Devendra Fadnavis Mahayuti led Mahayuti alliance government in Maharashtra comfortably won a confidence vote in the State assembly on Monday. The trust motion, tabled by Shiv Sena MLA Uday Samant and others, was passed by a voice vote on the last day of the three-day special assembly session.

Speaker Rahul Narwekar, elected unopposed for a second straight term earlier in the day, announced that the trust motion has been approved by the newly-constituted House. The BJP-Shiv Sena-NCP 'Mahayuti' coalition has a commanding majority of 230 seats in the 288-member assembly, where the majority mark is 145. "The confidence motion has been passed with a majority," Narwekar said. Fadnavis was sworn-in as the chief minister for a third time on December

5 at a grand ceremony in Mumbai's Azad Maidan. Eknath Shinde (Shiv Sena) and Ajit Pawar (NCP) took oath as deputy CMs at the ceremony attended by Prime Minister Narendra Modi. The 15th assembly officially began its tenure on December 7, two weeks the poll results were announced. With the BJP-led alliance enjoying a super majority in the lower House, the floor test was a mere formality. Shiv Sena leader and former minister Samant, BJP legislator Sanjay Kute, former minister Dilip Walse Patil (NCP), and independent MLA Ravi Rana tabled the proposal for a confidence motion in the lower House. With Narwekar's appointment as Speaker, the ruling coalition now enjoys the support of 229 MLAs, including small parties and independent MLAs. Narwekar (47), the BJP MLA from Mumbai's Colaba seat and a lawyer by training, was elected unopposed as the



Speaker of the 15th assembly. Opposition alliance Maha Vikas Aghadi (MVA), which has less than 50 MLAs, did not put up a candidate. Fadnavis, in his congratulatory speech, highlighted that Narwekar is only the second member of the lower House to be re-elected to the post since the state's formation in 1960. "Balasaheb Bharde was the only Speaker of the legislative assembly to be re-elected to the post twice since 1960 when Maharashtra was formed. After Bharde, Narwekar is the second member of the assembly to receive the honour," the chief

minister said. He pointed out that Kundanmal Firodia was the first Speaker of the House to be reappointed, but it was during the time of Bombay state, and Sayaji L. Silam was elected to the post before the formation of Maharashtra, and he was re-elected after the state came into existence. During his first tenure, Narwekar had ruled that the party led by Eknath Shinde was the "real" Shiv Sena after a split in the Uddhav Thackeray-led party in 2022. He also held that the faction under Ajit Pawar was the "real" Nationalist Congress Party (NCP), which was founded by Sharad Pawar. Making a cursory reference to the verdict on the disputes involving the Shiv Sena and NCP, Fadnavis said, "During his first tenure as Speaker, Narwekar underwent some excruciating tests of his mettle, such as the decisions related to recognising the parties in the House. It was his 'agnipariksha' (trial by fire). His

legal acumen proved invaluable during several debates in the chamber. In the evening, Governor C P Radhakrishnan addressed a joint sitting of the legislature where he said Maharashtra has emerged as the No.1 destination among all states in attracting foreign direct investment (FDI). Maharashtra contributes more than 14 per cent to the country's GDP, he said.

The government has set a very ambitious target of making Maharashtra the first state to achieve the target of becoming a USD one trillion economy by the year 2027-28, the Governor emphasised. The state government has announced a policy of giving anchor industry status to mega projects and hi-tech manufacturing sector like semiconductors, electric vehicles, aerospace and defence, chemicals and polymers, lithium ion batteries, steel and other products, the Governor noted.

CM Hemant Soren takes oath as member of Jharkhand Assembly

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ RANCHI



Jharkhand Chief Minister Hemant Soren on Monday took oath as a member of the Jharkhand Assembly on the first day of the four-day session of the House. Parliamentary Affairs Minister Radhakrishna Kishore, Revenue and Land Reforms Minister Deepak Birua and Labour Minister Sanjay Prasad Yadav were among the ministers in the Hemant Soren cabinet who also took oath as members of the assembly. The CM and the ministers were among 80 elected representatives who were administered the oath as MLAs by the assembly's pro-tem Speaker Stephen Marandi soon after the proceedings of the House began at 11 am. The House was adjourned till 11 am on Tuesday after the oath-taking ceremony. "All MLAs and ministers took oath today. We will move for

next proceedings tomorrow," the CM later told reporters. The Speaker's election is scheduled to be held on Tuesday, an assembly official said. Kishore said Nala MLA Rabindra Nath Mahato is likely to be elected as Speaker of the House unopposed as all members, including those of the BJP, have given their consent for it. The four-day session will conclude on December 12. Besides Speaker's election, governor's address, presentation of the second supplementary bud-

get and debate on the governor's speech are also scheduled during the session, the official said. Hemant Soren took oath as the 14th chief minister of Jharkhand in a grand ceremony here on November 28, while 11 MLAs took oath as state ministers on December 5. The JMM-led alliance on November 23 stormed to power in Jharkhand for the second time in a row, securing 56 seats in the 81-member assembly, while the BJP-headed NDA

Assam CM Himanta effects major reshuffle of portfolios

PNS ■ GUWAHATI

A major reshuffle of portfolios was effected by Assam Chief Minister Himanta Biswa Sarma on Monday, and four newly inducted ministers were assigned their departments. Sarma will hold Home, Public Works Building and National Highways, Public Works Roads, and Medical Education and Research departments, with some portfolios assigned to other ministers. He will also be in charge of Personnel and any other department not assigned to other ministers, an official notification said. Among the new ministers, Prasanta Phukan has been allotted Power and Skill, Employment and Entrepreneurship departments, and will assist the chief minister in the Medical Education and Research department. Kaushik Rai will hold Food, Public Distribution and Consumer Affairs, Mines and Minerals, and the newly created Barak Valley Development departments. Departments of Animal Husbandry and Veterinary, and Fishery have been allocated to Krishnendu Paul, who will also assist the



CM in Public Works Roads department, the notification signed by Chief Secretary Ravi Kota said. Rupesh Gowala has been given Labour Welfare and Tea Tribes and Adivasi Welfare departments, besides assisting the CM in the Home department. Ajanta Neog retained both her departments - Finance and Women and Child Development. The Health and Family Welfare department was assigned to Ashok Singhal, who retained

the Irrigation department. Atul Bora has been given charge of the Excise department, besides his existing portfolios of Agriculture, Border Protection and Development, Horticulture and Implementation of Assam Accord. Among the departments allocated anew are Tourism department to Ranjeet Kumar Dass, Revenue and Disaster Management to Keshab Mahanta, Parliamentary Affairs and Housing and Urban Affairs to Jayanta Malla Baruah.

BJP demands CBI probe into settlement of Rohingyas in Jammu

MOHIT KANDHARI ■ JAMMU

The Jammu and Kashmir Unit of the Bharatiya Janta Party (BJP) Monday demanded a thorough CBI probe to identify all those responsible for rehabilitating illegal immigrants from Myanmar and Bangladesh in Jammu to change the demography of the region. For the last couple of days, several Rohingya settlements in and around Jammu have come on the radar of security agencies following which a fresh security audit was launched to verify their records. Rough estimates indicated over 6500 Rohingyas are camping across different localities in and around Jammu. In the ongoing drive, the intelligence agencies stumbled upon credible evidence linking the involvement of Kashmir-based Non-Government organizations (NGOs) in rehabilitating these illegal immigrants in the close vicinity of several vital security installations. Taking serious note of these developments, the UT administration launched a massive crackdown against some of the landlords who have rented out accommodation and vacant plots to these illegal immigrants and booked them



as per the law of the land. The UT administration also decided to disconnect the power and water supply to these plots and properties to evict them at the earliest. Taking note of these crucial developments, Chief Spokesman of the Bharatiya Janta Party Sunil Sethi along with senior party leaders Monday urged Lieutenant Governor Manoj Sinha to order a CBI inquiry to investigate and identify persons involved in bringing in and facilitating the settlement of Rohingyas and Bangladeshi in Jammu. Sethi said that such persons/elements should be booked for anti-national

activities and punished. The people should know as to who have been showing sympathy with the illegally settled foreign nationals and advocating their cases in the court of law. Earlier, Jai Shakti Minister Javed Ahmed Rana, a member of the council of ministers led by Omar Abdullah issued verbal instructions to the concerned authorities not to deprive them of essential water and power supply till the government of India takes a call on their issue. Referring to the recent diktat issued by the National Conference, Minister Sunil Sethi questioned him to explain if they

respect and follow the law of the country or they are above the law and have liberty to go to any extent to appease the illegal settlers. By siding with the Rohingyas and Bangladeshi, the NC is also playing with the future of the unemployed youth of the UT, as the Rohingyas and Bangladeshi nationals have engaged themselves in different jobs here. "It is a matter of security concern that Rohingyas and Bangladeshi have settled in J&K UT, particularly in Jammu for years now, which is a few kilometers away from Pakistan. The BJP has been repeatedly raising questions on their enter-

ing Indian territory illegally, traveling thousands of kilometers, crossing half a dozen states and settling in Jammu, said Sunil Sethi. Sethi said that anyone wishing to settle in a country can apply through proper procedure and may get permission to come and settle but in case of these Rohingyas and Bangladeshi, they have crossed over illegally, and traveled so long with the motive of settling in Jammu. They are illegal and a threat to security as well. Any yardstick cannot justify their settlement near the border. The only solution is their immediate deportation, he said.

Hot words singe Winter Session

From page 1

Union Minister Dharmendra Pradhan termed Rahul as a 'comedy king' trying to be relevant after every electoral loss while Rajya Sabha Chairman Jagdeep Dhankar said anyone within or outside India cannot be allowed to "sacrilege our unity, integrity and sovereignty". Dhankar held a meeting with leaders of both sides and said its purpose was to ensure that the House runs smoothly. Leaders of some INDIA Bloc parties on Monday protested in Parliament complex over the Adani row, with Rahul Gandhi conducting a mock 'interview' over the issue with Congress members wearing masks of Prime Minister Narendra Modi and industrialist Gautam Adani. The BJP has claimed that Soros and some United States-based agencies,

investigative media platform Organised Crime and Corruption Reporting Project (OCCRP), and Rahul Gandhi occupy three sides of a "dangerous" triangle trying to destabilise India and stoke public disaffection for a regime change. The US has, however, rejected the BJP's allegations that organisations funded by the US State Department and elements in the American "deep state" were behind attempts to destabilise India. A spokesperson at the US embassy described the allegations as "disappointing" and asserted that the US government has been a champion of media freedom around the world. Leader of the Upper House JP Nadda said BJP members were agitated over an issue that involved Congress leaders and wanted a discussion. Nadda alleged the

FDL-AP sees Jammu and Kashmir as a "separate entity" and gets financial support from the Rajiv Gandhi Foundation. "This maligns India's image and raises concern about national security," he said, claiming that people are concerned about the manner in which the Congress is siding with such forces. As Dhankhar sought to know in the upper house why the ruling party members were protesting, few BJP MPs alleged that the top Congress leadership has links with Soros and demanded that the issue be discussed in the House as it is connected to national security. Leader of the Opposition in RS Mallikarjun Kharge and other MPs asked how the chairman was allowing the ruling party members to raise the issue when he had rejected their notices in this regard.

Congress members were heard saying that they had submitted notices to move a privilege motion against a BJP member for attempts to link Rahul Gandhi and former Congress chief Sonia Gandhi with US-based billionaire George Soros-backed outfits allegedly involved in anti-India activities. Opposition members joined by INDIA Bloc members SP and RJD raised slogans like "Modi Sarkar down down", "Modi Sarkar shame shame" and "we want justice". TMC members however remained confined to their seats. Dismissing the BJP's allegations Congress said the real conspiracy unravelling during the Parliament's Winter session is that the government would even put India's ties with another country at stake just to save Gautam Adani.

INDIA Bloc to seek VP's removal

From page 1

"We cannot afford to overlook such kind of evil designs", the Chairman said, adding that the 1.4 billion Indians are "extremely concerned". Earlier in the day, amid disruption in Rajya Sabha, he urged members to adhere to discipline and decorum. According to Article 67(b) of the Constitution, "Vice-President may be removed from his office by a resolution of the Council of States (Rajya Sabha) passed by a majority of all the then members of the Council and agreed to by the House of the People; but no resolution for the purpose of this clause shall be moved unless at least fourteen days' notice has been given of the intention to move the resolution."

Hoax bomb threats target city schools again

From page 1

Principal of GD Goenka Paschim Vihar Inderjit Kaur Batra said, "We informed parents immediately and evacuated the school promptly to ensure everyone's safety." Emergency teams, including bomb squads, police and fire officials, combed through the premises. Authorities later confirmed that no suspicious items were found. "Around 40 schools in Delhi received a bomb threat mail Monday morning with the sender demanding USD 30,000, prompting a multi-agency search of the premises but "nothing suspicious was found", a police official said. Most schools that received the threat suspended classes and sent students back home. Officials said the premises of the schools that received the

threat were thoroughly checked and nothing suspicious was found. Deputy Commissioner of Police (Southwest) Surendra Choudhary said the e-mail was received by four schools located within his district as well. "Soon after getting the information, we conducted a thorough check of the school premises. Nothing suspicious was found. I request parents to not panic." A Delhi Fire Services (DFS) official said they received the first alerts about the bomb threats from G D Goenka, Paschim Vihar, (6.15 am), and DPS RK Puram (7.06 am). He said bomb detection teams, fire officials, local police and dog squads responded immediately and conducted searches at the schools. In a message to parents, Mother Mary's School, Mayur Vihar, said,

"An email was received this morning regarding a bomb threat in school. As such, the students are being dispersed immediately as a precautionary measure. You are requested to kindly collect your wards from your respective bus stops. While taking his daughter back from the school, Harish, one of the parents, said, "I received a message about an emergency from the school. This is the failure of the government as the schools are getting such threats regularly." The Delhi Police Special and Crime Branch have started the probe. In May, more than 200 schools, hospitals and other important government installations in the city received a similar kind of bomb threat but the case is yet to be solved as the mail was sent using Virtual Private Network (VPN).

AAP list reflects anti-incumbency election stress

From page 1

Avadh Ojha, a UPSC coaching teacher and motivational speaker, popularly known as 'Ojha sir', who recently joined the AAP, has been nominated from Patparganj seat, which is held by Sisodia in the current assembly. Sisodia, had secured comfortable victories in 2013 and 2015 but faced a tight contest in 2020. So far, the AAP has announced 31 candidates and dropped 16 sitting MLAs. The party had dropped three sitting MLAs in the first list of candidates released on November 21. AAP which criticised the Congress and the BJP for promoting dynasty politics has given tickets to two MLAs sons. Vikas Bagga and

Punardeep Singh Sawhney (Saby), the sons of two MLAs - Krishna Nagar's S K Bagga and Chandini Chowk's Parlad Singh Sawhney - have found a place in the AAP list. The AAP has dropped Narela MLA Sharad Chauhan, Timarpur MLA Dilip Pandey, Adarsh Nagar MLA Pawan Kumar Sharma, Mundka MLA Dharampal Lakra, Chandini Chowk MLA Parhlad Singh Shawney, Janakpuri MLA Rajesh Rishi, Bijwasan MLA Bhupender Singh Joon, Palam MLA Bhawna Gaur, Jungpura MLA Praveen Kumar, Deoli MLA Prakash Jwaral, Trilokpuri MLA Rohit Kumar, Krishna Nagar MLA SK Bagga, Shahdara MLA Ram Niwas Goel, Mustafabad MLA Adil Ahmad Khan. Goel and

Pandey opted out of the tickets race just before the release of the list. Raaj Kumar Anand who won on the AAP ticket from Patel resigned from the party. The list also includes the names of Jitender Singh Shunty (fielded from Shahdara), and Surinder Pal Singh Bittu (Timarpur), who recently quit the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) to join the AAP. The candidates announced for the Timarpur and Shahdara seats, Surendra Singh Bittu and Jitender Singh Shunty, however, did not come as a surprise as sitting MLAs and senior AAP leaders Dilip Pandey and Ram Niwas Goel had opted out of the race before the list was announced. Shunty replaces sitting AAP MLA and Speaker in the

outgoing Assembly Ram Niwas Goel, while Bittu has been fielded in place of Dilip Pandey, AAP's chief whip in the house. Sharing details, Delhi AAP convener Gopal Rai said, "Dinesh Bhardwaj, a well-known athlete and current councillor, has been chosen to contest from Narela. Mukesh Goel, the current Leader of the House in the Municipal Corporation of Delhi (MCD), will contest from Adarsh Nagar. From Mundka, Jasbir Karala, has been selected as the candidate, while Surender Pal Singh Bittu, a former MLA, will contest from Timarpur." Parvesh Ratn, a social worker and former candidate, has been chosen for Patel Nagar, and Deputy Speaker Rakhi

Birla's name has been finalised for Madipur. Pravin Kumar, a councillor, will contest Janakpuri, while Surendar Bhardwaj, has been chosen for Bijwasan. Social worker Joginder Solanki will contest from Palam. Prem Kumar Chauhan, a current councillor, will contest Deoli, and Anjana Parcha, a former councillor, has been selected for Trilokpuri. Avadh Ojha, an educationist, will contest from Patparganj, while Vikas Bagga, the son of the current MLA, will contest Krishna Nagar. From Gandhi Nagar, Naveen Choudhary (Deepu), a former candidate, has been chosen again. Padmashri Jitender Singh Shunty, a former MLA, will contest Shahdara, and Adil Ahmad Khan, the state

secretary of the party, will contest from Mustafabad. Similarly, from Mangolpuri, Rakesh Jatav Dharamrakshak, from Rohini sitting councillor Pradeep Mittal and from Chandini Chowk, sitting councillor Punardeep Singh Sawhney (Sabby) will contest. Out of the list of 20 candidates, the AAP also declared its candidates on seats where the BJP is in power - Rohini and Gandhi Nagar. From Rohini, the Arvind Kejriwal led party has nominated Pradeep Mittal, and fielded Naveen Choudhary (Deepu) from Gandhi Nagar. The candidates announced for the Timarpur and Shahdara seats, Surendra Singh Bittu and Jitender Singh Shunty, however, did not come as a surprise as sitting

MLAs and senior AAP leaders Dilip Pandey and Ram Niwas Goel had opted out of the race before the list was announced. The AAP released its first list of 11 candidates for the Delhi Assembly polls in November, and named six leaders recently inducted from the BJP and Congress. Taking on X (formerly Twitter), Deputy CM Manish Sisodia thanked Aam Aadmi Party for the responsibility of contesting elections from Jangpura. In the post he wrote, "My heartfelt gratitude to Arvind Kejriwal and Aam Aadmi Party, who showed faith in me and gave me the responsibility of contesting elections from Jangpura. I consider myself a teacher, not a politician. Patparganj was not just an Assembly

constituency for me, but the heart of the education revolution in Delhi." He added, "When Avadh Ojha ji joined the party and there was a demand to field him in the elections, all I could think was that there could be no better seat than Patparganj for a teacher. I am happy to hand over the responsibility of Patparganj to another teacher. Now I am ready to work with everyone in Jangpura to do the same work that I did in Patparganj for education, service and development. For me, politics is not a means to power, but a means to education, honesty and public welfare. From Patparganj to Jangpura, my resolve is firm: to make Delhi even better. Your trust is my strength. Jai Hind!"

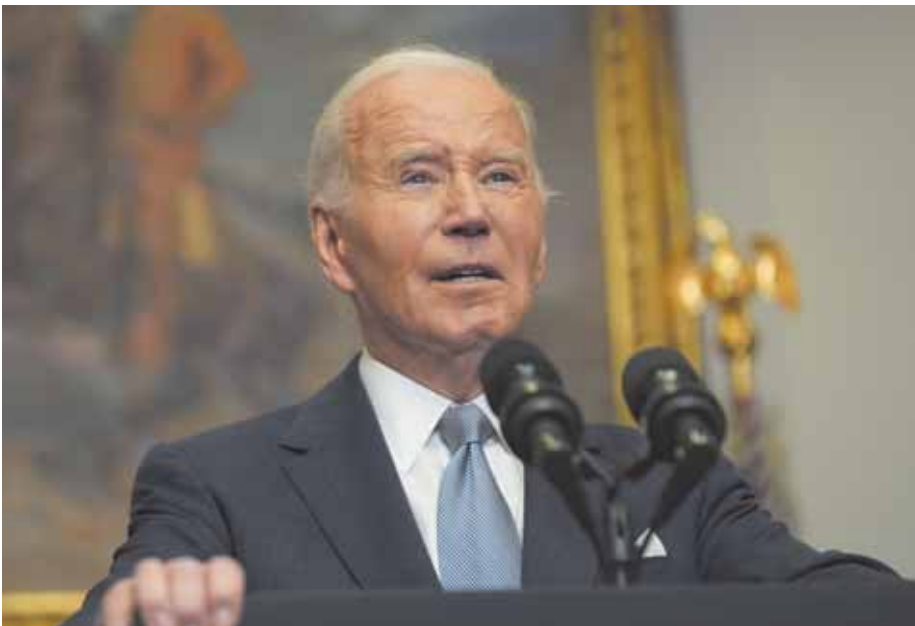
Fall of Assad regime 'historic opportunity for people' of Syria: Biden

PTI ■ WASHINGTON

The fall of the Assad regime that brutalised, tortured and killed thousands of innocent Syrians over the past half a century is a historic opportunity for the people of the country, outgoing US President Joe Biden said on Sunday. Biden spoke at the White House hours after rebel groups took over the country following more than a dozen years of violent civil war and decades of leadership by Bashar Assad and his family. "After 13 years of civil war in Syria and more than half a century of brutal authoritarian rule by Bashar Assad and his father before him, rebel forces have forced Assad to resign his office and flee the country. We're not sure where he is, but there's word that he's in Moscow. At long last, the Assad regime has fallen," Biden said. "This regime brutalised, tortured and killed hundreds of thousands of innocent Syrians. The fall of the regime is a fun-

damental act of justice. It's a moment of historic opportunity for the long-suffering people of Syria to build a better future for their proud country," he said. It is also a moment of risk and uncertainty, Biden said, adding that over the past few weeks, the support of Hezbollah, Iran and Russia to the Assad regime had collapsed. He observed a new opportunity for the people of Syria now. The Syrian opposition that brought down Assad is led by Hayat Tahrir al-Sham, which the US says is a terrorist organisation with links to al-Qaida. However, the group says it has since broken ties with al-Qaida. "Looking ahead, the United States will do the following. First, we'll support Syria's neighbours, including Jordan, Lebanon, Iraq, and Israel, should any threat arise from Syria during this period of transition. I will speak with leaders of the region in the coming days. I had long discussions with all of our people ear-

lier this morning. I'll send senior officials from my administration to the region as well," he said. "Second, we will help ensure stability in eastern Syria, protecting our personnel against any threats, and our mission against ISIS will be maintained, including security of detention facilities, where ISIS fighters are being held as prisoners. We're clear-eyed about the fact that ISIS will try to take advantage of any vacuum to reestablish its capabilities and create a haven. We will not let that happen," he said. "Just today, US forces conducted a dozen precision strikes, airstrikes, within Syria, targeting ISIS camps and operatives. Third, we will engage with all Syrian groups, including within the process led by the United Nations to establish a transition away from the Assad regime towards independent and sovereign Syria, with a new constitution, and a new government that serves all Syrians. And this process will be determined by the Syrian



President Joe Biden speaks about the sudden collapse of the Syrian government under Bashar Assad from the Roosevelt Room at the White House in Washington. AP/PTI

people themselves," Biden said. A day earlier, Trump ruled out any role for the US in Syria. "In

any event, Syria is a mess, but is not our friend and THE UNITED STATES SHOULD

HAVE NOTHING TO DO WITH IT. THIS IS NOT OUR FIGHT. LET IT PLAY OUT.

DO NOT GET INVOLVED!" he wrote on Truth Social. US Secretary of State Tony Blinken said the US would closely monitor developments as they unfold and engage with our partners in the region. "We will support international efforts to hold the Assad regime and its backers accountable for atrocities and abuses perpetrated against the Syrian people, including the use of chemical weapons and the unjust detention of civilians such as Austin Tice," he said. Blinken said the United States strongly supports a peaceful transition of power to an accountable Syrian government through an inclusive Syrian-led process. During this transitional period, the Syrian people have every right to demand the preservation of state institutions, the resumption of key services, and the protection of vulnerable communities, he said. Defence Secretary Lloyd J. Austin in a telephonic conversation with Turkish Defence

Minister Yasar Guler over developments in Syria emphasised the US is closely watching the statements and actions of the various opposition groups in Syria. The two leaders agreed that these groups must take steps to protect civilians, including ethnic and religious minorities, and abide by international humanitarian norms. On Sunday, US Central Command forces conducted dozens of precision airstrikes targeting known ISIS camps and operatives in central Syria. The strikes against the ISIS leaders, operatives, and camps were conducted as part of the ongoing mission to disrupt, degrade, and defeat ISIS to prevent the terrorist group from conducting external operations and to ensure that ISIS does not seek to take advantage of the current situation to reconstitute in central Syria. The operation struck over 75 targets using multiple US Air Force assets, including B-52s, F-15s, and A-10s, the Pentagon said.

Will make it easier for people to come in legally, says Trump

Insists on deporting all illegal immigrants

PTI ■ WASHINGTON

Incoming US President Donald Trump on Sunday said he would go ahead with his plans to deport all illegal immigrants after entering the Oval Office and said at the same time he would make it easier for people to come in, a move that could be helpful to Indians who mostly enter the US legally. "I think you have to do it," Trump told NBC News in an interview when asked if he plans to deport everyone who is here illegally over the next four years. "You have to have, rules, regulations, laws. They came in illegally. People that have been treated very unfairly are the people that have been online for 10 years to come into the country. We are going to make it very easy for people to come

in terms of they have to pass the test. They have to be able to tell you what the Statue of Liberty is. They have to tell you a little bit about our country. They have to love our country," Trump said. "They can't come out of prisons. We don't want people that are in for murder. So, we had 11,000 and 13,000 different estimates, 13,099 murderers released into our country over the last three years. They're walking down the streets. They're walking next to you and your family. They're very dangerous. You don't want those people in this country," he said. "I'm saying this. We have to get the criminals out of our country. We have to get people that were taken out of mental institutions and put them back into their mental institution, no matter what country it is," Trump said, adding that his top

priority on the deportation list is going to be such criminals. "Number one, we're doing criminals and we're going to do them rapidly. We're getting the worst gang probably with MS-13 and the Venezuelan gangs are the worst in the world. They're vicious, violent people," he said. "Is it realistic to deport everyone who's here illegally?" he was asked. "You have no choice. First of all, they're costing us a fortune. But we're starting with the criminals, and we've got to do it. Then we're starting with others, and we're going to see how it goes. Others are other people outside of criminals. We have convicted murderers. We don't mean people that are even on trial. We have people that have murdered numerous people on our streets and in our farms, and we have to get them out of our country," he said.

"The dreamers are going to come later and we have to do something about the dreamers because these are people that have been brought here at a very young age. Many of these are middle-aged people now. They don't even speak the language of their country. And yes, we're going to do something about the dreamers," he said. "I will work with the Democrats on a plan. And if we can come up with a plan. But the Democrats have made it very, very difficult to do anything. Republicans are very open to the dreamers. The dreamers, we're talking many years ago, they were brought into this country. Some of them are no longer young people. In many cases, they have become successful. They have great jobs. We are going to have to do something with them," he said.

AP ■ DAMASCUS

Syria's prime minister said Monday that most Cabinet ministers are still working from offices in Damascus after rebels entered the capital over the weekend and overthrew President Bashar Assad. Streams of refugees crossed in from neighbouring countries, hoping for a more peaceful future. But there were already signs of the difficulties ahead for the rebel alliance now in control of much of the country, which is led by a former senior al-Qaida militant who severed ties with the extremist group years ago and has promised representative government and religious tolerance. Israel said it is carrying out airstrikes on suspected chemical weapons sites and long-range rockets to keep them from falling into the hands of extremists. Israel has also seized a buffer zone inside Syria after Syrian troops withdrew. In a separate development, the Kremlin said Russia has granted political asylum to Assad, a decision taken by President Vladimir Putin. Kremlin spokesman Dmitry Peskov declined to comment on Assad's specific whereabouts and said Putin was not planning to meet with him. In northern Syria, Turkey said allied opposition forces seized the town of Manbij from Kurdish-led forces backed by the United States, a reminder that even after Assad's departure to Russia the country remains split among armed groups that have fought in the past. Damascus was quiet on Monday, with life slowly returning to normal while most shops and public institutions were closed. In public squares, some people were still celebrating. Civilian traffic resumed but there was no public transport, leaving some to hitchhike. Long lines formed in front of bakeries and other food stores. There was little sign of any security presence, and Associated Press reporters saw a few SUVs on the side of a

main boulevard that appeared to have been broken into, with their windows shattered and their doors open. In some areas, small groups of armed men were stationed in the streets. A video circulating online showed a man in military fatigues holding a rifle attempting to reassure residents of the Mezzeh neighbourhood in Damascus that they would not be harmed. "We have nothing against you, neither Alawite, nor Christian, nor Shiite, nor Druze, but everyone must behave well, and no one should try to attack us," the fighter said. **Prime minister says the government is still operational:** Prime Minister Mohammed Ghazi Jalali, who remained in his post after Assad and most of his top officials vanished over the weekend, has sought to project normalcy. "We are working so that the transitional period is quick and smooth," he told Sky News Arabia TV on Monday, saying the security situation had already improved from the day before, when joyful crowds gathered in public squares and celebratory gunfire rang out across the capital. He said the government is

coordinating with the insurgents, and that he is ready to meet rebel leader Ahmad al-Sharaa, formerly known as Abu Mohammed al-Golani, who made a triumphal appearance at a famed Damascus mosque on Sunday. Syrians who only days ago were working at all levels of the bureaucracy in Assad's regime were now flipping to the new reality. At the court of Justice in Damascus, which was stormed by the rebels to free detainees, Judge Khitam Haddad, an aide to the justice minister in the outgoing government, said Sunday that judges were ready to resume work quickly. "We want to give everyone their rights. We don't their rights to be wasted," Haddad told AP outside the courthouse. "We want to build a new Syria and to keep the work but with new methods." Meanwhile, a Syrian opposition war monitor said a top aide to Assad's brother, Maher, was found dead in his office near Damascus. A video that circulated on social media purportedly showed Maj. Gen. Ali Mahmoud covered with blood and with his clothes burned. The Britain-based Syrian

Observatory for Human Rights said it was not clear if he was killed or died by suicide. Maher Assad, whose whereabouts are unknown, led the army's 4th Armored Division, which played a major role in the civil war that erupted in 2011, after a popular uprising against Assad led to a violent crackdown on dissent and the rise of an insurgency. **Turkey says its allies have taken northern town:** Officials in Turkey, which is the main supporter of the Syrian opposition to Assad, say its allies have taken full control of the northern Syrian city of Manbij from a US-supported and Kurdish-led force known as the Syrian Democratic Forces, or SDF. The SDF said a Turkish drone struck in the village of al-Mistriha in eastern Syria, killing 12 civilians, including six children. Turkey views the SDF, which is primarily composed of a Syrian Kurdish militia, as an extension of the banned Kurdistan Workers' Party, or PKK, which has waged a decades-long insurgency in Turkey. The SDF has also been a key ally of the United States in the war against the Islamic State group.



Syrians arrive to cross into Syria from Turkey at the Cilvegözü border gate, near the town of Antakya, southern Turkey. AP/PTI

If we are subsidising Canada, Mexico let them become a state of US: Trump

PTI ■ WASHINGTON

Claiming that the US is subsidising its two neighbours Canada and Mexico to the tune of USD 100 billion and USD 300 billion, respectively, incoming US President Donald Trump on Sunday said that if that is the case then these two countries better be a part of America. Trump, 78, has threatened to impose hefty tariffs on both Canada and Mexico if they don't stop the flow of illegal immigrants into the US through their territories. "We're subsidising Canada to the tune of over USD 100 billion a year. We're subsidising Mexico for almost USD 300 billion. We shouldn't be subsidising. Why are we subsidising

these countries? If we're going to subsidise them, let them become a state (of the US)," Trump told NBC News in an interview, his first on a Sunday talk show after winning the November 5 presidential elections. "We're subsidising Mexico, we're subsidising Canada, and we're subsidising many countries all over the world. All I want to do is have a level, fast, but fair playing field," he asserted. Trump refuted the observations by some American CEOs that tariffs would cost the US and increase the cost of common commodities thus putting a strain on common people. "They cost Americans nothing. They made a great economy for us. They also solve another

problem. If we were going to have problems having to do with wars and having to do with other things, tariffs, I have stopped wars with tariffs by saying, you guys want to fight, it's great, but both of you are going to pay tariffs to the United States at 100 per cent. They have many purposes (for), tariffs if properly used. I don't say you use them like a madman. I say properly used," he said. "But it didn't cost this country anything. It made this country money. We never really got the chance to go all out because we had to fight COVID in the last part. We did it very successfully. When I handed it over to Biden, the stock market was higher than it was just previous to COVID coming in. It was

higher. Tariffs, if properly used, are a very powerful tool, not only economically, but also for getting other things outside of economics," he said. "Are you going to impose these tariffs, or are they a negotiating tactic?" Trump was asked. "Well, I'll give you an example. With Canada, and in particular Mexico, we have millions of people pouring into our country. I spoke with both (the leaders). I spoke with Justin Trudeau. He flew to Mar-a-Lago within... about 15 seconds after the call-in. It was at Mar-a-Lago. We were having dinner, talking about it," Trump said. "I said to the president of Mexico and Justin Trudeau, if it doesn't stop, I'm going to put tariffs on your country at about 25 per cent," Trump insisted.

Collapse of Syria's Assad is a blow to Iran's 'Axis of Resistance'

AP ■ MANAMA (BAHRAIN)

For Iran's theocratic government, it keeps getting worse. Its decades-long strategy of building an "Axis of Resistance" supporting militant groups and proxies around the region is falling apart. First came the crushing Israeli campaign in Gaza triggered by the October 7, 2023, attack on Israel by Iranian-backed Hamas. That war spawned another in Lebanon, where Israel has mauled Iran's most powerful ally, Hezbollah, even as Israel has launched successful airstrikes openly inside of Iran for the first time. And now Iran's longtime stalwart ally and client in Syria, President Bashar Assad, is gone. As dawn broke Sunday, rebel forces completed a lightning offensive by seizing the ancient capital of Damascus and tearing down symbols of more than 50 years of Assad's rule over the Mideast crossroads. Ali Akbar Velayati, a key adviser

to Iran's Supreme Leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei, once called Assad and Syria "the golden ring of the resistance chain in the region." "Without the Syrian government, this chain will break and the resistance against Israel and its supporters will be weakened." That break in the chain is literal. Syria was an important geographical link that allowed Iran to move weapons and other supplies to Hezbollah in Lebanon. Its loss now further weakens Hezbollah, whose powerful arsenal in southern Lebanon had put Iranian influence directly on the border of its nemesis Israel. "Iran's deterrence thinking is really shattered by events in Gaza, by events in Lebanon and definitely by developments in Syria," a senior diplomat from the United Arab Emirates, Anwar Gargash, said at the International Institute for Strategic Studies' Manama Dialogue in Bahrain. Iran still holds the card of its

Thousands of Syrian soldiers cross into Iraq, official says

AP ■ BAGHDAD

More than 4,000 Syrian army soldiers have crossed into Iraq since rebel forces seized Damascus and overthrew the government of Bashar Assad, a militia official in western Iraq said Monday. The official with the Anbar Tribal Mobilisation Forces said that the soldiers had turned over their weapons, ammunition and armoured vehicles and would be housed in a camp. He did not say where the camp was located. Another security official said that the governor of the Syrian province of Hasakeh had come to the border late Sunday night with a convoy of Syrian army soldiers who wanted to cross into Iraq, and they were allowed in via the Qaim crossing. Both officials spoke on condition of anonymity because they were not authorized to speak publicly about the matter.

nuclear programme. Though it denies that intention, it can use the potential for building a weapons capability to cast a shadow of influence in the region. "Iran remains a critical regional player," Gargash said. "We should use this moment to connect and speak about what's

next in my opinion." It's a dramatic reversal in Iran's regional might. Only a few years ago, the Islamic Republic loomed ascendant across the wider Middle East. Its "Axis of Resistance" was at a zenith. Hezbollah in Lebanon stood up against Israel. Assad appeared

to have weathered an Arab Spring uprising-turned-civil war. Iraqi insurgents killed US troops with Iranian-designed roadside bombs. Yemen's Houthi rebels fought a Saudi-led coalition to a stalemate. Syria, at the crossroads, played a vital role. Early in Syria's civil war, when it appeared Assad might be overthrown, Iran and its ally, Hezbollah, rushed fighters to support him — in the name of defending Shiite shrines in Syria. Russia later joined with a scorched earth campaign of airstrikes. The campaign won back territory, even as Syria remained divided into zones of government and insurgent control. But the speed of Assad's collapse the past week showed just how reliant he was on support from Iran and Russia — which at the crucial moment didn't come. "What was surprising was the Syrian's army's failure to counter the offensive, and also the speed of the developments,"

Iranian Foreign Minister Abbas Araghchi told state television late Sunday night. "That was unexpected." Russia remains mired in Ukraine years after launching a full-scale invasion there in 2022. For Iran, international sanctions over its advancing nuclear programme have ground down its economy. For Israel, breaking Iran's regional network has been a major goal, though it is wary over jihadi fighters among the insurgents who toppled Assad. Israel on Sunday moved troops into a demilitarised buffer zone with Syria by the Israel-held Golan Heights in what it called a temporary security measure. Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu called Assad's fall a "historic day," saying it was "the direct result of our forceful action against Hezbollah and Iran, Assad's main supporters". Iran's theocratic rulers long touted their regional network to Iranians as a show of their country's strength, and its crumbling could raise reper-

cussions at home — though there is no immediate sign of their hold weakening. Anger over the tens of billions of dollars Iran is believed to have spent propping up Assad was a rallying cry in rounds of nationwide anti-government protests that have broken out over recent years, most recently in 2022. Iran could respond by revving up its nuclear programme. The loss of Syria does not mean the end of Iran's ability to project power in the Mideast. The Houthi rebels continue to launch attacks on Israel and on ships moving through the Red Sea — though the tempo of their attacks has again fallen without a clear explanation from their leadership. Iran also maintains its nuclear programme. While insisting it enriches uranium for peaceful purposes, Western intelligence agencies and the International Atomic Energy Agency say Iran had an organised nuclear weapons programme until 2003.

The head of the IAEA also warned Friday that Iran is poised to "quite dramatically" increase its stockpile of near weapons-grade uranium as it has started cascades of advanced centrifuges. "If Iran would develop nuclear weapons, that would be a great blow to the international non-proliferation regime," said Thanos Dokos, Greece's national security adviser, in Bahrain. There remains a risk of wider attacks in the region, particularly on oil infrastructure. An attack in 2019 initially claimed by the Houthis but later assessed by experts to have been carried out by Iran temporarily halved Saudi Arabia's production of oil. "If, as a result of escalation, there are attacks against the energy infrastructure of Iran or Saudi Arabia, that would be bad news for the global oil supply," Dokos warned. Whatever happens next, Iran will need to make the decision weighing the problems it faces at both home and abroad.

Development in every sector with mantra of ‘Reform, Perform and Transform’ is visible : PM Modi

PTI ■ JAIPUR

Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Monday said the development following the mantra of ‘Reform, Perform and Transform’ is visible in every sector. Addressing the inaugural session of the Rising Rajasthan Summit here, Modi said today every expert and investor in the world is very excited about India. “In the last ten years, India has become the 5th largest economy from the 10th largest. In the last ten years, India has almost doubled the size of the economy. India’s exports have also almost doubled in ten years,” he said. Modi stressed on the importance of having a large manufacturing base in India. “Today the world needs an economy that continues to function strongly even during the biggest crisis. It should not be disrupted. For this, it is very important to



have a large ‘manufacturing base’ in India,” he said. He said that it is a great achievement in itself that democracy is flourishing in a diverse country like India. “Welfare of humanity while being democratic is at the core of India’s philosophy. The people of India are voting for a stable government in India

through their democratic right. The youth power is taking this forward,” he said. The PM said that India is going to be among the youngest countries in the world for many years to come. “India will have the largest pool of youth as well as the largest skilled youth segment. For this, the

government is taking many decisions one after the other,” he said. The Prime Minister said India has shown how the democratisation of digital technology is benefiting every sector and every class. “India is showing the world the real power of ‘Democracy, Demography and Data,’” he said. PM Modi said our government is working on the mantra of development as well as heritage, and Rajasthan is getting huge benefits from it. He said the priority of the post-independence governments was neither the development of the country nor the heritage and Rajasthan has suffered the loss due to this. “Rajasthan is not just rising but also proving to be reliable. The state is receptive to change and knows how to refine itself over time. Recently, Rajasthan’s “R-factor” has

gained an additional dimension, with the people electing a responsive government led by the BJP,” he said. Modi said in a short span of time, Chief Minister Bhajanlal Sharma and his team have delivered impressive results and his commitment towards the state’s development are highly commendable. “Under the leadership of the current government, new opportunities are being created for the youth, while infrastructure projects like road and electricity developments are progressing rapidly. The government’s swift action in controlling crime and corruption has instilled confidence among investors and people,” he said. Highlighting the potential of the state, he said Rajasthan is rich in natural resources, with a vast land area and a strong, skilled young workforce.

Air India to purchase 100 more Airbus aircraft

PTI ■ MUMBAI

Private carrier Air India on Monday announced placing an order to purchase 100 more Airbus aircraft, comprising 10 wide-body A350 and 90 narrow-body A320 family aircraft including A321neo. These 100 new aircraft are in addition to the orders of 470 aircraft that Air India had placed with Airbus and Boeing last year, Air India said in a statement. The airline also announced it has tied up with Airbus for component and maintenance support for its A350 fleet. The latest order takes the total number of aircraft that Air India ordered with Airbus from 250 to 350. The order placed in 2023 for 250 planes comprised 40 A350 and 210 A320 family aircraft. Air India in February 2023 announced that it would place an order for 470 aircraft, with an additional 370 options. This was confirmed in June 2023, with the order comprising 40 Airbus A350s, 20 Boeing 787s and 10 Boeing



777-9s wide-body aircraft, as well as 210 Airbus A320/321 Neos and 190 Boeing 737 MAX single-aisle aircraft. However, in December last year, the airline rejigged this order with 140 neo planes and 70 A320neo, as against the earlier order of 140 A320neo and 70 A321 neo aircraft. Besides, it also reshuffled its A350 order with 20 A350-900s and 20 A350-1000s as against six A350-900 and 34 A350-1000s ordered in February 2023. “With India’s passenger growth outpacing the rest of the world, its significantly improving infrastructure and an aspirational young population increasingly going

global, we see a clear case for Air India to expand its future fleet beyond the firm orders of the 470 aircraft placed last year,” said Natarajan Chandrasekaran, Chairman, Tata Sons and Air India. These additional 100 Airbus aircraft will help position Air India on the path to “greater growth” and contribute to our mission of building Air India into a world-class airline that connects India to every corner of the world, he said. With the order for 100 additional aircraft, Air India currently has a total of 344 new aircraft incoming from Airbus, having received six A350s so far, it said. Air India in 2023 had also placed orders for 220 wide-body and narrow-body aircraft with Boeing, of which 185 aircraft remain to be delivered, the company said. Meanwhile, Air India on Monday also said it has selected Airbus’ Flight Hour Services-Component (FHS-C) to support the maintenance of its growing A350 fleet.

Tata Motors and Kia India to hike vehicle prices from January



PTI ■ NEW DELHI

Tata Motors and Kia India on Monday announced plans to hike vehicle prices from January to offset the impact of rising input costs. Tata Motors said it will hike the price of its passenger vehicle portfolio, including electric vehicles, by up to 3 per cent from January next year. The price hike is being undertaken to partially offset the rise in input costs and inflation, the Mumbai-based auto major said in a statement. “Effective January 2025, the price increase will vary depending on model and variant,” it added. Tata Motors sells a range of passenger vehicle models ranging from Tiago hatchback to SUVs Harrier and Safari. Kia India, which sells models like Seltos and Sonet, said it will increase prices of its entire model range by 2 per cent from

January. The price hike, effective from January 1, 2025, is primarily due to rising commodity prices and escalating supply chain-related costs, the automaker said in a statement. Kia India Senior Vice President - Sales and Marketing - Hardeep Singh Brar said the company is committed to delivering technologically advanced vehicles of the highest quality to customers. “However, due to the persistent rise in commodity prices, unfavourable exchange rates, and increased input costs, a necessary price adjustment has become unavoidable,” he added. Despite these challenges, Kia is absorbing a significant portion of the cost increase, minimising the financial impact on customers, so they can continue to enjoy their favourite models without a major dent in their pockets, Brar said. Market leaders Maruti Suzuki and Hyundai Motor India have announced plans to hike vehicle prices next month. The country’s largest carmaker aims to raise prices by up to 4 per cent from January due to rising input costs and operational expenses. Rival Hyundai Motor India is also looking to increase the prices of its model range by up to Rs

25,000 from January 1, 2025. The price increase has been necessitated due to an increase in input costs, adverse exchange rate and increase in logistics costs, the maker of Verna and Creta said. Mahindra & Mahindra said it will hike prices of its SUVs and commercial vehicles by up to 3 per cent from January. The adjustment is in response to the rising costs due to inflation and increased commodity prices, the automaker stated. Similarly, JSW MG Motor India said it will increase prices of its entire model range by up to 3 per cent from next month. Honda Cars India is also considering a price increase but is yet to decide on the quantum. Besides, luxury car market leader Mercedes-Benz India plans to increase prices by up to 3 per cent from January. Prices of Mercedes-Benz cars will be revised in the range of Rs 2 lakh for the GLC to Rs 9 lakh for the top-end Mercedes-Maybach S 680 luxury limousine. Audi India said it will increase prices by up to 3 per cent across the model range due to an increase in input and transportation costs. Similarly, BMW India is looking to increase prices of its model range by up to 3 per cent from January next year.

War on spam: Airtel’s network flags eight billion spam calls in 2.5 months, identifies one million spammers daily

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

Telecom operator Bharti Airtel on Monday said its network has flagged a staggering 8 billion spam calls and called out 0.8 billion spam SMSes within two and a half months of the launch of its spam-fighting AI-powered solution. Leveraging an advanced algorithm, the AI-powered network has successfully identified close to 1 million spammers every day, the company informed in a release. Notably, six per cent of all calls and two per cent of all SMSes on the Airtel network have been identified as spam. Delhi had the dubious distinction of accounting for a maximum number of the spam calls received and originated. The company, in the last 2.5 months, has alerted close to 252 million unique customers to these suspicious calls and has observed that there has been a 12 per cent decline in the number of customers answering them. “Bharti Airtel, India’s first spam-fighting network, has flagged a staggering 8 billion spam calls and 0.8 billion spam SMSes within two and a half months of launching its AI-powered, spam-fighting solution,” the release said. Airtel observed that a



staggering 35 per cent of the spammers have used landline telephones. Customers in Delhi have received the maximum number of spam calls, followed by customers in Andhra Pradesh and Western Uttar Pradesh. Delhi is also where the maximum number of spam calls have originated, followed by Mumbai and Karnataka. In terms of SMSes (text messages), the maximum number have originated in Gujarat followed by Kolkata and Uttar Pradesh and the maximum number of customers targeted have been from Mumbai, Chennai and Gujarat. As per the trends, 76 per cent of all spam calls have been targeted at male customers.

Additionally, distinct differences have been noted in terms of spam call frequency across age demographics. Customers in the age bracket of 36-60 have received 48 per cent of all spam calls, while those in the 26-35 age bracket have been the second-most targeted, accounting for 26 per cent of spam calls. Just about 8 per cent of the spam calls have landed in the handsets of senior citizens, the release said. Giving insights into the hourly distribution of spam activity detected, the company said spam calls commence from 9 am onwards and gradually escalate in volume as the day progresses. The peak of spam activity is observed between noon and 3 pm, during which the

highest concentration of spam calls occurs. Moreover, there is a notable disparity in the frequency of spam calls between weekdays and weekends. “The volume of these calls diminishes by around 40 per cent on Sundays. Specifically, devices in the price range of Rs 15,000-20,000 are the recipients of approximately 22 per cent of all spam calls,” it said. By meticulously examining a multitude of parameters, the AI-driven system has been able to identify these unwanted intrusions in real time with remarkable accuracy. The government has allocated 10-digit numbers with the prefix 160 for service and transactional calls. “Customers can expect to receive calls from these 160-prefix series assigned to banks, mutual funds, insurance companies, stockbrokers, other financial institutions, corporates, enterprises, SMEs, big and small businesses used for making transactional and service calls,” Airtel said. Further, those customers who have not opted for Do-not-disturb (DND) and have subscribed to receiving promotional calls will continue to receive them from a 10-digit number with the prefix 140.

Centre allows Adani Krishnapatnam Port to import petroleum up to March 2026



PTI ■ NEW DELHI

The Centre has allowed Adani Krishnapatnam Port in Andhra Pradesh to import petroleum into India up to March 1, 2026, according to an official notification. The port has been allowed to import petroleum by sea from August 28, 2024, till March 1, 2026, in public interest, according to the notification by the Ministry of Ports, Shipping and Waterways. Owned and operated by Adani Ports and Special Economic Zone Limited (APSEZ), Adani Krishnapatnam Port Ltd is an all-weather deep water port located on the East Coast of India in Andhra Pradesh. Adani Ports & SEZ shares were trading higher by 0.56 per cent at Rs 1,267.30 on BSE in the pre-close session.

Special CBI court convicts Abhijeet Infrastructure Pvt Ltd and two others under coal scam

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

A special CBI court on Monday convicted Managing Director of Abhijeet Infrastructure Ltd Manoj Kumar Jayaswal and its former director Ramesh Kumar Jayaswal in a coal scam case related to the allocation of Brinda, Sisai, and Meral coal blocks in Jharkhand. In its case registered in 2016, the CBI had alleged that the company obtained the coal blocks by misrepresenting its financial position, acquisition of land for its proposed end-use plant, and other related claims, a statement from the agency said. Forged documents were used to secure the recommendation of the Ministry of Steel, Government of India, for the allocation of the coal blocks, the CBI said. Special Judge Arun Bhardwaj convicted Nagpur-based Abhijeet Infrastructure Pvt Ltd (AIPL), its Managing Director Manoj Kumar Jayaswal and former director Ramesh Kumar Jayaswal of cheating, criminal conspiracy and using forged documents as genuine. Their sentence will be pronounced later. The four-year-long investigation showed that photocopies of fabricated documents related to the purchase of private land at Hazaribagh, Jharkhand, procurement of machinery for

the proposed end-use plant and financial tie-ups with banks were submitted to clinch the coal blocks. “These forged documents were used to secure the recommendation of the Ministry of Steel, Government of India, for the allocation of the coal blocks. Based on this recommendation, the Ministry of Coal allocated the Brinda, Sisai and Meral coal blocks to Abhijeet Infrastructure Pvt. Ltd (now Abhijeet Infrastructure Ltd) on June 25, 2005. The company thus defrauded the Ministry of Coal/public exchequer,” the CBI Spokesperson said. The judge noted that Manoj Kumar Jayaswal was controlling the affairs of the company when forged letters and documents were submitted to the ministry. “It is he who got forged documents submitted (through Ramesh Kumar Jayaswal) to the Ministry of Steel. “False information in these letters led to the recommendation of the Ministry of Steel in favour of M/s AIPL. On the basis of recommendations of the Ministry of Steel, the Screening Committee was also induced to believe false facts to be true and recommended allocation of Coal blocks in favour of the company,” the judge held.

Rupee drops eight paise to close at 84.74 against US dollar

PTI ■ MUMBAI

The rupee depreciated 8 paise to close at 84.74 (provisional) against the US dollar on Monday, dragged down by fresh foreign fund outflows and a muted trend in domestic equities. Forex traders said the rupee remains in a weakening mode due to dollar demand from importers and foreign banks. At the interbank foreign exchange, the rupee opened at 84.70 and touched the lowest level of 84.73 against the greenback during intra-day trade. The unit ended the session at 84.74 (provisional) against the dollar, registering a fall of 8 paise over its previous close. On Friday, the rupee appreciated by 5 paise to settle

at 84.66 against the US dollar. On December 4, the rupee had slumped to its all-time low of 84.76 (provisional) against the US dollar. The dollar index, which gauges the greenback’s strength against a basket of six currencies, was trading lower by 0.09 per cent at 105.96. Brent crude, the global oil benchmark, surged 0.89 per cent to USD 71.75 per barrel in futures trade. Forex traders said post the RBI monetary policy announcement, investors will await the Industrial Production (IIP) and CPI data for further cues. The Reserve Bank of India on Friday kept its key interest rate unchanged citing inflation risks, but cut the Cash Reserve Ratio that banks are required

to park with the central bank, boosting money with lenders to support a slowing economy. On the domestic equity market front, the 30-share benchmark index Sensex closed 200.66 points, or 0.25 per cent lower, at 81,508.46 points. The Nifty fell 58.80 points, or 0.24 per cent, to 24,619.00 points. Foreign Institutional Investors (FIIs) offloaded Rs 1,830.31 crore in the capital markets on net basis on Friday, according to exchange data. Meanwhile, India’s forex reserves increased by USD 1.51 billion to USD 658.091 billion for the week ended November 29, the RBI said on Friday. The overall reserves had dropped by USD 1.31 billion to USD 656.582 billion in the previous reporting week.

Over 100 global firms to participate in Bharat Battery Show in January 2025

PTI ■ MUMBAI

Over 100 global firms from countries like the US, Japan, China and India will showcase cutting-edge innovations at the Bharat Battery Show in January 2025. The second edition of the Bharat Battery Show (as part of the Bharat Mobility Global Expo 2025) is shaping up very well with the global participation of companies from various countries, a statement said. According to the statement, a Singaporean delegation will visit the global expo to explore Indian market opportunities. Bharat Mobility, led by the Ministry of Commerce and Industry, is a landmark event. It is set to bring together over 1,000 exhibitors and attract

more than 5,00,000 visitors from over 50 countries, it added. Over 100 global companies from the US, Japan, Korea, Singapore, China, and India will showcase cutting-edge innovations at the Bharat Battery Show, the statement said. The India Energy Storage Alliance (IESA), a prominent industry partner for the mega event, will play a key role by hosting the Bharat Battery Show, a global expo on batteries and charging focused on lithium-ion batteries, battery components, BMS, testing solutions, raw materials, supply chain solutions, manufacturing equipment, recycling solutions, charging infra and battery swapping solutions. This initiative highlights India’s advancements in

energy storage and positions the country as a central player in the global mobility revolution. Leading battery ecosystem players will be showcasing their innovative products and solutions during the show. Bharat Battery Show will be collocated with the Auto Expo at Bharat Mandapam, Pragati Maidan, New Delhi, from January 19 to 21, 2025. IESA president Debi Prasad Dash said, “The event will feature dedicated pavilions focusing on critical sectors, including the Battery Tech Pavilion, Supply Chain Pavilion, and Charging Infra Pavilion, curated by IESA to underscore India’s growing capabilities in energy storage, sustainability, and clean mobility”.

Hiring in IT sector to witness 15 to 20 per cent growth in job opportunities: Report



PTI ■ MUMBAI

The IT sector, which is on the path of recovery, is expected to witness 15-20 per cent growth in job

opportunities across various industries in 2025, talent solutions company NLB Services said on Monday. The IT industry has gained back momentum in H2 2024

and is gearing up for a promising 2025 on multiple fronts, said NLB Services. In the coming year, fresher hiring in the Indian IT sector is poised for significant growth, with an anticipated increase of 15-20 per cent in job opportunities across various industries, it added. At the same time, the demand for highly specialised tech roles, including artificial intelligence, machine learning (ML), data analytics, and cloud

technologies, is expected to surge by 30-35 per cent, driven by the increasing reliance on emerging technologies, it said. This surge in demand is not limited to hiring but extends to a strategic focus on tech upskilling, with companies investing heavily in training initiatives to equip their workforce with the necessary skills to meet the evolving technological landscape, the company noted. NLB Services’ analysis is based on the brand’s view of

the macro ecosystem, industry trends, and demand. Further, the company stated that campus hiring remains the core focus for larger companies that are looking to hire aggressively for the second half of 2024-25. Since the 2021-22, global economic slowdown, clients have curtailed their discretionary spending due to on-demand hiring patterns and global macroeconomic challenges, this has impacted the project pipeline however, it is

expected to stabilise in 2025, thus promising hopes for freshers, it said. IT fresher hiring in 2025, is projected to increase with high demand for roles in artificial intelligence (AI), machine learning (ML), data analytics, Python, cloud technologies, and cybersecurity. Sectors such as Global Capability Centres (GCCs), manufacturing, BFSI, healthcare, and retail are also anticipated to boost their IT fresher intake by 30-35 per cent in 2025, it added.

Nine-year-old boy becomes youngest Indian to beat a chess Grandmaster

PTI ■ BHUBANESWAR

Nine-year-old Delhi boy Aarit Kapil has become the youngest Indian to beat a chess Grandmaster as he emerged victorious against Raset Ziatdinov of United States in the ninth and penultimate round of the KIIT International open tournament here. At 9 years, 2 months and 18 days, Aarit is the youngest Indian and third in the world to beat a GM under the classical time control. The youngest player in the world to beat a GM is Indian-origin Singapore boy Ashwath Kaushik who won against Jacek Stupa of Poland when he was just 8 years and six months old earlier this year.

Ziatdinov, 66, is certainly past his prime if the game was any indication. As is usually the case when an experienced GM plays against a youngster,



Ziatdinov did many things right positionally to get the upper hand thanks to his better pawn structure. To Aarit's credit, he fought on

after standing slightly worse with his white pieces. It was a long-drawn endgame wherein Ziatdinov made the final mistake and lost a

knight on Sunday. The resulting position just needed decent calculation and the young lad from Delhi had no troubles whatsoever

in converting his advantage in to a well-deserved win. The game lasted 63 moves. While the victory places Aarit among the elite young talents, it remains to be seen how he performs in upcoming tournaments. The next challenge awaits him in form of under-13 national championship to be held at Durgapur later this month, followed by his own age group event, the under-9 nationals in Pune. Meanwhile, Grandmaster Boris Savchenko of Russia won the KIIT tournament, settling for a draw with India's Sayantan Das in the final round. Savchenko scored 8.5 points out of a possible 10. The top three youngest players to beat a Grandmaster: 1. Ashwath Kaushik (Singapore) – 8 years 2 months 2. Leonid Ivanovic (Serbia) - 8 years 11 months



Atletico Madrid stunning 4-3 victory over Sevilla

AP ■ MADRID

Atletico Madrid conceded three goals in a Spanish league game for the first time this season but still managed to beat Sevilla 4-3 with Antoine Griezmann's double helping to make it nine wins in a row in all competitions for Diego Simeone's in-form side. Third-place Madrid restored its three-point lead over fourth-place Athletic Bilbao, which beat Villarreal earlier Sunday. Rodrigo De Paul gave Atletico the perfect start when he lashed home a stunning opener in the 10th minute. However, goals from Dodi Lukébakio, Isaac Romero and Juanlu Sanchez put Sevilla 3-1 up early in the second half and Atletico, without the vocal support of some home fans in a dispute over tickets, seemed lost in an unusually quiet at Metropolitano Stadium. Simeone's side, though, is known for its resilience and it was not long before the fightback began. Griezmann reduced the deficit in the 62nd minute and 17 minutes later, after Simeone made five substitutions in a quarter of an hour, Samuel Lino got the equalizer with a low shot from 30 yards. Griezmann himself got the winner in stoppage time to

consolidate Atletico's third place. The Madrid club now has 35 points, one behind city rival Real and three behind league leader Barcelona. "We struggled to get into the game," Griezmann said. "We missed the support of the fans behind the goal. But in the end we managed to come back." FOURTH-PLACE BILBAO BEATS VILLARREAL Athletic Bilbao consolidated fourth place with a comfortable 2-0 win over Villarreal, the team immediately below it in the table and one of its closest rivals for a Champions League spot. Aitor Paredes put Athletic ahead when he glanced home a corner kick in 14 minutes and Iñaki Williams made it 2-0 midway through the second half. It was the fourth consecutive league win for Athletic but the victory was marred by a silent protest from an organized fan group. The group refused to sing or chant in response to a rift between it and the club president, who reported threats to police earlier in the week. Several Athletic players expressed solidarity with the president and the team did not salute the fans behind the goal after the match. "It's a very sad win and a time for everyone to pull

together," club captain Óscar De Marcos said in comments reported by newspaper Marca. "The silence was notable during the game but we need to keep doing our job." Earlier Sunday, Real Sociedad won for the fourth time in a row, beating Leganes 3-0 at the Butarque stadium near Madrid. Three days after his extra-time goal gave Sociedad a 1-0 win at fourth-tier Conquense in the Copa del Rey, Brais Méndez scored again to give the visitors an early lead. Substitute Ander Barrenetxea's first goal of the league season doubled its lead 10 minutes from time and then Mikel Oyarzabal added a third in stoppage time. It was only the fourth time in 16 matches that Sociedad has scored twice in a league game and the win lifted it into sixth, above Osasuna, which drew 2-2 with Alaves. Alaves took only 37 seconds for Kike Garcia to put the team ahead with a diving header. However, Ante Budimir and Rubén Garcia scored early in the second half to put Osasuna in front before Kike Garcia got his second of the game to tie the scores at 2-2. The point was the first for new Alaves coach Eduardo Coudet but still leaves it in 15th place without a win in five games.

Scheffler defends Hero World Challenge title

PTI ■ ALBANY (BAHAMAS)

Scottie Scheffler was firing a solid 9-under 63, good enough for the World No. 1 American to defend the Hero World Challenge title on the fourth and final day here. Scheffler finished the event with a total of 25-under (263: 67, 64, 69, 63) on Sunday. The 28-year-old won by six shots over Tom Kim, and it was the largest winning margin at the Albany Golf Club and the biggest in the tournament history since the 10-shot margin achieved by Jordan Spieth in 2014. South Korean Kim finished second with a final round of four-under 68 for a total of 270 (74, 65, 62, 68). But Kim can be proud of his comeback and running Scheffler close after going 2-over on day 1 and his third round card of 62 was the best day's score by any golfer in this tournament. "I think only two bogeys for the week and then I made a good amount of birdies. Eliminating the mistakes and making a good amount of birdies is always helpful," said Scheffler. "I'm very thankful to be sitting here with the trophy. Winning the Hero (World Challenge), which is Tiger Woods' event, is pretty special," added the American, who was presented the trophy by Woods and Pawan Munjal, Executive Chairman of Hero MotoCorp. Debutant Indian-American Akshay Bhatia (69) missed several putts to finish fourth at 15-under and Keegan Bradley (71) was fifth at 14-under. Sahith Theegala (74) was eighth and Indo-British Aaron Rai (70) was tied 14th. However, Scheffler's commanding victory kept the stats men busy. Scheffler equalled the best-ever winning total of 25-under set by Bubba Watson in 2015.

Danilo Cataldi scores goal for hospitalised teammate Bove

AP ■ ROME

Danilo Cataldi texted hospitalized Fiorentina teammate Edoardo Bove to say that he would score for him and then fulfilled his promise in a 1-0 win over Cagliari. It was Fiorentina's first Serie A match since Bove collapsed on the field during a game against Inter Milan last weekend and was placed in a medically induced coma. The 22-year-old has been awake and alert since last Monday as doctors continue to investigate the cause of his collapse. Cataldi found the top corner midway through the first half and that was all Fiorentina needed for its eighth straight



win in the Italian league to match the club record set in 1960. After he scored, Cataldi ran toward a TV camera, held up four fingers to match Bove's No. 4 jersey then created a heart symbol with his fingers

as he shouted, "I told you. I told you." "I texted him before the match, saying: Watch the game on TV because I'm going to score a goal into the top corner," Cataldi said. "He said it was impossible? We're

pleased that he's feeling well and about these three points." Fiorentina, which has a game in hand since the match against Inter was abandoned, moved level on points with third-place Inter. Fiorentina is three points behind new leader Atalanta, which is on a nine-game winning streak, and one point behind second-place Napoli, which was beaten 1-0 at home by Lazio. Gustav Isaksen scored for Lazio with a long-range shot late in the second half. Lazio also moved level on points with Inter and Fiorentina. Napoli had led for most of the season under first-year coach Antonio Conte but has now lost at home to both Atalanta and Lazio.

Mbappé reaffirms his commitment to France after missing recent games

AP ■ PARIS

Kylian Mbappé has reaffirmed his commitment to France despite missing recent games, saying "there's nothing bigger than the national team." The 2018 World Cup winner was left out for Nations League matches against Israel and Italy last month, with coach Didier Deschamps saying "it's better that way" and adding that the player's struggles were physical and mental. Mbappé is France's captain and was also absent from a previous gathering in October because of a minor thigh injury, but nevertheless played for Real Madrid. "I've always said there's nothing bigger than the national team," Mbappé said on Sunday night during a television interview with Canal Plus. "My love for the France team hasn't changed." Deschamps' reference to his mental state led some



observers to speculate Mbappé suffered from depression. He took a moment to explain that he has not. "There are people who really are in a depression and who should be helped. This is not a subject which should be taken lightly," Mbappé said. "I am not going to claim that (I had a depression)." However, he alluded to unfair treatment when saying "people ask a lot of me" as captain compared to his predecessor, the goalkeeper Hugo Lloris, and also took a swipe at those who questioned his dedication

to France. "I've always put it above anything else. I even gave my nose," Mbappé said, referring to his broken nose at the European Championship this year. Mbappé, who turns 26 on Dec. 20, is third on France's all-time scoring list with 48 goals, only Thierry Henry (51) and Olivier Giroud (57) are ahead of him. He scored a superb hat trick in the 2022 World Cup final, but his scoring ratio has dropped recently with two goals in the past 12 games for Les Bleus. Mbappé said he gave the television interview because he's had enough of people talking for him in recent weeks, when his struggles with Madrid have also been widely commented upon. "When you're a star, if you don't talk, people talk in your place. That's why I'm talking now," said Mbappé, who also spoke for the first time about reports of a rape investigation in Sweden.

Botafogo wins its first Brazilian league title

AP ■ SAO PAULO

Copa Libertadores champion Botafogo had another big reason to celebrate as the club owned by American businessman John Textor beat Sao Paulo 2-1 to win its first Brazilian league title since 1995. Botafogo won the title for the third time with 79 points in 38 matches to finish six points ahead of runner-up Palmeiras. Jefferson Savarino scored the first goal for host Botafogo in the 37th minute at the Nilton Santos Stadium, but a defensive mistake allowed an under-strength Sao Paulo side to equalize in the 63rd through William Gomes. Gregore netted the winner in injury time for the Rio de Janeiro-based team. The same player was sent off after a first-minute foul in the Copa Libertadores final against Atletico Mineiro. Botafogo overcame that difficulty to beat their countrymen 3-1 and lift its first South American crown



on Nov. 30. That earned Botafogo a spot at the Club World Cup in the United States next year. Palmeiras, the last rival standing between Botafogo and the trophy, lost 1-0 at home to Fluminense, which managed to avoid relegation and send Atletico Paranaense to the second division instead. Kevin Serna scored in the 37th minute. It's another welcome trophy

for Textor. Asked if he had expected Botafogo to win major trophies in only three years since he took over, Textor replied "not at all." "I can't really say I believed it," Textor told journalists on the field Sunday. "When you have ambition, it doesn't necessarily mean you know (you will win)," Textor said. "It happened much before we expected. We are very

excited about that." Before the club won the Copa Libertadores, Textor was under widespread criticism from fans because of financial difficulties and poor results. Textor's Eagle Football also owns Crystal Palace in the Premier League, French club Lyon and RWD Molenbeek in Belgium. Textor has had his share of critics in Brazil, after making unproven allegations about match-fixing when Botafogo squandered a 13-point lead to miss out on the league title last year. Botafogo was relegated from the league in 2020 but has risen to prominence again with Textor's investment. He was part of a wave of foreign owners who came into Brazilian soccer after a 2021 law change paved the way for private investors. Textor has spent big on star signings for Botafogo such as Argentina midfielder Thiago Almada for \$25 million and winger Luiz Henrique for \$21 million.

F1 in 2025: Close racing, Lewis Hamilton at Ferrari and plenty of new faces

AP ■ ABU DHABI

Even before he'd parked his car after winning the last Formula 1 race of 2024, Lando Norris made a vow to be champion in 2025. "Next year is going to be my year, too," Norris, who was runner-up to Max Verstappen this year, told the McLaren team over the radio. After four different teams won races in 2024, next year could see an even closer contest for the title. Lewis Hamilton will be aiming for an eighth career championship at his new team, Ferrari, and there'll be ambitious young drivers joining the grid. CLOSE COMPETITION Major rule changes in F1 tend to shake up the established order, but can let one team gain a big

advantage. When the same rules are in place for a while, teams tend to be more evenly matched. The season-long competition for the title in 2021 between Verstappen and Lewis Hamilton preceded a rule change for 2022. Expect McLaren and Norris to be in the hunt next time. "The one thing I've learned this year is probably to believe in myself a bit more," Norris said Sunday. "I've certainly not come out on top as often as I would have liked in certain moments as a driver, especially in my fights against Max. As much as it hurts sometimes, I'm probably happy about it now that I'm going to go into next season knowing that I can fight." Some worry focusing on 2025 could hurt them in the long run, and may be



tempted to aim for 2026 instead. Carlos Sainz Jr. On Sunday said his new team, Williams, is "preparing to maximize

that chance" in 2026. Aston Martin has Adrian Newey, widely considered F1's greatest designer, heading up its development after he left

Red Bull. Audi is turning Sauber into its works team for 2026 and General Motors is joining the grid with its Cadillac brand and may

already have a head start on development. "Obviously, the earlier start, the bigger advantage you have," Red Bull team principal Christian Horner said, "but if there is a tight championship (in 2025) and it does go down to the wire, then that's going to be a tough balancing act." HAMILTON AT FERRARI A seven-time champion in Ferrari red. Hamilton's move to the storied Italian team could bring back memories of Michael Schumacher, the only other driver to win seven titles in F1. After an emotional farewell to Mercedes on Sunday, Hamilton's focus will shift quickly to 2025. No driver has won the F1 title with Ferrari since Kimi Raikkonen beat then-rookie Hamilton by a single point in

2007. "Lewis has achieved so much in the sport and it will be a big motivation," his future teammate Charles Leclerc said Sunday. Hamilton, F1's only Black driver, has also said he wants to continue his efforts to improve diversity in F1 when he joins his new team. NEW CHALLENGERS ON THE GRID Could 2025 be the year the next generation of drivers upsets F1's biggest names? The biggest rookie class in years arrives in F1 with plenty of hype as 18-year-old Andrea Kimi Antonelli steps up from Formula 2 to replace Hamilton at Mercedes. Oliver Bearman joins Haas after impressive stand-in drives this year, while F2 champion Gabriel Bortoletto moves to Sauber. Alpine gave its new driver Jack Doohan,

son of a motorcycle racing great, an early taste of F1 at the Abu Dhabi Grand Prix, where he was 15th. Post-season tests Tuesday in Abu Dhabi offer a chance to get valuable experience. The new arrivals mean experienced drivers will be off the F1 grid. Ten-time GP winner Valtteri Bottas is likely heading back to Mercedes as a reserve next year after leaving Sauber. Kevin Magnussen, Zhou Guanyu and Franco Colapinto are also without race seats for 2025. Then there's Sergio Perez. Second to Verstappen in the 2023 standings, the Mexican driver was nowhere near his Red Bull teammate's pace this season and has faced repeated speculation he will be dropped for 2025 despite a contract extension agreed in June.

Kapil Dev backs Rohit, says captain doesn't need to prove himself

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

Let's not doubt Rohit Sharma's ability to bounce back, said the legendary Kapil Dev, who also felt that under-fire India skipper doesn't need to prove himself at this stage of his career. Rohit, who managed scores of 3 and 6 in the the Adelaide pink-ball Test after dropping down the batting order, is being criticized by fans and former players for being subdued. India lost the game by 10 wickets in just two and a half days. "He doesn't have to prove himself. He has done this for many, many years, so let's not doubt somebody. I won't doubt him. I hope his form comes back, that's important," Kapil said during the launch of the Vishwa Samudra Open, a

PGTI event set to begin at the Delhi Golf Club on Tuesday. Rohit had missed the opening Test due to the birth of his second child. Despite scoring most of his runs as an opener, the 37-year-old dropped down to the number six position, offering the top spot to KL Rahul, who played a pivotal role in the Perth win. "With one or two performances, if you doubt someone's captaincy, I mean, just six months back when he won the T20 World Cup, you wouldn't have asked me this question. Let it go, knowing his ability and talent, he will come back. They will come back strongly." Asked if it was a mistake to include young Harshit Rana in the second Test, Kapil said: "I am a nobody. How can I judge? There are people



up there who have the responsibility to decide who should be in the team." "We shouldn't talk. My former colleagues are sitting

there, and I hope they will do a good job." In Rohit's absence, vice-captain Jasprit Bumrah had led India to a 295-run in



Perth. Asked if Bumrah is shaping up well to take over the reins from Rohit, Kapil said: "I think it is too early to talk

about that. With one performance, you can't say he is the best, and with one bad performance, you can't say he doesn't deserve it.

"Let a player play a lot of cricket, take on a lot of captaincy. Ups and downs will come, and then you judge a person by how he reacts in difficult times, not in good times. In good times, we don't have to judge. When he is down and out. Virat Kohli, who also looked subdued coming into the five-Test series in Australia, managed to hit his first hundred in 18 months in Perth. However, the star batter failed in the second Test with scores of 7 and 11 in his two innings. "Like Virat Kohli, he is one of the best cricketers in our country. If you put the four top batsmen, he will be there. If he is going through a rough time, it is only up to him how fast he can bounce back," Kapil said. Kampli needs to go back to rehab. Former India batter Vinod

Kampli has been struggling with alcohol-related and other health issues. He appeared frail during a recent public event held in memory of legendary coach Ramakant Achrekar. He was seen refusing to let go of his childhood friend Sachin Tendulkar. Kapil expressed sadness over Kampli's condition, emphasising the need for self-help alongside external support. "We should all try to support him. But more than us, he has to support himself. We can't look after anybody if that person can't look after himself," Kapil said. "All the cricketers feel very sad about what we have seen. I wish his closest friends can try to get him some help, to look after himself, to go back to rehab. People do get this illness, but you have to get back to rehab."



Siraj fined, Head also sanctioned by ICC for Adelaide confrontation

PTI ■ ADELAIDE

Indian pacer Mohammed Siraj was fined 20 per cent of his match fee, while Australian batter Travis Head was also "sanctioned" by the ICC for indulging in a heated exchange of words during the just-concluded day-night Test here. Siraj and Head were held guilty of breaching the world body's code of conduct following a disciplinary hearing on Monday. "Siraj has been penalised 20 per cent of his match fee after being found guilty of breaching article 2.5 of the ICC Code of Conduct for Players and Player Support Personnel," the ICC said in a statement. The cited rule relates to "using language, actions or gestures which disparage or which could provoke an aggressive reaction from a batter upon dismissal." The ICC said Head too was "sanctioned" for breaching Article 2.13 of the ICC Code of Conduct for Players and Player Support Personnel. However, he escaped a fine for breaching the rule that relates to the "abuse of a player, player support personnel, umpire or match referee during an international match." Siraj and Head also received one demerit point each on their disciplinary records, marking their first offence in the last 24 months. "Both admitted their offences and accepted the sanctions

proposed by Match Referee Ranjan Madugalle," the ICC said. Head and Siraj had a brief showdown on day two of the match that Australia won by 10 wickets on Sunday. Head had struck a splendid 141-ball knock of 140 before being castled by Siraj, who went on to give him an aggressive send-off following an exchange of words. The Indian endured boos from the Adelaide crowd following the confrontation. Head later claimed that he had merely said "well bowled" to Siraj and that he was disappointed at how the visiting bowler had responded. Siraj disputed that claim, asserting that Head had abused him. "I only celebrated and he abused me and you saw that on TV too. I only celebrated at the start. I didn't say anything to him," Siraj told broadcaster 'Star Sports'. "What he said in the press conference wasn't right, it's a lie that he only said 'well bowled' to me. It's there for everyone to see that that's not what he said to me." Head also acknowledged his role in the incident. "There was no confrontation leading up to him and I felt like it was probably, yeah, a little bit far at the time, and that's why I am disappointed in the reaction that I gave back," he said in a post-play press conference. The two teams are tied 1-1 in the five-match series.

World Chess Championship: Gukesh loses to Ding Liren in 12th game

PTI ■ SINGAPORE

Indian challenger D Gukesh lost the 12th game against defending champion Ding Liren of China to allow his opponent bounce back and level the World Chess Championship match here on Monday. The 18-year-old Gukesh was ahead by one point after he notched his second win of the match on Sunday, which came after seven consecutive draws, but Liren's win on Monday brought the things on an even keel. The two players are now tied at 6 points each with just two games left in the 14-round classical time control format, still shy of 1.5 points in order to win the title. The remaining two games will be played on Wednesday and Thursday, after rest day on Tuesday. Irrespective of what happens in the next game on Wednesday, the match will go the distance (14 games) and more likely there will be tiebreaker - where games are of shorter duration - to determine the winner. The 32-year-old Liren had won the opening game before Gukesh emerged victorious in



the third game. The second, and the fourth to 10th games were drawn. In what was the first victory for Liren with his white pieces, Gukesh's preparation did not come as good as the other 11 games that he played here. The start was an English opening by the Chinese and much to the surprise of the fans, Gukesh went for a position that led to a Benoni defense with colours reversed. Gukesh started to miss out creating counter play in the middle game as white played just normal developing moves. By the 15th move, though less on time on the

clock, white had a small advantage as a central breakthrough looked inevitable, giving Liren the space advantage. Gukesh's 17th move did not help his cause as white was able to get the desired break in the centre. Five moves later, another error by Gukesh gave Liren a huge advantage. Liren's central pawn made a foray to the sixth rank in what was a near-decisive blow on the 27th move. Gukesh had to part with a couple of pawns. Adding to Gukesh's woes was an imminent rook invasion. The game ended through a fine tactic by Liren who sacrificed a rook to force

matters. The game ended in 39 moves. For Gukesh, much would depend on how he does in his last remaining white game after the final rest day on Tuesday. Liren has proved again that he is a tough nut to crack and his second victory in the match was pretty much one-sided compared to many other games in the match that had chances for both sides. In the previous world championship match against Ian Nepomniachtchi of Russia, Liren had to come back from behind as many as three times before being crowned the world champion. The Moves: 1.C4 e6 2.G3 d5 3.Bg2 Nf6 4.Nf3 d4 5.0-0 Nc6 6.E3 Be7 7.D3 dxe3 8.Bxe3 e5 9.Nc3 0-0 10.Re1 h6 11.A3 a5 12.H3 Be6 13.Kh2 Rb8 14.Qc2 Re8 15.Nb5 Bf5 16.Rad1 Nd7 17.Qd2 Bg6 18.D4 e4 19.Ng1 Nb6 20.Qc3 Bf6 21.Qc2 a4 22.Ne2 Bg5 23.Nf4 Bxf4 24.Bxf4 Rc8 25.Qc3 Nb8 26.D5 Qd7 27.D6 c5 28.Nc7 Rf8 29.Bxe4 Nc6 30.Bg2 Rcd8 31.Nd5 Nxd5 32.Cxd5 Nb8 33.Qxc5 Rc8 34.Qd4 Na6 35.Re7 Qb5 36.D7 Rc4 37.Qe3 Rc2 38.Bd6 f6 39.Rxg7+ Black resigned.



India gets tricky group in 2027 Asian Cup Qualifiers final round

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

India was on Sunday drawn in a tricky group along with Bangladesh, Hong Kong and Singapore for the 2027 Asian Cup Qualifiers final round matches, beginning March 25 next year. The draw, which saw 24 teams divided into six groups of four, was held at the Asian Football Confederation (AFC) House in Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia. Only the six group winners will qualify for the main tournament to be held in Saudi Arabia in 2027 and join the 18 teams who have already booked their tickets after the second round of qualifying. The final round will be contested over six match days in a home-and-away format between March 25, 2025 and March 31, 2026. Aiming to qualify for the third successive time, India will begin its Group C campaign at home against Bangladesh. India is the highest-ranked team in the group at 127, followed by Hong Kong (156), Singapore (161) and Bangladesh (185). But, they won't be easy opponents. India has faced all three opponents in the recent past.

The Blue Tigers last faced Bangladesh (1-1 draw) in the 2021 SAFF Championship, Hong Kong (India won 4-0) in the AFC Asian Cup Qualifiers in Kolkata in June 2022, and Singapore (1-1 draw) in the Hung Thinh Friendly Tournament in Vietnam in September 2022. After the draw, India head coach Manolo Marquez said, "We are a Pot 1 team and we need to show why we are the favourites to qualify. There are not too many differences between groups. Every group is difficult. "Hong Kong has improved a lot with naturalised players and with their coach Ashley Westwood. "We will play against Bangladesh first in March, who have been our regular opponents in the SAFF Championship. We know the calendar. We have six games and we need to top the group and qualify for the Asian Cup." India's fixtures: March 25, 2025: India vs Bangladesh (home) June 10, 2025: Hong Kong vs India (away) October 9, 2025: India vs Singapore (home) October 14, 2025: Singapore vs India (away) November 18, 2025: Bangladesh vs India (away)

South Africa go on top in WTC points table

PTI ■ DUBAI

South Africa on Monday replaced Australia at the top of the ICC World Test Championship table after their massive 109-run over Sri Lanka while India are now in the third place following their defeat in the Adelaide Test. South Africa now have 63.33 percentage points after 10 matches in the cycle and they are followed by Australia (60.71 PTC). India were leading the WTC table, heading into the Adelaide Test after their massive win in the Border-Gavaskar Trophy opener in Perth. India had 61.11 points heading into the pink ball Test in Adelaide which they



lost inside three days and they now stand third with 57.29 percentage points. The best possible way for India to make a third appearance in the WTC final next year would be to win

each of the three remaining Tests in Australia. Australia had 57.69 percentage points before the Adelaide Test which improved to 60.71 after their win.

But even as they grabbed the top spot with the contest ending on Sunday, Australia remained table-toppers only for one day as the Proteas surged ahead with their win in the second Test at St George's Park in Gqeberha. With the Border-Gavaskar series now tied at 1-1, Australia are in a strong position for a top-two finish. They will also tour Sri Lanka next year for an additional two Tests, meaning they could theoretically draw 2-2 with India and stay in contention for a place in the final. Both England and New Zealand have been penalised with three WTC points each for slow over-rate in the Christchurch Test, according to the ICC.

Mohammed Siraj is a good character, he gets the crowd up like Kohli: Josh Hazlewood

PTI ■ ADELAIDE

Mohammed Siraj's hot temper has become a topic of discussion but Australian quick Josh Hazlewood says the Indian pacer is a "good character" who fires up the crowd and is passionate about the game like Indian superstar Virat Kohli. Siraj was involved in two incidents where his temper flared during the pink-ball Test that India lost by 10 wickets. In Australia's first innings, Siraj threw the ball wide off the stumps near Marnus Labuschagne after the Australian batter pulled away from his stance, forcing the

bowler to halt his run-up. This occurred when a man holding a tower of beer cups walked into Labuschagne's line of sight. The next day, Siraj was involved in a verbal altercation with Travis Head soon after cleaning him up, drawing the ire of the Adelaide crowd which booed him. "He's just a good character and it's good to see sometimes," said Hazlewood, who shared the dressing room with both Siraj and Kohli during his time at the Royal Challengers Bangalore in the IPL. "I really enjoyed my time at RCB with Siraj. He's probably the leader of the attack there,

to a degree. He's another one who's a bit like Virat, very passionate, goes with the flow of the game, gets the crowd up. He has bowled serious spells in the IPL in the last few years," he added. Hazlewood, who missed the second Test due to a side strain, had dismissed Kohli for 5 in the first innings in the opening Test at Perth. It was the fourth time the Australian quick dismissed Kohli in red-ball cricket. "It just comes down to who executes well on the day, whether he leaves you well until the ball gets soft or someone else comes on the balls and doesn't ball quite well enough," he said.



"There's a lot of match-ups like that throughout international cricket. You know, we've played each other

so much. If you've been around for 10 years, you pretty much know each other inside out."

Hazlewood said the current crop of batters are much more eager to go after the ball as compared to the players who wielded the willow 10 years ago. "There are different players in different teams there are some players you really need to be patient with. There are others who come after you, so you don't have to be patient but they are dangerous because they can score. "I don't think betterers are probably as patient as they were 10 years ago. They like to feel the ball and we've seen the way England play and even players in the Indian team with (Rishabh) Pant and (Nitish) Reddy and guys like

that." India suffered a 10-wicket loss in the pink ball Test as Australia levelled the five match series 1-1 following their 295-run loss in the opener. The two sides now head to Brisbane for the third match, starting December 14. Australia have lost the last two matches in the Gabba and will look to get back to winning ways at the venue, where they have done well, traditionally. The last time they played at the Gabba, pacer Shamar Joseph ripped through Australia to fashion West Indies 8-run win in the day night fixture. "We always play pretty well in Brisbane (but) the last Test

was obviously pink-ball," Hazlewood said. "The pink-ball gets quite soft in Brisbane quite early on, with the wicket being quite hard, it doesn't have that that grass that we see here at Adelaide. "So we're back to the red-ball there, which suits us. We obviously haven't won recently up there, but it's a place we like to play as it suits our guys. "It's an experienced team, so we've all been there a lot of times. It's probably more just the time difference - the going from day-night and sleeping in - to your sleeping patterns, getting that adjusted and getting back on track."