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MESSI SCORES
THREE GOALS AS
ARGENTINA WINS
11 SPORTS

BOMB HOAXES A RED HERRING?

Multiple airlines get 19 bomb threats in 48 hours, eight FIRs filed, three arrests



RAJESH KUMAR ■ NEW DELHI

Multiple bomb threats continued to disrupt airline operations in the country for the third consecutive day. Eight flights, four of IndiGo, two of SpiceJet and one of Akasa Air, received bomb threats on Wednesday, leading to long delays and diversions. All the threats turned out to be hoaxes. However, there was panic amongst air passengers. It is not clear what triggered the sudden surge in hoax bomb threats since Monday. The threat message to IndiGo was the 19th confirmed instance of a bomb threat to an Indian carrier's flight over the past 48 hours. Worried over a trend of surge in hoax bomb threat messages, Delhi Police has registered seven FIRs at Indira Gandhi International Airport, in connection with bomb threats to several domestic and international flights in the last two days and launched a probe into the matter.

According to sources, top officials of Ministry of Home Affairs (MHA), Ministry of Civil Aviation (MoCA), Directorate General of Civil Aviation (DGCA), National Investigation Agency (NIA), Intelligence Bureau (IB) and Bureau of Civil Aviation Security (BCAS) on Wednesday met to discuss the bomb threats received by airlines. The authorities are also planning putting the hoax callers on 'no-fly list' and increasing the number of air marshals on flights. A unit of National Security Guard (NSG) commandos is deployed as air marshals mainly on international routes and some sensitive domestic routes. Sky marshals are armed plain clothes security officers who travel on passenger planes. Civil Aviation Minister K. Ram Mohan Naidu on Wednesday said the government is closely monitoring the situation due to bomb threats to flights and asserted that all necessary

measures are taken against such activities. Strongly condemning the recent bomb threats to Indian carriers, the minister said the Mumbai police have arrested a minor responsible for issuing bomb threats to three flights and that others responsible for disruptions will be identified and prosecuted. The law enforcement agencies are pursuing all cases actively, he said. In less than 24 hours, nine flights received bomb threats and the total count has climbed to at least 19 in three days. The threats have turned out to be hoaxes. On Wednesday, bomb threats were received by four IndiGo flights, two SpiceJet flights and one flight of Akasa Air. On Tuesday late at night, one flight each of Vistara and Air India Express had received the threats. IndiGo received bomb threats for three flights, including the Riyadh-Mumbai flight 6E 74 that was diverted to Muscat (Oman).

"The aircraft has been isolated, and all passengers have been safely disembarked," an airline spokesperson said in a statement. Another flight 6E 1011 from Mumbai to Singapore received a security-related alert and the flight landed at Singapore. Also, IndiGo's flight 6E 515, operating from Chennai to Lucknow, received a security-related alert. After landing at Lucknow, the aircraft was positioned at an isolated bay and all passengers have been safely disembarked. Meanwhile, late on Tuesday, a Mumbai-bound IndiGo flight from the national capital was diverted to Ahmedabad after a bomb threat. An Akasa Air flight enroute to Bengaluru returned to Delhi on Wednesday afternoon following a bomb threat. Earlier, three international flights, one of Air India and two of IndiGo, had received bomb threats on Monday, while another nine flights spanning across all major carriers had received threats on Tuesday. All the threats came via social media platforms, and eventually turned out to be fake. This prompted Ministry of Home Affairs (MHA) to seek a report from Ministry of Civil Aviation (MoCA), Central Industrial Security Force (CISF), Bureau of Civil Aviation Security, National Investigation Agency (NIA) and Intelligence Bureau (IB) on bomb threats that have been received recently, disrupting services.

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SC slams Punjab, Haryana for inaction on stubble burning



PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

Coming down heavily on Punjab and Haryana Governments over non-prosecution of stubble burning, the Supreme Court on Wednesday summoned the Chief Secretaries of the two States for explanation of no action against the violators. A Bench of Justices Abhay S Oka, Ahsanuddin Amanullah and Augustine

George Maish pointed out "complete insensitivity" on the part of both States, directing the Commission for Air Quality Management (CAQM) to take penal action against both the Government officials for the failure to take action against the violators. The Supreme Court called CAQM a toothless tiger that only passed directions without any implementation. "This is not a political

matter. If the Chief Secretary is acting at somebody's behest, we will issue summons against them as well. Next Wednesday (October 23) we are going to physically call for the chief secretary and explain everything. Nothing has been done, same is with the Punjab government. The attitude is of complete defiance," the Bench remarked, pointing out that both States have not taken any steps to implement the directions issued by the CAQM, in the national capital region (NCR) in June 2021, to stop stubble burning. Slamming the Punjab Government, the SC said not even a single prosecution has been carried out in the past three years and it was only tolerating breaches.

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AQI was 999 at Anand Vihar!

STAFF REPORTER ■ NEW DELHI

The air of the national Capital has turned extremely hazardous for the public as data by the AQICN revealed that the Anand Vihar recorded an Air Quality Index (AQI) of 999 at 8 pm on Wednesday. Across the city, alarming AQI levels were reported, Sector 8, Dwarka recorded an index of 876, Munda Ka was 465, R.K. Puram was 334, Rohini was 322 and Narela was at 305. According to the Central Pollution Control Board (CPCB), the National Capital recorded an average AQI of 230.

Omar Abdullah back in the hot seat

Jammu and Kashmir Chief Minister Omar Abdullah with Lok Sabha LoP Congress MP Rahul Gandhi, and party leader Priyanka Gandhi Vadra during the swearing-in ceremony of the Union Territory's new government, in Srinagar



PTI



Gold, silver soar to a new high

NEW DELHI: Ahead of Diwali, Gold prices on Wednesday touched a new all-time high of ₹78,900 per 10 grams in the national Capital, gaining ₹250 due to sustained buying by jewellers. The precious metal had closed at ₹78,650 per 10 grams in the previous session on Tuesday. Silver also followed the suit and surged ₹1,000 to ₹93,500 per kg due to fresh buying from industrial units and coin makers. On Tuesday, it had finished at ₹92,500 per kg. Meanwhile, gold of 99.5 per cent purity jumped ₹250 to hit a fresh record high of ₹78,500 per 10 grams against the previous close of ₹78,250 per 10 grams. The All India Sarafa Association attributed the rise in gold prices due to strong demand by local jewellers. Besides, the decline in equity markets also aided the rally in the yellow metal as investors moved towards the safe haven assets like gold. In futures trade on the Multi Commodity Exchange (MCX), gold contracts for December delivery climbed ₹268 or 0.35 per cent to ₹76,628 per 10 grams. Silver contracts for December delivery zoomed by ₹580 or 0.63 per cent to ₹92,203 per kg on the exchange. In the international markets, Comex gold futures rose 0.51 per cent to USD 2,692.50 per ounce. The yellow metal remains strongly supported by elevated geopolitical tensions and uncertainty surrounding the United States' Presidential elections. PNS

Jharkhand list leak stuns BJP



DEEPAK KUMAR JHA ■ NEW DELHI

In a major goof up that has not gone down well with the Bharatiya Janata Party's top leadership, a list of 35 probable candidates for the 81 member Jharkhand Assembly circulated on social media, and several news platforms, prompting the party to defer its 'official' announcement for declaration of the contestants. Prime Minister Narendra Modi and top BJP leaders were present in the party's Central Election Committee (CEC) meeting for Jharkhand held late on Wednesday evening. Sources said the meeting continued till late night but the PM left midway. Sources also said the PM told the members to reconsider some of the Assembly pockets since the party is banking high on the winnability of the

candidates to wrest power from the Jharkhand Mukti Morcha-Congress led government in the mineral rich state. Soon after the announcement of Assembly and By-Poll elections schedule, BJP's CEC convened a two-day marathon meeting on Tuesday and Wednesday evening at the party's Headquarters in national Capital to deliberate on the names of candidates for the upcoming Jharkhand and Maharashtra Assembly polls, as well as candidates for Assembly and Lok Sabha By-Polls. The meeting for Maharashtra on Wednesday was attended by several high-profile BJP leaders, including Prime Minister Narendra Modi, BJP National President JP Nadda, Union Home Ministers Amit Shah, Piyush Goel Bhupender Yadav, Ashwini Vaishnaw and Maharashtra deputy chief Minister Devendra Fadnis and respective state and CEC members. The meeting continued till the time of going to press. A day earlier CEC held a crucial meeting and discussed the names of candidates for the Jharkhand Assembly Elections. Sources said the PM left the meeting earlier and asked the CEC members to rethink on certain seats.

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Must talk about lack of trust: EAM



External Affairs Minister S Jaishankar with Pakistan Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif and other leaders during the 23rd meeting of the SCO Council of Heads of Government, in Islamabad, Pakistan, Wednesday

PTI ■ ISLAMABAD

Delivering a thinly veiled message to Pakistan from its soil, External Affairs Minister S Jaishankar on Wednesday said activities across borders characterised by the "three evils" of terrorism, extremism and separatism are unlikely to encourage trade, energy flows and connectivity. In his address at a conclave of Shanghai Cooperation Organisation (SCO) chaired by Pakistan Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif, Jaishankar asserted that trade and connectivity initiatives must recognise territorial integrity and sovereignty and it is essential to have an "honest conversation" on the lack of trust. Jaishankar spoke immediately after Sharif's inaugural address

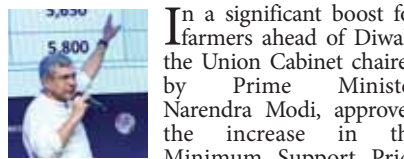
at the 23rd meeting of the Council of the Heads of Government (CHG) of the Member States of the SCO attended among others by Chinese Premier Li Qiang. His remarks came amid the lingering military standoff between Indian and Chinese troops in eastern Ladakh and concerns over China's increasing military muscle-flexing in the Indian Ocean and other strategic waters. "If activities across borders are characterised by terrorism, extremism and separatism, they are hardly likely to encourage trade, energy flows, connectivity and people-to-people exchanges in parallel," the external affairs minister said without naming Pakistan. Jaishankar arrived in Islamabad on Tuesday, becoming the first Indian foreign minister to visit

Pakistan in nearly a decade. He led the Indian delegation at the SCO-CHG summit in the Pakistani capital city. Ahead of the deliberations, PM Sharif shook hands with Jaishankar and warmly received him and other leaders of the SCO member nations at the Jinnah Convention Centre, the venue of the summit. In his remarks, the external affairs minister said cooperation must be based on mutual respect and sovereign equality and that the SCO member nations can benefit immensely if the grouping moves ahead collectively with mutual trust. He, especially stressed on adhering to SCO charter, highlighting its underlying essence of strengthening mutual trust, friendship and good neighbourliness. "It should recognise territorial integrity and sovereignty. It must be built on genuine partnerships, not unilateral agendas. It cannot progress if we cherry-pick global practices, especially of trade and transit," he said, in remarks seen as an indirect reference to China's assertive behaviour on several critical issues such as trade and connectivity. "But most of all, our endeavours will progress only when our commitment to the Charter remains firm. It is axiomatic that development and growth requires peace and stability.

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Cabinet increases MSP of six Rabi crops for 2025-26

RAJESH KUMAR ■ NEW DELHI



In a significant boost for farmers ahead of Diwali, the Union Cabinet chaired by Prime Minister Narendra Modi, approved the increase in the Minimum Support Price (MSP) of six mandated Rabi crops for 2025-26 marketing season in the range of ₹130-300 per quintal. The hike in MSP is significant ahead of elections in states like Maharashtra, Jharkhand and Delhi. Rabi marketing season begins from April 2025. The decision was announced by Union Minister Ashwini Vaishnaw. The MSP for wheat has been raised by ₹150 per quintal, moving from ₹2,275 to ₹2,425 for the 2025-26 Rabi marketing season. The ₹150 per quintal hike in wheat support price is significant ahead of elections in states like Maharashtra, Jharkhand and Delhi. Rabi marketing season begins from April 2025. Mustard saw a hike of ₹300, bringing its MSP to ₹5,950 per quintal, while the MSP for Gram/Chana was increased by ₹210 bringing the new rate to ₹5,650 per quintal. The higher MSP for mustard and chana is expected to provide farmers with better returns and encourage more cultivation of this oilseed, which is crucial for India's pulses and edible oil supply. Mustard is widely grown in states like Rajasthan, Haryana, and Madhya Pradesh while chana is widely consumed by a larger part of the population.

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Traffic jams on the Ring Road go round and round...

Severe congestions on routes along, Ashram, Sarai Kale Khan, Majnu Ka Tila, Hanuman Setu, Rajghat

BY SANJAY RAI

The traffic on Ring Road is anything but a smooth circle, if anything it resembles a 'jalebi' with two wheelers, autos and even rickshaws crossing lanes in a bid to get ahead in the bumper-to-bumper traffic on the circular road. From Majnu Ka Tila to Hanuman Temple these jams are making the drivers sweat in their vehicles. There is a severe traffic jam on both sides of this route from Majnu Ka Tila to Hanuman Setu. This adds to the problems of the drivers coming to Majnu Ka Tila from Rajghat side, and those coming to Hanuman Setu from Majnu Ka Tila side.

On Tuesdays, there is a severe traffic jam on both sides in front of Hanuman temple. All efforts to reduce this jam have failed. Recently, traffic signals have been installed at the end of Hanuman Mandir Setu by Delhi Traffic Police. But this has not resulted in much improvement right now. After the inauguration of Ashram Flyover, and Ashram Flyover Extension, people were expecting some relief from the jam, but due to the bottleneck near Sarai Kale Khan on the Ring Road, the mess remains. As soon as one descends from the Ashram flyover to the Ring Road, the traffic jams begin, due to which it takes more than half-an-hour for people to cover the



Ranjan Dimri/Pioneer

distance of about half a kilometre to Sarai Kale Khan. This is due to the ongoing construction work of the rapid rail at Sarai Kale Khan. Meanwhile, traffic jams continue on six roads of outer Delhi. Even emergency vehicles, ambulances and fire engines also get stuck in this jam. At the same time, due to the bottle neck near Haiderpur Badli Mod on Outer Ring Road, the traffic of six-lanes gets reduced to four lanes. The jam here is due to the narrow railway bridge. Vehicles coming without stopping from the elevated road from Pitampura get stuck in traffic as soon as they reach here. Several meetings have also been

held between the Public Works Department (PWD) and Railways. According to PWD sources the width of this bridge can be increased soon if mutual consent is reached. Due to the construction work of Outer Ring Road Metro, there are traffic jams from Prashant Vihar to Rohini Jail Mod. It takes about 30 to 40 minutes to cover three kilometres in, whereas earlier it used to take five to seven minutes. Vehicles coming from KN Katju route are stuck in traffic jams as soon as they reach the outer ring road. E-rickshaws and other vehicles parked haphazardly below Rithala metro station, add to the mess.

Instead of stressing on report card, Shinde should talk about his rate card: Patole

T N RAGHUNATHA ■ MUMBAI

Dismissing the BJP-led Mahayuti government's claims of development in the past two years as "false and fabricated", the Opposition Congress said here on Wednesday that it was laughable for chief minister Eknath Shinde to talk about the "report card" when he should be talking about his government's "rate card".

Commission of India (ECI) scheduled the State Assembly polls for November 20, Maharashtra Congress chief Nana Patole accused the MahaYuti government of "plundering" the state at the behest of Prime Minister Narendra Modi and Union Home Minister Amit Shah, who had allegedly turned to state into an ATM. "It's laughable for Chief Minister Eknath Shinde to talk about his government's report

card, when he should be talking about a 'rate card,' Patole said. Patole charged that Modi and Shah "diverted" large projects that were intended for Maharashtra, to Gujarat, while Shinde, deputy chief ministers Devendra Fadnis and Ajit Pawar remained silent. "As industries moved to other states, Maharashtra has seen a surge in unemployment, the state government has not only let businesses move to Gujarat



but it has also brought drugs from the neighbouring state, destroying the youth in our state," Patole said. "Important land parcels in Mumbai have been handed

over to their beloved industrialists, and tenders after tenders have been floated to benefit contractors, all while the government reaped profits quietly for the past two years," the state Congress president said. Rubbishing the "claims of development in the last two years" made by Shinde, Patole said that Maharashtra had fallen behind other states in terms of development under Eknath Shinde's leadership, "which came to power through con-

spiracies, dishonesty, and unconstitutional methods". "During the Congress rule, Maharashtra was number one in all aspects, but under Fadnis and Shinde, the state has deteriorated. The state of Maharashtra has been completely ruined by the agents of Gujarat over the past two years," Patole claimed. Patole said that after the Maha Vikas Aghadi government came to power in 2019, it successfully handled the COVID-

19 pandemic, and its work was recognized not just across the country but globally. "In BJP-ruled states like Gujarat and Uttar Pradesh, piles of dead bodies were seen during the pandemic. That being the case, the BJP-led MahaYuti government should refrain from patting themselves on the back. Their identity is solely based on being 'traitors' and as the 'Khoke' (corruption tainted) government," he said

School girl gang-raped, bathed in acid in Bengal

SAUGAR SENGUPTA ■ KOLKATA

The cold horror of RG Kar Medical College and Hospital rape and murder case returned on Wednesday, this time at Krishnagar in Nadia district where a teenage girl was allegedly gang-raped and literally bathed in acid before her body being dumped barely a few hundred metres of the city offices of the District Magistrate and the Superintendent of Police, triggering fresh round of protests. The incident takes place little more than two months of RG Kar rape and murder of an on-duty lady doctor and within a fortnight of Joy nagar rape and murder case of a 10-

year-old school girl. The body of the 18-year-old victim was found inside a Laxmi Puja pandal in the wee hours of Wednesday, family members said adding her face had melted as acid was poured on her apparently to hamper identification. Rahul Basu the boy friend of the girl has been arrested, police said. "We have lodged an FIR and arrested the alleged boy friend of the victim based upon the complaints of the family members and two other persons have also been detained for questioning," district SP Amarnath K said adding "investigation is on to discover other information." "My granddaughter went missing in the evening of



Tuesday and when she did not return even till 10 pm the family went out searching for her... We tried to contact her boyfriend, Rahul several times but found his actions and responses suspicious. ... and in the morning some neighbours discovered her body from near a Laxmi Puja pan-

dal," the maternal grandfather of the victim said adding she was a student of Class XI. Meanwhile, even as political opposition gathered outside the Kotwali Police Station and the morgue demanding a CBI investigation into the case, State BJP president and Union Minister Sukanta Majumdar on Wednesday demanded Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee's resignation saying, "A woman Chief Minister who cannot save the lives and honour of women and continuously remains on the denial mode has no business continuing on her post ... when this girl was being raped and murdered on Tuesday she was playing Dandia and dancing with her party MPs at

Durga Puja Carnival in Kolkata ... she should resign immediately," Majumdar said. Drawing a comparison between Roman emperors Nero the Chief Minister Bengal Governor CV Ananda Bose said "Nero played the fiddle when Rome was burning ... is history repeating itself?" CPI(M) central committee member Sujun Chakrabarty said "the repeated incidents of rape and murder despite the ongoing RG Kar movement when the police should be on an ultra high alert mode only shows that the entire police administration of this State has broken down ... it is for the police minister Mamata Banerjee to explain."

No necessity of seeking NOC of any kind by power discoms: DDA

STAFF REPORTER ■ NEW DELHI

The Delhi Development Authority on Wednesday said that there shall be no necessity of seeking any No Objection Certificate (NOC) of any kind from the authority by the power discoms, stating they may provide new or renew old connections at their own level suo moto. In an official order, the DDA said, "In this regard, in supersession of all previous orders issued, it is hereby clarified that DISCOMS may issue fresh electricity connections suo-moto for constructions within the notified PM-UDAY colonies, lal dora and extended lal dora areas by referring to the list of such areas." It

added that for vacant patches of private land completely encircled by PM-UDAY colonies and not situated at the periphery of the boundary of PM-UDAY colonies, the DISCOMS may issue fresh electricity connections suo-moto. "Cases where pre-existing permanent electricity connections were surrendered in lieu of reconstruction, renovation or change of ownership, the DISCOMS may issue fresh electricity connections suo-moto," it read. It also stated that the discoms may follow their existing protocol prior to June 26, 2023 in issuing fresh electricity connections in respect of MCD regularized colonies, plots allotted under 20 points programme

and industry/godown situated in non-conforming areas regularized by GNCTD prior to issuance of notification of land pooling regulations. It will also in regards to JJ clusters where land rights have been given by DDA or any other government agency prior to issuance of notification of land pooling regulations, government establishments and cases where vertical and horizontal extensions were added to the existing construction. "Hence, in all the above instances, the DISCOMS may provide new/ renew old connections at their own level suo moto and there shall be no necessity of seeking any clarification/ NOC of any kind from DDA," it said.

Stampede like situation erupts in Sadar Bazar due to heavy footfall of shoppers

STAFF REPORTER ■ NEW DELHI

A stampede-like situation erupted in the busy Sadar Bazar recently in Delhi due to a heavy footfall of shoppers ahead of Diwali festivities, showed a purported video of the incident that surfaced on social media on Wednesday. In the video, a large group was seen jostling for space in the busy market as people tried to find a way through the dense crowd while balancing bags on their heads. Street vendors also obstructed the road leaving to a narrow path for people. It is unclear when the video was originally recorded. Police said they have deployed teams in the market to avoid any untoward incident and maintain law and order. "Sadar Bazar, during festival



seasons, faces high footfall. We are planning to manage the crowd and soon meetings will be done with the district magistrate, market association and officials of the MCD for the crowd planning," said a senior officer. Another police officer said efforts are being taken to restrict the entry of heavy load vehicles in the area that causes jam and lead to con-



gestion. There was no immediate reaction on the incident from the Municipal Corporation of Delhi, which is responsible for removing encroachments from public property. Meanwhile, a market association in Sadar Bazar said it is planning to write a letter to the Delhi Police for proper management.

Kejriwal launches Jan Sampark Abhiyan ahead of Delhi elections

STAFF REPORTER ■ NEW DELHI

Ahead of Delhi elections, slated to be held early next year, AAP Convenor Arvind Kejriwal on Wednesday launched 'Jan Sampark Abhiyan' and penned a letter to the public in which he claimed that his arrest in the alleged excise policy linked money laundering scam is politically motivated and it is the BJP's larger plan to derail state's progress. "The letter is a part of a statewide public outreach campaign, which will continue until October 29, and aimed at AAP volunteers visiting households across the city, distributing the letter to ensure that all citizens receive answers to their concerns. Addressing party workers at the launch, Kejriwal said, "People have been asking why I was arrested and what led to it. I've been answering these questions in person, but to reach every



Delhi, I've written a letter addressing their questions. AAP workers will distribute this letter door-to-door until October 29, ensuring that everyone receives the answers they seek." "Everyone knows that I have never engaged in corruption. So why was I arrested? Because the work we are doing for Delhi, the facilities we are providing to you,

have threatened their political dominance. They don't want us to keep delivering services that have never been seen before in India," the letter read. He claimed that the BJP's fear of AAP's growing influence on a national level was a key driver behind his arrest. Attacking the Lieutenant Governor Vinai Kumar Saxena, the former Chief

Minister said, "For two years, the LG held up the Mohalla Clinic file. It was only after intense pressure, including a 10-day sit-in protest by me and my cabinet colleagues, Manish Sisodia, Satyendar Jain and Gopal Rai that we were able to move forward." He warned that if the BJP comes to power, Delhi could return to a time of long power cuts, crumbling public services, and deteriorating infrastructure. "We didn't go to jail for ourselves. If we hadn't worked for you—if we hadn't provided free services—none of us would have been arrested," Kejriwal alleged. "Only you can protect the work in Delhi and the facilities you are receiving through the power of your vote. I trust that together, we will defeat every conspiracy by BJP to stop the work in the upcoming assembly elections with the power of your vote," the

Bomb hoaxes a red herring?

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The issue of multiple hoax threat messages to various airlines came up before a parliamentary committee on Transport, Tourism and Culture where Civil Aviation Secretary Vumlungmang Vualnam cited the sensitivity of information due to the ongoing probe into the matter to decline to share more details. Notably, most bomb threats turn out to be fake, the security checks, which often take a few hours, result in disruptions like delays and even rescheduling of the remainder of the flight in some cases, which hit the airlines financially. On getting a threat like this airports/aircraft, passengers are off-loaded from the plane along with cabin baggage, check-in baggage and cargo, and they are all screened again. Engineering and security teams also search the plane before it is cleared for flying again. In the latest incident, a Delhi-bound IndiGo aircraft from Mumbai was diverted to Ahmedabad after receiving a bomb threat, which later turned out to be a hoax. The aircraft was isolated, and all passengers were safely disembarked. After a thorough checking, nothing suspicious was found and the flight took-off for Delhi on Wednesday morning. Soon after the flight took-off from Mumbai on Tuesday night, an unidentified person, through a tweet, claimed a bomb had been placed in the aircraft which was carrying nearly 200 passengers and crew, an official from the Sardar Vallabhbhai Patel International Airport here said. After being alerted by

the Mumbai ATC, the pilots decided to make an emergency landing at Ahmedabad airport, which was the closest airport when the flight was en-route to Delhi, said the official. "After landing here during midnight, the aircraft, carrying nearly 200 passengers and crew, was thoroughly checked by the security agencies overnight. However, nothing suspicious was found. The flight took-off for Delhi at around 8 am today after getting a green signal from the security personnel," the official said. In a statement, IndiGo said flight 6E 651, operating from Mumbai to Delhi, was redirected to Ahmedabad due to a "security-related alert". In another incident, no bomb was found aboard an Air India Express plane which landed in Singapore more than an hour after its scheduled arrival time. A Bengaluru-bound Akasa Air flight with more than 180 people on board returned to the National Capital on Wednesday afternoon following a bomb threat. Sources said the flight QP1335 landed safely at the Delhi airport. Meanwhile the Canadian Air Force aircraft is ferrying 191 stranded passengers of an Air India flight from Iqaluit airport, landed safely in Chicago. Intelligence sources said most of the social media accounts that issued the hoax bomb threats to airlines were found to be operating from outside the country and were immediately suspended. Cyber security agencies are also on alert and are tracking social media accounts that are linked to these false threats.

Must talk about lack...

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And as the Charter spelt out, this means being firm and uncompromising in countering the "three evils." Jaishankar said there is a need to introspect if "good neighbourliness" is missing somewhere and there is a lack of trust. "If we fast-forward from the inception of the charter to the situation today, these goals and these tasks are even more crucial. It is, therefore, essential that we have an honest conversation," he said. "If trust is lacking or cooperation inadequate, if friendship has fallen short and good neighbourliness is missing somewhere, there are surely reasons to introspect and causes to address," he said. "Equally, it is only when we reaffirm our commitment most sincerely to the Charter that we

can fully realise the benefits of cooperation and integration that it envisages," he added. Jaishankar said the SCO's objective was to strengthen mutual trust, friendship and good neighbourliness. "It is to develop multifaceted cooperation, especially of a regional nature. It is to be a positive force in terms of balanced growth, integration and conflict prevention," he said. "The Charter was equally clear what the key challenges were. And these were primarily three, that the SCO was committed to combating: one, terrorism; two, separatism; and three, extremism," he said. Jaishankar also described the challenge of debt as a serious concern. The external affairs minister, delving into global issues, said the global institutions need to keep pace with the changes and underlined the need for

'reformed multilateralism'. He also emphasised the need for comprehensive reform of the UN Security Council, both in the permanent and non-permanent categories, to make the global body more representative, inclusive, transparent and efficient. "The SCO must be in the lead of advocating such change, not hold back on a matter of such importance," he said. Jaishankar also referred to various global challenges. "We meet at a difficult time in world affairs. Two major conflicts are underway, each with its own global repercussions. The Covid pandemic has left many in the developing world deeply devastated," he said. "Disruptions of various kinds - ranging from extreme climate events to supply chain uncertainties and financial volatility - are impacting growth and development," he said.

Jharkhand list leak stuns BJP

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Party's national organization general secretary B.L. Santhosh, K. Laxman, Satyanarayan Jatiya, Iqbal Singh Lalpura, Sudha Yadav, Sarbananda Sonowal, and Vani Tripathi, among other CEC members were present. Jharkhand in-charge and Union Minister Shivraj Singh Chouhan, Jharkhand co-in-charge and Assam Chief Minister Himanta Biswa Sarma, Jharkhand BJP in-charge Laxmikant Vajpayee, Jharkhand BJP president Babul Marandi, former Jharkhand Chief Ministers Champai Soren and Arjun Munda, Union Minister Annpurna Devi,

and Minister of State for Defense Sanjay Seth, among other senior leaders of the Jharkhand BJP Core Group, also attended the meeting. Sources said CEC discussed the names of candidates for around 50 assembly seats in Jharkhand. The first list is likely to include more than 35 candidates. The Election Commission announced the dates for the Maharashtra and Jharkhand Assembly Elections on Tuesday. Maharashtra will go to polls in a single phase on November 20, while Jharkhand will have a two-phase election on November 13 and 20, with the results being declared on November 23.

CEO of online clothing website arrested for financial fraud

STAFF REPORTER ■ NEW DELHI

The Delhi Police arrested a 55-year-old Chief Executive Officer (CEO) and founder member of an online clothing website, in financial fraud case, which was covered by the Forbes magazine as the top five startups to watch out for. According to the police on Wednesday, the accused has been identified as Vivek Gaur, who is a resident of Gurugram in Haryana. "The above accused was involved in many an incident of financial fraud in Delhi and other states. He was also wanted in FIR under section 174A of IPC at RK Puram police station," a senior police officer said. He ran a company called YEPME

SC slams Punjab, Haryana...

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"Why are you shy of prosecuting people? This is not a political matter. This is a matter of implementation of statutory directions of the commission. No political considerations will apply. There is defiance on your part. You are encouraging people to commit breaches. You are only imposing nominal fines. ISRO (Indian Space Research Organisation) is telling you the location of the stubble burning and you say fire location is not found," the Bench said. Stubble burning is a major contributor to the rising pollution levels in the National Capital Region. Punjab Advocate General Gurminder Singh submitted it was difficult to implement the directions on the ground

and the authorities made "red entries" in the revenue records of the farmers who caused fires at farms. The SC also took exception to a purported incorrect statement of the Punjab government of having submitted a proposal to the Central government for the grant of funds to provide a tractor along with driver and fuel to small farmers. The Bench said no endeavour has been made by the Punjab Government to seek funds from the Centre for ensuring tractors to farmers. On the CAQM, the Supreme Court called it a toothless tiger that only passed directions without any implementation. The Bench noted the Union government was at fault for not choosing renowned experts in the field of pollution as members of

CAQM. "We have great respect for the members and their academic qualifications but they are not qualified or experts in the field of air pollution," the Bench said. Additional Solicitor General Aishwarya Bhati said that one of the members had been a chairperson of the Madhya Pradesh Pollution Control Board for six years. But the Bench remarked, "Heading Pollution Control Board of states in no qualification. You know how pollution control boards function." The judges subsequently suggested that the CAQM should engage with some expert agency to address the issue of air pollution. Slamming the Commission for Air Quality Management for failing to control instances of stubble burning

in NCR and adjoining areas, the SC had said it had taken no efforts to implement its direction to prevent such incidents. The top court had wondered how the sub-committee on safeguarding and enforcement to be constituted by CAQM would function owing to the lack of representation from the pollution control boards of Delhi, Punjab, Haryana, Rajasthan and Uttar Pradesh due to vacancies. The Supreme Court directed the five NCR states to fill up the vacant posts urgently, preferably before April 30, 2025. The Court had directed the CAQM chairperson to file an affidavit explaining the steps to curb air pollution, often attributed to the burning of paddy straw in states adjoining the national capital.

Several factors contributed to the MSP hike, including a moderation in inflation, the availability of adequate wheat stocks, and softening global prices. Last year, the government had raised the wheat MSP by 7.05 per cent, the largest increase since 2014-15, to incentivise farmers to boost output. The Commission for Agricultural Costs & Prices (CACP) recommends MSP for 22 crops before the sowing period each year. There are 14 Kharif crops and seven Rabi crops covered under MSP. The minister said the support price for wheat has been increased to ₹2,425 per quintal for 2025-26, from ₹2,275 per quintal in the previous year. The support price for safflower was increased by ₹140 to ₹5,940 per quintal from ₹5,800 per quintal in the previous

year. In case of pulses, support price for lentil (Masur) increased by ₹275 to ₹6,700 per quintal, while that for gram MSP raised by ₹210 to ₹5,650 per quintal for the 2025-26 marketing season. Support price for barley increased by ₹130 to ₹1,980 per quintal for 2025-26 Rabi marketing season, from ₹1,850 per quintal in the previous year. The increase in Rabi crops MSP is in line with the Union Budget 2018-19 announcement of fixing the MSP at a level of at least 1.5 times the All-India weighted average cost of production. The expected margin over the All-India weighted average cost of production is 105 per cent for wheat, followed by 98 per cent for rapeseed & mustard; 89 per cent for lentil; 60 per cent for gram; 60 per cent for barley; and 50 per cent for safflower.

Cabinet approves increased...

From page 1

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Multiple FIRs registered in connection with bomb threats to flights, probe on

STAFF REPORTER ■ NEW DELHI

Delhi Police has registered multiple FIRs in connection with bomb threats to several domestic and international flights in the last two days and launched a probe into the matter.

According to the police on Wednesday, a total of eight FIRs were registered at the Indira Gandhi International (IGI) Airport police station as different flights received the threats through a social media handle in the last two days.

Deputy Commissioner of Police (DCP) Usha Ragnani said, "In October, the IGI Airport Police responded to eight incidents involving

reported bomb threats. After thorough verifications and inspection, all threats were confirmed to be hoaxes." She said that the police have initiated legal action for those who are responsible for creating chaos by sending such threats. "Legal action has been initiated against those responsible for these false alarms to ensure strict measures against misuse and to maintain the safety and security of passengers and airport operations," Ragnani said.

A total of six flights of three Indian carriers—Akasa Air, Air India Express, and IndiGo—were affected on Wednesday after they received threats, which later turned out

to be hoaxes.

Among the flights that received such threats, a Bengaluru-bound Akasa Air flight with more than 180 people on board returned to the national capital following a bomb threat. "Akasa Air flight QP 1335, operating from Delhi to Bengaluru on October 16, 2024, received a security alert. The Emergency Response teams closely monitored the situation and recommended diverting the flight back to Delhi. The captain followed all emergency protocols to ensure a safe landing at IGI Airport around 2 PM," said an Akasa Air spokesperson.

However, the police confirmed that the threats were a hoax.



The DCP said, "Following standard security protocols, a thorough inspection was conducted, and no suspicious items were found."

An FIR has been registered under sections 217 (False information, with intent to cause public servant to use his law-

ful power to the injury of another person) and 351(4) (Criminal intimidation through anonymous communication) of the BNS, as well as section 3(1)(d) of The Suppression of Unlawful Acts Against Safety of Civil Aviation Act, 1982, in connection with

the bomb threat concerning Akasa Air flight. "A detailed investigation is currently underway," the DCP stated. She added that additionally, after coordination with the concerned social media platform, all accounts responsible for spreading these false threats have been suspended to prevent further misuse and ensure public safety.

On Tuesday, seven flights, including one bound for the United States, received bomb-threat messages through a social media handle, prompting security agencies to undertake specific counter-terrorist drills at various airports.

This including an Air India Express flight from Jaipur to

Bengaluru via Ayodhya (IX765), a SpiceJet flight from Darbhanga to Mumbai (SG116), an Akasa Air flight from Bagdogra to Bengaluru (QP 1373), an Air India flight from Delhi to Chicago (AI 127), an Indigo flight from Dammam (Saudi Arabia) to Lucknow (6E 98), an Alliance Air Amritsar-Dehradun-Delhi flight (9I 650) and an Air India Express flight (IX 684) from Madurai to Singapore. In Canada - where the Air India flight to Chicago had landed at Iqaluit airport as a precautionary measure - the Royal Canadian Mounted Police said it was investigating the threat.

On Monday, three international flights that took off from

Mumbai were diverted or delayed after an X (formerly Twitter) handle posted threats. Police have detained a teenager in connection with this.

In the past two days, nearly a dozen Indian flights, including some international flights, received bomb threats but nothing suspicious was found in the planes. Police also said the number of FIRs may increase.

Meanwhile, the issue of multiple hoax threats to various airlines came up before a parliamentary committee on Wednesday as the civil aviation secretary told parliamentarians that the accused are being identified and action will be taken against them.

SC asks LG to file personal affidavit by October 22 on felling of trees in Ridge area

STAFF REPORTER ■ NEW DELHI

The Supreme Court on Wednesday directed the Lieutenant Governor (LG) Vinai Kumar Saxena, who also holds the office of the Delhi Development Authority (DDA) chairperson, to file his personal affidavit by October 22 on issues concerning alleged felling of trees in the Delhi Ridge area.

A bench of Chief Justice D Y Chandrachud and Justices J B Pardiwala and Manoj Misra was hearing a contempt case against the DDA and others over the alleged felling of trees in the area. After going through the materials on record, the top court noted an ambiguity on certain aspects. It wanted clarity on whether there was any discussion or intimation to the DDA chairperson on the top court's permission for felling trees during his site visit on February 3. "In the event of the answer to the one above being positive, what steps, if any, were taken to ensure that the permission of this court was taken," it said.



The Supreme Court further said if the answer was in the negative, when did DDA chairperson learn of the permission required. It noted the actual felling of trees had allegedly commenced on February 16 even before a plea was moved before the top court and eventually dismissed. The Court will further be informed about the steps taken for the restoration -- suggested in its orders -- of the ecological damage. "What steps have been taken against the officers for the willful

suppression before this court of the fact that the felling of trees took place before the application was filed," it added.

The Supreme Court directed the LG to further inform if any disciplinary proceedings and criminal action were initiated against the erring persons. The bench posted the case for hearing on October 22 and said that the affidavit be filed on or before the next date of hearing.

The contempt case against DDA vice-chairperson Subhashish Panda and others over the alleged felling of trees

in the Ridge area was being heard by a bench headed by the CJ. A bench of Justices Abhay S Oka and Ujjal Bhuyan had previously heard the matter.

The earlier bench had issued a criminal contempt notice against Panda for allegedly allowing large-scale felling of trees in the southern Ridge's Satbari area for the construction of a road from Chatterpur to the South Asian University. It had expressed displeasure over a misleading affidavit filed by the vice-chairperson. On July 24, another bench of Justices B R Gavai, P K Mishra and K V Viswanathan took note of two separate contempt proceedings pending before different benches over the felling of trees in Delhi's Ridge area and said it believes in "judicial propriety" and does not want any conflicting orders to be passed.

Two different benches were hearing related but separate aspects of the contempt case against the DDA reportedly leading to a potential judicial standoff and possibility of conflicting orders.

NDMC taking measures to control air pollution with all manpower, machinery at war footing

STAFF REPORTER ■ NEW DELHI

Aiming to reduce pollutants in the air in its area, New Delhi Municipal Council (NDMC) is taking intensive measures to control "Air Pollution" in New Delhi with all manpower and machinery at war-footing level around the clock.

In view to curb the air pollution, NDMC has taken several initiatives and violators are fined. Besides fines, NDMC has taken several steps including control of dust emissions by mechanical road sweepers (MRS), officials said here on Wednesday.

The civic body has deployed six MRS in two shifts with GPS tracking for wet sweeping. The average sweeping length per day is 227 Km by the MRS. All avenue roads are mechanically cleaned daily or on alternate days.

There is no unpaved area in NDMC the central verges and side berms are already green paved. A target of more than 10,000 saplings and three lakh shrubs were planted successfully this year.



All the centre verge of the roads has already been converted into the green belt and the gaps arise which have been filled up from time to time.

There are no potholes on the roads under the jurisdiction of NDMC if any found the restoration is to be made simultaneously.

Moreover, eight mobile Anti-Smog Guns are running on the NDMC roads for reducing the dust particles in the air and environment in the New Delhi area.

The NDMC has also deployed

20 water tanker/trolley of 5,000 Ltr. to 10,000 Ltr. the capacity of water for sprinkling on trees and shrubs along the main roads using STP-treated water to remove dust.

Construction and Demolition (C&D) waste in the NDMC area is collected on a daily basis and is being sent to the dumping ground at Okhla C & D waste Recycling Plant.

In the NDMC area there are 14 designated sites for collection of C&D waste of large capacity. There is no vacant

plot in the NDMC area for the dumping of C&D waste/malba in the NDMC area.

A 14 member team of field officers (Health, Horticulture & Civil departments) have been deployed, for the whole NDMC area (including one team for the night) which reports every day.

In addition, 14 teams of the Health Department are deployed circle-wise, day time carrying out the inspection on account of waste burning.

As regards vehicular emission control, to promote the E-Vehicle in its area as per National Mobility Program 100 Electric Vehicle Public Charging Stations have been installed and commissioned in the NDMC area.

Also, on a daily basis in the special cleanliness drive, Swachhta Teams are being not only sweeping the pavement and roads by brooms but also washing by water to wash the dust or other air pollution elements. This initiative is very important for reducing the air pollution in the NDMC area.

AAP, BJP spar over scrapping of NOCs to power connections in unauthorised colonies

STAFF REPORTER ■ NEW DELHI

The Aam Aadmi Party (AAP) and the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) Tuesday sparred over the issue of scrapping of 'no objection certification' (NOC) to power connections in unauthorised colonies. Chief Minister Atishi on Wednesday announced the scrapping of requirement of "No Objection Certificate" (NOC) by Delhi Development Authority for getting electricity connections in unauthorised colonies.

She further accused the BJP for making it difficult for residents of these colonies to get electricity connections. While the Delhi BJP hit back at the AAP government saying the Lieutenant Governor has already done away with the NOC provisions and alleged that the AAP government and their ministers are spreading lies to mislead the people.

The BJP further accused her of being a 'Credit Chor' claiming that she can go to any extent to take credit for oth-



ers' work and mislead the public by lying.

Speaking about the decision, Atishi said, "I am pleased to announce that the Delhi government has decided that no NOC will be required for installing electricity meters in 1,731 unauthorised colonies. Anyone residing in these colonies can apply for an electricity meter, and they will receive a connection within 15 days, as stipulated by the DISCOMs."

She stated that the decision comes in the backdrop where she had received complaints about people being forced to wander and pay bribes due to



the mandatory NOC requirement by BJP-governed DDA. She said, "Despite the BJP's DDA attempting to trouble the residents of unauthorised colonies, all such attempts will be thwarted under the leadership of Arvind Kejriwal."

"Residents from various areas like Swaroop Vihar Extension, West Kamal Vihar, Mohan Garden, Vipin Garden, and Nawada Extension came to me as the Energy Minister and Chief Minister, sharing their grievances," Atishi said, adding that no matter how much the BJP's DDA tries to harass the residents of unau-

thorized colonies, the Delhi government will not allow them to suffer.

"Orders have been issued to the electricity companies to ensure that no NOC is needed for installing meters in these colonies," she stated.

Meanwhile, South Delhi MP Ramvir Singh Bidhuri has accused Atishi of telling a blatant lie and said that the DDA has already removed the condition of NOC for electricity connection in unauthorised colonies of Delhi. Bidhuri said that the order issued by DDA can only be withdrawn by DDA. Leader of the Opposition in the Delhi Assembly Vijendra Gupta called Atishi's announcement the height of dishonesty.

"Atishi is trying to take credit for the announcement made by the Lieutenant Governor to remove the NOC requirement for new electricity connections in unauthorised colonies. The Lieutenant Governor had already issued this order on October 1, and now, 15 days later, Atishi is falsely attempt-

ing to take credit for the same decision, claiming it benefits the public," he alleged.

Delhi BJP President Virendra Sachdeva said that Atishi proved that both her government and the AAP are "machines for churning lies." He claimed that neither the DDA nor the MCD had ever imposed the NOC condition. "Instead, the requirement came from the power DISCOMs under the Kejriwal government. For years, power DISCOMs requested NOCs from the MCD for urbanized areas, and by mid-last year, they started demanding NOCs from the DDA for unauthorised colonies and urban villages, worsening the issue," Sachdeva claimed.

Northeast Delhi MP Manoj Tiwari alleged that Atishi shamelessly lied and called her claims a complete fabrication aimed at misleading the public. "This decision was publicly acknowledged on October 6 in Burari, where residents expressed their gratitude through the "THANK YOU MODIJI" program," he stated.

Jitendra Singh asks DU students to act as torchbearers, lead India's development in 2047

STAFF REPORTER ■ NEW DELHI

Union Minister Jitendra Singh on Wednesday asked students of the Delhi University to act as "torchbearers" to lead a developed India in 2047. The reforms brought in the last 10 years have given self-confidence to Indian youth and raised their esteem globally, he said.

Addressing students, the minister called them "torchbearers of 2047 India" and exhorted them to lead the "Viksit Bharat 2047", envisioned by Prime Minister Narendra Modi, according to an official statement. Singh, the Minister of State for Personnel, was addressing a certificate distribution and felicitation of young minds at Daulat Ram College here.

He shared with the audience information about the various steps taken by the government in the last 10 years benefiting the youth and students. "It has been an amazing journey as India comes a long way from fragile five



before 2014 to become top five," Singh said.

Within 100 days of taking charge, this government-sanctioned infrastructure projects worth Rs 15 lakh crore, and decided to develop 12 industrial nodes in which 40 lakh youths will be employed, said the statement issued by the personnel ministry.

The minister recalled the initiative of self-certification by the prime minister a few months after taking charge, saying, "Youths (now) no longer have to go to any gazetted officer for certification of documents" which

shows the kind of faith this government posed on the youth.

"There had been allegations that despite getting good marks in written examination, government service aspirants were getting subpar marks in the interview," he said.

To tackle this, the government came up with a solution. "In the Group C service and below of the government of India, the provision for interview was done away with," he was quoted as saying in the statement.

Speaking about start-ups, the minister said, "Our government incubated and accelerated this concept in the country. There were only 350-375 start-ups before 2014, which have now reached around 3.75 lakh. We are now third in the world in terms of start-ups."

If India wants to become developed by 2047, it has to have global benchmarks and the country has started going in that direction rapidly, he added.

Complete construction of upcoming hospitals within financial year: HC tells city Government

STAFF REPORTER ■ NEW DELHI

The Delhi High Court has directed the Delhi government to complete the construction of three of its upcoming hospitals within the ongoing financial year.

The court, in an order passed on October 15, asked authorities to forthwith provide necessary financial sanctions for finishing the three hospitals - that are 96 per cent ready - as well as for the recruitment of staff there.

Observing that not completing the projects in a timely manner might result in wasting the expenditure already incurred, the court also asked the Delhi government about its proposal to complete the other 'brown field' and 'green field' hospital projects that are in the range of 74-87 per cent completion.

"We direct GNCTD to ensure that Guru Gobind Singh Hospital, Sanjay Gandhi



Memorial Hospital and Acharya Shree Bhikshu Govt. Hospital are completed within the current financial year and the posts for the aforementioned hospitals are created within the next 15 days," a bench of Chief Justice Manmohan and Justice Manmeet P S Arora said.

"The Finance Department of GNCTD will ensure that all necessary financial sanctions for giving effect to the aforesaid directions as regards posts and completion of construction are issued, without any delay.

GNCTD will ensure that steps for appointments to these sanctioned posts are initiated and made within this financial year," it said.

The court passed the order while dealing with a suo motu case it initiated in 2017 over the alleged lack of critical care in government hospitals here.

In a status report filed in the case earlier, the Delhi government said it was undertaking the construction of 11 'green field' and 13 'brown field' hospitals in the national capital which would be run under different models, such as either as a government or private hospital or in a PPP mode.

In the order, the court noted that while an affidavit by the Delhi government claimed that the current budget allocation was not adequate for completing the projects, the Health Minister's counsel assured that he was willing to take steps for raising and allocating funds.

Sulabh International marks UN World Food Day

STAFF REPORTER ■ NEW DELHI

To mark the UN World Food Day Sulabh International, India's premier social service organisation emphasized the importance of diversity, nutrition, affordability, accessibility, and food safety.

This event gave an opportunity to women farmers from across India who have benefited from Sulabh's food program, offering them a platform to showcase their produce.

Union Minister of State for Agriculture and Farmers' Affairs Ram Nath Thakur while addressing World Food Day programme informed that provision of Rs. one lakh crore made for creating storage and cold storage facilities to ensure proper storage of foods in the country.

Thakur said that the Prime Minister Narendra Modi has given special attention towards the development of agriculture sector and such a huge amount has been allocated in this year



budget to boost storage of all kinds of agricultural produce including vegetables and fruits. There is a vast possibility of work in this sector," he added.

Thakur further stressed the need of intensive research to improve soil conditions to ensure high yields and quality production.

With special reference to north Bihar, Thakur stressed the need to maximise the uses of availability of ponds in seven districts suitable for Makhana and fish farming.

Expressing his views the executive Mayor of Cape Town,

South Africa Geordin Hill Levis said that the situation is similar both in South Africa and India. Apart from Sanitation he is keen to learn about the food safety programmes being implemented in India, Levis added.

President of Sulabh International Kumar Dilip in his remarks said that the decision to focus on food security emerged from our founder late Dr. Bindeshwar Pathak's commitment to holistic development—one that addresses not just sanitation but also the underlying factors contributing to poverty and inequality.

Police arrest lover after body of woman with stab wounds recovered from Kalindi Kunj

STAFF REPORTER ■ NEW DELHI

Three days after the body of a 30-year-old woman with multiple stab wounds was found in the Kalindi Kunj area of southeast Delhi, police have apprehended her supposed lover in connection with the case.

According to the police on Wednesday, the accused, Toffique, alias Sonu, was out on bail in murder and attempt to murder cases. He was arrested from Haryana's Mewat area. DCP Southeast Delhi Ravi Kumar Singh said, "A PCR call was received at Kalindi Kunj police station on Sunday regarding stabbing by Toffique. The police team reached the spot in Khadda Colony and met a girl who informed that her mother was killed by him. Accused had mercilessly stabbed the deceased and cut

her throat."

During investigation, it was revealed that Toffique was known to the deceased and her husband Rashid. "He had an extramarital affair with the deceased and killed the husband of the deceased in the year 2019. While on bail, he also attempted to kill Guljar, a neighbor of the deceased and again went to jail," Singh stated.

The accused revealed to the police that he had an extramarital affair with the victim and wanted to live with her family at her residence. "On October 12, at around 9 pm, Toffique sneaked into the house of the woman and stayed on the first floor overnight. The next morning, when the woman went to meet him, they got into a verbal spat and he attacked her. He slit her throat and stabbed all over her body," he said.

Centre hikes DA by three percentage

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

The Centre on Wednesday increased the Dearness Allowance (DA) by 3 percentage points effective from July 1 this year, benefitting more than 1 crore employees and pensioners ahead of the Diwali festival. The Union Cabinet has approved to increase Dearness Allowance (DA) to central government employees and Dearness Relief (DR) to pensioners by three percentage points of the basic pay/pension ahead of Diwali, Union Minister Ashwini Vaishnaw said after the Cabinet meeting. The minister also offered Diwali greetings to all central



government employees and pensioners. The DA/DR hike will be effected from July 1, 2024, the minister informed. He also informed that the financial implication of this DA/DR hike is Rs 9,448 crore. Earlier in March this year, the government hiked DA/DR by 4 percentage points to 50 per cent from January 1, 2024. The minister said that the DA hike is based on the 12-month average of All India Consumer Price Index-Industrial Workers The Union Cabinet, chaired by Prime Minister Narendra Modi, has approved an additional instalment of Dearness Allowance (DA) to Central Government employees and

Dearness Relief (DR) to pensioners from July 1, 2024, representing an increase of three per cent (3%) over the existing rate of 50 per cent of the Basic Pay/Pension, to compensate against price rise, an official statement said. This increase is in accordance with the accepted formula, which is based on the recommendations of the Seventh Central Pay Commission. The combined impact on the exchequer on account of both DA and DR would be Rs 9,448.35 crore per annum. This will benefit about 49.18 lakh central government employees and 64.89 lakh pensioners.



NCP (SP)'s 66-day yatra ends, party campaign for Assembly polls begins

T N RAGHUNATHA ■ MUMBAI:

The 66-day long 'Shiv Swarajya Yatra' of the Nationalist Congress Party (SP)—a 7,365 km journey that took its leaders to 19 districts across the state — culminated on Wednesday at Islampur in Sangli district of sugar-rich western Maharashtra where party chief Sharad Pawar addressed a massive election rally. State NCP (SP) chief Jayant Patil had set off on the "Shiv Swarajya Yatra" on from Shivneri Fort near Pune — the birthplace of Maratha king Chhatrapati Shivaji Maharaj on August 9, a day that coincided with the 82nd anniversary of Quit India Movement. The 'Shiv Swarajya Yatra' touched almost all the stronghold constituencies of the NCP (SP) where the party will field candidates in the State Assembly polls scheduled for November 20. Apart from Jayant Patil, the NCP (SP)'s leading campaigner and actor-turned Shirur MP Amol Kolhe participated in the yatra. The NCP (SP) leaders who participated in the Yatra tried to reach out to the voters in the 19 districts of the state, by harping on the alleged misdeeds of the

Eksth Shinde Sena-BJP-NCP (Ajit Pawar) grand alliance government. At their rallies during the yatra, the NCP (SP) leaders spoke about the "deteriorating" law-and-order situation in the state, growing atrocities against women, the runaway inflation, spiraling unemployment, flight of industries from Maharashtra and, the farmers' suicides caused by agrarian distress. "During our Yatra, we managed to reach to at least one crore either directly or indirectly," senior NCP (SP) associated with the Yatra said. At Wednesday's Islampur rally which marked the end of 'Shiv Swarajya Yatra', NCP (SP) chief — accompanied by Jayant Patil and other leaders — kick-started the party's campaign for the State Assembly polls. The NCP (SP), which is a part of the Opposition Maha Vikas Aghadi (MVA) — is contesting the State Assembly polls in alliance with the Congress and Uddhav Thackeray-led Shiv Sena. The MVA constituents are expected to announce their seat-sharing arrangement for the State Assembly polls either during the weekend or early next week.

Railway modernisation: Cabinet approves ₹ 2,642 crore for multi tracking project

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

Union Cabinet on Wednesday approved the Varanasi-Pt Deen Dayal Upadhyaya (DDU) multi-tracking project with an estimated cost of Rs 2,642 crore. The proposed project includes a new rail-cum-road bridge across the Ganga river and the addition of third and fourth railway lines between Varanasi and DDU Junction route, among other infrastructural upgrades. "The proposed multi-tracking project will ease operations and reduce congestion, providing the much-required infrastructural development on the busiest sections across Indian Railways. The project traverses through Varanasi and Chandauli districts in Uttar Pradesh," a government statement said. It added, "Varanasi Railway Station, a crucial hub in Indian Railways, connects key zones



and serves as a gateway for pilgrims, tourists and the local population." According to the statement, the Varanasi-DDU Junction route, vital for both passenger and freight traffic, faces heavy congestion due to its role in transporting goods like coal, cement, and food grains, as well as serving growing tourism and industrial demands.

(million tonnes per annum) freight is anticipated on the proposed stretch," it added. Highlighting the enhancement of employment/self-employment opportunities, the official release stated that the project is result of PM-Gati Shakti National Master Plan for multi-modal connectivity which has been possible through integrated planning and will provide seamless connectivity for movement of people, goods and services. According to the government, the project, covering two districts in Uttar Pradesh, will increase the existing network of Indian Railways by about 30 kilometres. "The Railways being an environmentally friendly and energy efficient mode of transportation, will help both in achieving climate goals and minimizing logistics cost of the country and lower CO2 emissions (149 crore kg) which is equivalent to plantation of six crore trees," the statement said.

Civic volunteers still on hospital duties

SAUGAR SENGUPTA ■ KOLKATA

In a gross defiance of the Supreme Court order making government hospitals, schools and police stations out of bounds for the civic volunteers the alleged 'half-cops' continued to man the premises of at least three major hospitals of Kolkata, sources said. Civic volunteers were on Wednesday seen in their usual sky-blue uniform doing duty inside the state-of-art SSKM Hospital, Calcutta Medical College and CN Medical College sources said. When asked as to whether they were aware of the Apex Court order the Bengal Government's "men in blue" either ran away or said they were not aware of any order. A SSKM alleged civic volunteer was asked as to whether he was aware of the Supreme Court order he replied in the negative before slipping behind the doors of the hospital. At

CMC, the oldest medical college in Asia the civic volunteers said they had come to get their payment and find out details of their subsequent posting. Making a passing reference that appointing civic volunteers was "a nice method of conferring political patronage on totally unverified persons," the Bench of Chief Justice Chandrachud, JB Pardiwala and Manoj Misra had on Tuesday directed the State Government to stop deployment of civic volunteers inside hospitals, schools and police stations. The Court also asked the Government to file an affidavit in the next hearing saying "the affidavit shall also mention the steps taken to ensure that such volunteers do not operate in any event where sensitive establishments such as hospitals and schools may be particularly vulnerable. The affidavit must also state whether they are associated with police stations or investigation of crime."

PM Modi, enrolled as 'active member' of BJP

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Wednesday became the first person to be enrolled as the 'active member' of the BJP as he launched the party's 'Sakriya Sadasyata Abhiyan' here. He took his 'Sakriya Sadasyata' (active membership) in the presence of BJP president J P Nadda and general secretary Vinod Tawde, who is convener of the nationwide membership drive. An 'active member' of the BJP has to enrol at least 50 persons as party members in a booth or in an assembly seats. Only active members take part in the party's organisational elections, which will begin after the membership drive ends. Modi said in a social media post, "Adding momentum to our endeavour of making a Viksit Bharat! As BJP Karyakarta, proud to become the first Sakriya Sadasya and



launch the Sakriya Sadasyata Abhiyan today. This is a movement which will further strengthen our Party at the grassroots and ensure effective contribution of our Party Karyakartas for national progress. "Active members, Modi noted, will be eligible to contest elections for a 'Mandal Committee' and above. At the same time, they will get many opportunities to work for the party in the times to come, he added. Every six years, the BJP launches a fresh membership drive. Every existing BJP member is also required to enrol himself afresh, while new members are also added.

Government departments told to resolve pensioners' issues

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

The Centre has asked all its departments to strive to redress pensioners' grievances within 21 days, according to an official statement issued on Wednesday. In the cases where redressal of grievances requires more time, an interim reply may be furnished, it said. The central government has issued comprehensive guidelines after reviewing its pensioners' grievance redressal mechanism, i.e., Centralized Pension Grievances Redress and Monitoring System (CPENGRAMS), a portal. The guidelines envisage expeditious and efficient redressal of the grievances, said the statement issued by the Personnel Ministry. "Ministries/departments should strive to redress the pensioners' grievances within 21 days. In the cases, where redressal of the grievances requires longer time, an interim reply may be furnished on the portal," read one of the highlights of the comprehensive

guidelines for handling central government pensioners' grievances. The grievance shall be redressed under 'whole of the government approach', it said. In no case, grievance shall be closed summarily by stating, 'it does not pertain to this office', the statement said. The grievance shall not be closed without its conclusive redressal and the Action Taken Report (ATR) should be filled in with the supporting information and documents at the time of closure of grievance, it added. "Ministries/departments shall undertake monthly review of pension related grievances, pending on the portal to ensure the qualitative redressal of grievances within the prescribed time limit," the statement said. The nodal public grievance officers have been asked to "analyse the trend of grievances and conduct a root cause analysis to check the incidence of grievances," it added. According to the guidelines, an applicant can file an appeal against the redressal of his



grievance within 30 days of closure of the grievance and it shall be disposed of within 30 days by the Appellate Authority. A speaking order shall be passed, attaching relevant documents, if any, the statement said. "The grievance applications, filed in the physical form with the ministry/department, shall be uploaded on the CPENGRAMS portal to ensure proper monitoring of these grievances" it added. In another statement, the Personnel Ministry said that the Department of

Administrative Reforms and Public Grievances (DARPG) under it is all set to achieve the mid-campaign 100 per cent progress of the ongoing special campaign 4.0. This campaign is part of the government's commitment for institutionalising 'Swachhata' and minimising pendency in government offices. Special Campaign 4.0 is implemented on digitisation, improving/enhancing office spaces, timely scrap disposal, weeding/preservation of office records, inclusivity measures and environment friendly

activities, the statement said. "DARPG has preserved historical records and has organised an exhibition in collaboration with National Archive of India (NAI) showcasing historical documents preserved in DARPG earlier," it added. As of mid-October 2024, 800 public grievances have been addressed, contributing to the improvement of service delivery and enhancing public satisfaction, the statement said. The DARPG has adopted the use of AI-enabled tools for better grievance tracking and resolution in the Centralized Public Grievance Redress and Monitoring System (CPGRAMS) and has seen a marked improvement in the speed and accuracy of grievance redressal during the campaign, it added. "DARPG has initiated weeding of files, marking the beginning of enhanced record management and reinforcing the commitment to a clutter-free and efficient office premise. So far, over 4,100 files have been reviewed, and 800 files identified for weeding/closure," the statement said.

These files were identified as outdated, irrelevant, or redundant as per the record retention schedule and were subsequently weeded out or closed. This activity aimed to de-clutter office spaces, it added. The special campaign 4.0 has emphasised sustainability through the promotion of e-waste disposal mechanisms. "Outdated files, redundant materials, and unused office equipment have been disposed of systematically. DARPG disposed of electronic waste (e-scrap) as part of the campaign. A revenue of Rs 67,625 has also been earned from e-scrap disposal. Additionally, approximately 110 square feet of space was cleared in the process, enhancing the efficiency and organisation of office facilities," the statement said. With the special campaign 4.0 ongoing until October 31, 2024; the DARPG aims to further intensify its efforts in ensuring cleanliness, enhancing efficiency, and addressing the remaining pendency, it added.

New drug rules in India: A leap towards global research excellence

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

New drug rules and regulatory procedures introduced in India have promoted scientific and ethical research at par with global expectation and practices, the Government said on Wednesday. Addressing the 19th International Conference of Drug Regulatory Authorities (ICDRA) here, Union Minister of State for Health and Family Welfare, Anupriya Singh Patel, said the conference is crucial in sharing knowledge, building partnerships and working in harmonisation to ensure safe and effective medicines for everyone. "Our efforts can lead to better health outcomes for people all over the world. The ICDRA is not just a conference; it is a chance for us to collaborate, innovate, and support one another in our shared mission for better health for all," said the minister. The conference is being hosted for the first time in India by the Central Drugs Standard

Control Organisation (CDSCO), in collaboration with the World Health Organisation (WHO). According to the minister, the medical device rules in India include risk-based classification, bringing all devices under regulation through registration and framing regulatory pathways. "There is robust pre-approval and post approval regulatory procedures of all medical devices, diagnostics managing product lifecycle indicating robust control. We are collaborating with international organisations such as the International Medical Device Regulators Forum (IMDRF), ISO, WHO and regional network like SEARN (South-East Asia Regulatory Network) to harmonise regulatory requirements in the area of medical devices and diagnostics," Patel said. India has recently been recognised as an affiliate member of IMDRF. "Recognition of Indian Pharmacopoeia by the Pharmacopoeial Discussion



Group (PDG) is another milestone marking the harmonisation and recognition of regulatory standards," the minister informed. Dr VK Paul, Member (Health), NITI Aayog, highlighted the efforts being taken on the healthcare sector by the present government such as the launch of the world's largest

health assurance scheme and a massive effort being taken in digital health. Dr Paul informed that India licensed eight vaccines for use during the pandemic through a proper regulatory process. Dr Rajiv Bahl, Secretary, Department of Health Research and DG, ICMR, said that in the first three months

of the pandemic, India developed indigenous tests at one-fourth of the cost. He said, "three diagnostic tests have also been developed for MPox which were approved by CDSCO." Dr Yukiko Nakatani, Assistant Director-General, WHO noted that one urgent need highlighted by the pandemic was

the need for a strong regulatory system. New drug rules and regulatory procedures introduced in India have promoted scientific and ethical research at par with global expectation and practices, the Government said on Wednesday. Addressing the 19th International Conference of Drug Regulatory Authorities (ICDRA) here, Union Minister of State for Health and Family Welfare, Anupriya Singh Patel, said the conference is crucial in sharing knowledge, building partnerships and working in harmonisation to ensure safe and effective medicines for everyone. "Our efforts can lead to better health outcomes for people all over the world. The ICDRA is not just a conference; it is a chance for us to collaborate, innovate, and support one another in our shared mission for better health for all," said the minister. The conference is being hosted for the first time in India by the Central Drugs Standard Control Organisation

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stone marking the harmonisation and recognition of regulatory standards," the minister informed. Dr VK Paul, Member (Health), NITI Aayog, highlighted the efforts being taken on the healthcare sector by the present government such as the launch of the world's largest health assurance scheme and a massive effort being taken in digital health. Dr Paul informed that India licensed eight vaccines for use during the pandemic through a proper regulatory process. Dr Rajiv Bahl, Secretary, Department of Health Research and DG, ICMR, said that in the first three months of the pandemic, India developed indigenous tests at one-fourth of the cost. He said, "three diagnostic tests have also been developed for MPox which were approved by CDSCO." Dr Yukiko Nakatani, Assistant Director-General, WHO noted that one urgent need highlighted by the pandemic was the need for a strong regulatory system.

Omar Abdullah, first CM of Union Territory J and K

MOHIT KANDHARI ■ JAMMU

National Conference Vice President Omar Abdullah was sworn in as the first Chief Minister of the Union Territory of Jammu and Kashmir at a glittering oath ceremony in the Sher-e-Kashmir International Conference Centre (SKICC) on Wednesday. Omar wore a skull cap and a resplendent black sherwani on the occasion.

To balance the regional aspirations Omar Abdullah inducted an equal number of legislators from the Kashmir and Jammu regions.

Nowshera MLA Surinder Choudhary, who turned out to be a giant killer after defeating J&K BJP Chief Ravinder Raina, took oath as Deputy CM, while senior NC leader and MLA from DH Pora, Sakina Itoo, was also inducted into the Cabinet. Alongside them, NC's Mendhar MLA Javed Rana, MLA Rafiqabad Javed Dar and Independent MLA Satish Sharma, son of a former Congress MP Madan Lal Sharma, also took the oath of office. Three more ministers are expected to be inducted into the Council of Ministers. Lieutenant Governor Manoj Sinha administered the oath of office and secrecy to Omar and five members of the council of ministers. Sinha posed for a group photograph and immediately left the venue of the oath ceremony while guests were still attending a high tea.

Ironically, none of the elected legislators from the Congress party, a pre-poll alliance partner of the National Conference took the oath of office. The Congress party chose to stay away in protest against the denial of 'statehood' to Jammu and Kashmir.

Jammu and Kashmir Pradesh Congress Committee (JKPCC) Chief Tariq Hameed Karra said that the Congress party is not joining any Ministry in the



newly formed J-K government "at the moment" as despite repeated promises made by the Prime Minister for statehood, it has not been restored. Prime Minister Narendra Modi and Defence Minister Rajnath Singh congratulated Omar Abdullah soon after the oath ceremony. "Congratulations to Shri Omar Abdullah Ji on taking oath as the Chief Minister of Jammu and Kashmir. Wishing him the very best in his efforts to serve the people. The Centre will work closely with him and his team for J&K's progress," PM Modi wrote in a post on X.

The swearing-in ceremony was attended by several INDIA bloc leaders, including Congress leaders Rahul Gandhi, Priyanka Gandhi Vadra and Mallikarjun Kharge, SP chief Akhilesh Yadav, Left leaders Prakash Karat and D Raja, DMK's Kanimozhi, and NCP's Supriya Sule. PDP chief Mehbooba Mufti also attended the event. Former RAW Chief AS Daulat, AIP Supremo and Baramulla MP Sheikh Abdul Rashid also attended the ceremony.

DPAP Chairman Ghulam Nabi Azad, Peoples Conference Chairman Sajad Lone, Jammu Kashmir APNI party Chief Altaf Bukhari, and J&K BJP

Chief Ravinder Raina remained conspicuous in their absence. Before the swearing-in ceremony got underway, Dr Farooq Abdullah was seen greeting guests and welcoming them. He hugged his old friends and political leaders and warmly shook hands with them.

In his first comments after taking the oath, the Chief Minister said, "We will not let Jammu feel that they do not have a voice or representation in the current government. We have brought in a Deputy CM to ensure this and this will be our endeavour going forth as well." Omar also visited the Civil Secretariat complex and occupied the 'hot seat' in his office chamber. On his arrival, he was given a customary guard of honour. Omar also chaired a meeting of the administrative secretaries of all the departments.

Omar also directed the union territory's police to minimise "public inconvenience" during VIP movements. In his first direction to the police, he said they should avoid "stick-waving" and "aggressive gestures" when he moves by road. Omar Abdullah also asked the Jammu and Kashmir police to refrain from creating a green corridor for his movement. Interacting briefly with the

media, Omar said the first task of my government will be to become the voice of the people and expressed optimism that Jammu and Kashmir will not remain a Union territory for a long time and regain full statehood soon.

Before attending his oath ceremony Omar also offered prayers at the revered Hazratbal Shrine and Mazarat-e-Anwar of Sher-e-Kashmir.

Before the oath-taking ceremony, Omar said that he looked forward to working in cooperation with the Union government.

"I have some strange distinctions. I was the last chief minister to serve a full six-year term. Now I'll be the first chief minister of the Union territory of J-K. The last distinction, as in the one of serving six years, I'm quite happy about. Being a CM of a Union Territory is a different matter altogether. It has its challenges. I hope that the status of a union territory is a temporary one. We look forward to working in cooperation with the government of India to resolve the people's problems and the best way to do that would be to start by restoring statehood to J-K," Omar Abdullah said.

After attending the oath-taking ceremony of Jammu and Kashmir CM Omar Abdullah, JKDPD president Mehbooba Mufti said, "Today is a very auspicious day. The people of Jammu and Kashmir have got their government after several years. People have elected a stable government. The people of Jammu and Kashmir suffered a lot after 2019, and we hope that this new government will treat the wounds we have. We hope that the government will pass a resolution condemning the decision of August 5, 2019 (abrogation of Article 370). Apart from this, we also hope that the government will also find ways to resolve issues of unemployment, drug addiction, electricity and others."

Nayab Singh Saini to be sworn in as Haryana CM

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ CHANDIGARH/NEW DELHI

Nayab Singh Saini will be sworn-in as the chief minister of Haryana on Thursday, with Prime Minister Narendra Modi, Union Home Minister Amit Shah and BJP's top leadership, among others attending the oath-taking ceremony. Saini, 54, on Wednesday met Haryana Governor Bandaru Dattatreya and staked claim to form the next government after he was unanimously elected as the leader of the BJP legislature party in a meeting held at the party office in Panchkula. Massive security arrangements have been made in the wake of the swearing-in ceremony which will take place in Panchkula. Besides Modi and Shah, several Union ministers including Rajnath Singh and J P Nadda, who is also the BJP president, chief ministers of many states, and senior party leaders will attend the oath-taking event. Haryana Governor Bandaru Dattatreya will administer the oath of office and secrecy.

Haryana BJP chief Mohan Lal Badoli on Tuesday said while PM Modi, Union ministers, chief ministers of the BJP-ruled states and NDA partners will attend the oath-taking function, opposition leaders of various parties, "progressive farmers", "Lakhpati Didis" and people from various social organisations have also been invited.

Badoli had also said Valmiki Jayanti falls on October 17, the day when the new government would be sworn-in. In the October 5 Haryana polls, the BJP secured an unprecedented third term in the state, winning 48 seats in the 90-member assembly. The Congress won 37 seats. With the BJP forming the government for a third time in a row in Haryana, Saini will be taking oath as the chief minister for the second time. Around 50,000 people were expected to attend the mega event, party leaders said. A total of 14 LED screens will be installed at the event venue



so that people could witness the function. Traffic advisory has also been issued ahead of the swearing-in event. In a departure from tradition, the BJP had declared that Saini would remain chief minister if the party returned to power in Haryana after the assembly polls.

Saini had replaced Manohar Lal Khattar as the chief minister of Haryana in March. Saini, an OBC face of the party, had won the Ladwa seat in Kurukshetra district.

Months before the assembly polls, the BJP replaced Khattar with low-profile Saini, a decision that surprised many, but the BJP's gamble paid off with Saini leading the party to victory in the state elections. Saini's elevation from the Haryana BJP president to chief minister in March came at a time when the party was facing anti-incumbency following Khattar's tenure of nine-and-a-half years and attacks from a buoyant opposition on farmers' issues, unemployment, Agnipath scheme, inflation, and law and order.

Days after Saini was brought in by the BJP, the Model Code of Conduct came into effect with the announcement of the Lok Sabha elections, and later ahead of the assembly elections, effectively giving him only two months to shift the public perception.

MUDA chairman resigns amid site allotment controversy

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ BENGALURU/NEW DELHI

The Mysuru Urban Development Authority (MUDA) chairman K Marigowda quit on Wednesday, amid a row over irregularities in allotment of sites to Chief Minister Siddaramaiah's wife Parvathi B M. He submitted his resignation from the post to the Urban Development Department Secretary. "I have resigned following directions from the CM. Also, as I had health issues, I have resigned... There was no pressure on me, as I had health issues I have resigned," Marigowda, who is considered close to Siddaramaiah, told reporters here.

Responding to a question, he said, "Probe is on (in MUDA case allegedly involving CM) and it will continue. It will be known from the probe whether there were any irregularities." Siddaramaiah is facing the Lokayukta and Enforcement Directorate (ED) probes into alleged irregularities in the allotment of 14 sites to his wife by the MUDA. Siddaramaiah's wife, brother-in-law Mallikarjuna Swamy, Devaraju from whom Mallikarjuna Swamy purchased land and gifted it to Parvathi and others are named as other accused in the case by Lokayukta. Stating that Siddaramaiah is his leader and he has been with him for 40 years, Marigowda said, "He made me taluk and zilla panchayat president, has never asked to do illegal things, even on the MUDA issue."

Asked whether he was resigning to "save" the CM, he said, "No. I'm resigning on personal grounds. I had a stroke twice. I felt I cannot continue, so I have resigned." To a question whether there was pressure on him to quit from Urban Development Minister Byrathi Suresh, Marigowda said, "It is far from the truth." On September 27, Congress workers and CM's supporters, who had gathered in large numbers in a show of support to Siddaramaiah at the Mysuru airport on his arrival there, tried to gherao Marigowda alleging that he was responsible for the CM's "plight." Despite his attempts to explain, they did not listen to him and asked him to go back, following which he left the scene. After the Mysuru Urban Development Authority (MUDA) chairman stepped down from his post on Wednesday, the BJP demanded that Karnataka Chief Minister Siddaramaiah also resign immediately as he is "deeply embroiled" in the land "scam." Mysuru Urban Development Authority (MUDA) chairman K Marigowda resigned from his post amid the row over alleged irregularities in allotment of sites to Siddaramaiah's wife Parvathi B M. "MUDA chairman has tendered his resignation. I call upon Siddaramaiah that if you have the slightest morality left in you, you should step down immediately. You should not wait for today's sunset" BJP national spokesperson and MP Sambit Patra said at a press conference here. He said Marigowda's resignation and Siddaramaiah's wife "offering" to return the MUDA sites allocated to her make it clear that the chief minister is "deeply involved in the scam from head to toe." "There is no doubt about it," Patra said. Earlier in the day, Marigowda submitted his resignation to the Urban Development Department secretary. "I have resigned following directions from the CM. Also, as I had health issues, I have resigned... There was no pressure on me, as I had health issues I have resigned," Marigowda told reporters in Bengaluru.

SC Collegium recommends judges for three High Courts

BISWAJEET BANERJEE ■ LUCKNOW

Bahraich, a city close to Indo-Nepal border, has been in the headlines for nearly three months, with various incidents keeping it in the spotlight. From the terror of wolves to connections with a high-profile murder case in Mumbai, Bahraich has been struggling with a series of crises. Most recently, the city was engulfed in violence following the murder of a youth during a religious procession, leading to widespread unrest. The situation escalated on Sunday, the day after Dussehra, when one Ramgopal Mishra was shot dead during a Durga idol immersion procession.



PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

The Supreme Court Collegium headed by Chief Justice DY Chandrachud has recommended to the Centre the names of three advocates for appointment as judges of the Andhra Pradesh High Court. The three-member Collegium, which also comprised Justices Sanjiv Khanna and B R Gavai, held the meeting on Tuesday and also decided to recommend the names of four senior judicial officers as judges of the Kerala High Court.

The Collegium by way of a separate resolution, recommended to the Centre the name of Justice Siddaiah Rachaiah, an additional judge of the Karnataka High Court, as a permanent Judge of the same high court. "The Collegium resolves to recommend that S/Shri (i) Maheswara Rao Kuncham @ Kuncham, (ii) Thoota Chandra Dhana Sekar @ T C D Sekhar, and (iii) Challa Gunaranjan, advocates, be appointed as Judges of the High Court of Andhra Pradesh. Their inter se seniority shall be fixed as per the existing

practice," the October 15 resolution said. They are practising as lawyers in the Andhra Pradesh High Court. "The Collegium resolves to recommend that S/Shri (i) K V Jayakumar, (ii) Murallee Krishna S, (iii) Jobin Sebastian, and (iv) P V Balakrishnan, Judicial Officers, be appointed as Judges of the High Court of Kerala," it said. Referring to an earlier recommendation on appointment of judges in the Kerala High Court, the apex court on Tuesday said, "By recommendation dated 10 October 2023, the Supreme Court Collegium recommended names of five Judicial Officers, including the name of Shri P Krishna Kumar, for elevation as judges of the high court of Kerala. Out of these, four judicial officers have been appointed, it added. "However, nothing has been intimated by the Government to the Collegium with regard to the status of Shri P Krishna Kumar. The Collegium, therefore, resolves, the four Judicial Officers shall rank, in the appointment order, below Shri P Krishna Kumar and their inter seniority shall be fixed in that order," it said.

Violence, wolf attacks, murders: The many woes of Bahraich

BISWAJEET BANERJEE ■ LUCKNOW

The incident sparked a wave of anger, leading to large-scale protests, vandalism, and arson across the city. Angry mobs took to the streets, clashing with authorities, and causing chaos in several areas. The mob ransacked shops, torched vehicles, and damaged properties across Shivpur, Raji Chowk, Khaira Bazar, and other areas. By Monday morning, the unrest had intensified to such an extent that the situation was deemed out of control, prompting senior police officials from Lucknow to intervene. Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath monitored the developments closely, ensuring a swift response to bring the situation under control.

of inciting communal violence and sent them to jail. Two additional FIRs have been registered against those involved in the unrest. SP Bahraich, Vrinda Shukla, has assured that senior officials are patrolling sensitive areas, and efforts are ongoing to identify more suspects based on video footage from the incidents.

Fear of Wolves Before the recent violence, Bahraich had been terrorized by a different kind of menace: man-eating wolves. Over the past three months, these predators had killed ten people, including children, and left many others injured. The district administration and forest department launched a large-



scale operation to capture the wolves, even using drone mapping for surveillance. Five wolves were caught and relocated to zoos in Gorakhpur and Lucknow, but one injured wolf remained elusive. The attacks left nearly 50 villages in fear, with families staying indoors, and men standing guard during the night. Some families even sent their children away to relatives in other cities for safety. The terror began in March, and by July, attacks had escalated, with wolves often targeting children sleeping inside their homes.

embroiled in a high-profile murder case when the killing of NCP leader Baba Siddiqui in Mumbai was linked to Bahraich. On October 12, Baba Siddiqui, a former minister, was shot dead by three assailants. Two of the shooters—Dharmraj Kashyap and Shivkumar—were residents of Bahraich's Kaiserganj area, while a third accomplice hailed from Haryana. Mumbai police arrested Dharmraj Kashyap, but Shivkumar remains at large. In their search, the police detained two more youths from Bahraich, and an investigation is underway with the collaboration of the Mumbai police and Uttar Pradesh STF.

Milkipur By-election cleared after legal hurdle withdrawn

BISWAJEET BANERJEE ■ LUCKNOW

The path for the by-election on the Milkipur seat in Ayodhya district has been cleared following a decision to withdraw a pending petition. This legal hurdle had delayed the announcement of the by-election. However, the lawyer representing BJP leader Baba Gorakhnath confirmed that he will be withdrawing the petition filed in the Allahabad High Court, paving the way for the Election Commission to proceed. With this development, it is speculated that the election on this seat could be scheduled alongside other by-elections in the state. The Milkipur Assembly seat was vacated after Samajwadi Party (SP) leader Awadhesh Prasad won the Faizabad Lok Sabha seat. The SP has already named Awadhesh Prasad's son, Ajit Prasad, as its candidate for the by-election, aiming to retain its hold on the constituency. Legal dispute delayed Milkipur by-election. The by-election for the Milkipur assembly seat was



stalled due to a petition filed in the Allahabad High Court. The petition challenged the validity of documents submitted by SP candidate Awadhesh Prasad during the 2022 assembly elections, where he defeated BJP's Baba Gorakhnath by over 13,000 votes. The pending petition had prevented the Election Commission from announcing the by-election for this seat. In a video statement, Baba Gorakhnath's lawyer, Advocate Rudra Vikram Singh, clarified that the legal case, which had blocked the by-election process, would be withdrawn. He emphasized that since Awadhesh Prasad is no longer an MLA from Milkipur, the petition no longer holds ground. "We will appeal to the

High Court to withdraw the petition within the next couple of days, allowing the by-election process to move forward," Singh said

By-Elections Announced for Nine Seats in Uttar Pradesh The Election Commission has announced by-elections for nine out of the 10 assembly seats in Uttar Pradesh. The Milkipur seat in Ayodhya was initially excluded from this announcement due to the pending legal petition. Voting for the by-elections on the nine seats is scheduled for November 13, with the counting of votes set for November 23.

The by-elections will be held in: Karhal (Mainpuri), Sisamau (Kanpur), Katehari (Ambedkarnagar), Kundarki (Moradabad), Khair (Aligarh), Ghaziabad, Phulpur (Prayagraj), Majhwa (Mirzapur) and Meerapur (Muzaffarnagar). The Sisamau seat became vacant following the conviction of SP MLA Irfan Solanki, while the remaining nine seats were vacated as the respective MLAs became members of the Lok Sabha.

Kumbh narrative shifts from uncertainty to assured reunions: Government

BISWAJEET BANERJEE ■ LUCKNOW

The Uttar Pradesh government is redefining the age-old cinematic trope of loved ones getting separated in the bustling crowds of the Kumbh Mela. Through meticulous planning and state-of-the-art technology, the government aims to put an end to the 'filmy' drama of people getting lost at the Maha Kumbh and reuniting years later. Instead, the Maha Kumbh 2025 is set to be a safer, more organized event, where lost individuals are swiftly reunited with their families. The UP government has introduced a cutting-edge lost-and-found system, focusing on the safety of every visitor, particularly children and the elderly. This initiative is a collaborative effort between the Prayagraj Mela Authority and the Police Department, aiming to prevent missing cases and ensure that anyone who gets separated is quickly found and reunited with their loved ones. A key feature of this system is an innovative pilgrim registration setup designed to curb instances of missing persons. The high-tech lost-and-found centers will digitally register



anyone who goes missing, sharing their details across multiple centers and on social media platforms like Facebook and X (formerly Twitter). These centers will also make announcements for all lost individuals, transforming the fair's narrative from one of separation to one of quick, efficient reunions. Special attention is being paid to the safety of children and women. Anyone attempting to claim a child or a woman must first verify their identity, with the police intervening in any doubtful situations. This precaution ensures that vulnerable individuals do not fall into the wrong hands, unlike the dramatic storylines often portrayed in movies.

Shift from 'Filmy' Drama to Real-Life Safety The iconic scenes of family members getting separated in the vast crowds of the Kumbh Mela have long been a staple in Indian cinema, from the 1943 film Taqdeer to the 1970s clas-

sic Mela. These stories often hinged on chance encounters and long-lost reunions, leaving an emotional imprint on audiences. However, the Yogi government's initiative aims to replace these chance encounters with a systematic process that prioritizes safety and responsibility.

In films, the search for lost loved ones often depended on fate and took years. Now, with the government's new system, if a lost individual remains unclaimed for 12 hours, the police will intervene, ensuring their safety until they are reunited with their families. This guarantees that no one will remain lost for long, and that reunions will be swift and secure.

Government spokesman said: "For the millions of pilgrims expected at the Maha Kumbh 2025, the government's initiative promises an event that is both safe and memorable. The new lost-and-found centers, equipped with digital registration and real-time announcements, will eliminate the fear of getting lost in the crowd. Instead, pilgrims can look forward to an experience where their safety is the priority, and where the narrative has shifted from uncertainty to assured reunions."



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PAPER WITH PASSION

Election time

The elections in the two states, along with by-elections, will provide a clear snapshot of the public sentiment

It is election time once again. The last round of elections in 2024 would be held in November. The Election Commission has announced that Assembly elections in Maharashtra and Jharkhand will begin on November 13. Jharkhand will go to the polls in two phases, on November 13 and 20, while Maharashtra will hold a single-phase election on November 20. The votes for both states will be counted on November 23. Additionally, dates for several Lok Sabha by-elections, including in Wayanad, Kerala, where a bypoll is needed after Rahul Gandhi vacated the seat, have been announced. The Assembly elections in Maharashtra and Jharkhand are critical for both the ruling and the Opposition parties, as they serve as key battlegrounds to gauge their standing. In Maharashtra, the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) faces a formidable challenge from the Maha Vikas Aghadi (MVA) coalition, comprising the Shiv Sena (UBT), the Nationalist Congress Party (NCP) and the Congress.



The MVA aims to capitalise on public dissatisfaction over issues like economic distress and governance failures while projecting a united front despite internal tensions.

In Jharkhand, the contest is equally poised, with the incumbent Jharkhand Mukti Morcha (JMM)-Congress alliance seeking to fend off the BJP's challenge. The ruling coalition is banking on Chief Minister Hemant Soren's popularity and social welfare schemes to retain power. However, the BJP is expected to emphasise issues like law and order and tribal rights to swing the vote in its favour. Apart from the Assembly polls, by-elections will be conducted on November 13 for four Assembly seats in Punjab—Dera Baba Nanak, Chabbawal (SC), Gidderbaha, and Barnala. These bypolls are seen as indicators of the prevailing political sentiment in the regions, potentially setting the tone for broader electoral battles. In addition, the by-election for the Wayanad Lok Sabha seat in Kerala presents another crucial contest. Speculation is rife that Priyanka Gandhi Vadra may make her electoral debut from this constituency, adding a significant dimension to the Congress's campaign strategy. Elections in India are not only a period of heightened activity for political parties but also a monumental task for the Election Commission and government machinery. Conducting elections in the country is no small feat, as ensuring a peaceful, free and fair process presents significant challenge. The upcoming assembly elections in Maharashtra and Jharkhand, along with the bypolls, will serve as critical indicators of India's evolving political dynamics. As the states prepare for high-stakes battles, various political scenarios could unfold, influenced by factors like coalition strategies, regional issues and leadership challenges. But ultimately it would be the unpredictable and elusive voters who would decide the fate of the political parties.

On the contrary, Samajwadi Party leader Akhilesh Yadav's statement a day after the defeat indicated that the alliance with Congress would continue. Akhilesh said, "I want to say that the INDIA bloc will be there. The UP and Congress alliance will remain intact..." The Aam Admi Party has said it will go solo in the Delhi Assembly poll, while it allied with the Congress in the Lok Sabha polls three months ago. Congress won no seat. The other allies criticise Congress for its overconfidence and rigid attitude toward seat sharing. The resurgent Congress, which had doubled its tally in the Lok Sabha polls, weakened after its Haryana shocker. Most exit polls suggested an astounding win for Congress in Haryana because the BJP faced a 10-year anti-incumbency and dealt with a section of disgruntled people. However, the BJP sprung a surprise and registered its most impressive victory in Haryana. No party has ever won a third term in the rural state. Discussions occur between the Congress, the Shiv Sena

PICTALK



A vendor arranges earthen lamps (Diya) for sale, in Bikaner

PTI

Why Indian women deserve support, not judgement

We must start questioning the unrealistic expectations placed on women and inculcate a culture that promotes shared responsibilities and duties

Indian women are increasingly taking on obligations that exceed 55 hours per week. They manage to pursue their professional careers while also managing a household—what one may refer to as the "second job." It reveals an unsettling fact about the intimidating pressure on women to perform above their capabilities. Although this problem between job and private life affects women all over the world, it is especially difficult for Indian women due to cultural expectations, societal standards and the long-held conviction that they "must do it all."

The question arises: why is there so much pressure on Indian women to push themselves beyond their breaking point? The answer lies in deeply ingrained gender roles and societal expectations. While strides have been made in women's empowerment, the onus of managing the household and caring for children continues to largely fall on their shoulders, even as they excel in their careers. As more women enter the workforce and pursue professional goals, the expectation



to continue fulfilling traditional roles has not diminished. Instead, it has expanded, creating an unsustainable juggling act. Are women taken for granted? In many ways, yes. The concept that women are born to balance this act manifests itself in the belief that they can easily handle a high-demanding profession while also serving as primary carers, homemakers, and support for the rest of the extended family. However, such an assumption ignores the impact on their physical and mental well-being. Each woman's drive is influenced by the societally imposed "superwoman" image, which puts undue pressure on them. And when

they falter, they are unfairly judged. But why should society judge women for trying to manage the impossible? The expectations placed on women often come with little recognition or appreciation for the sacrifices they make. Instead, when women struggle or choose to prioritise one aspect of their life over another, they are met with criticism rather than compassion. This is especially true for those who lack a strong support system. If a woman does not have family members willing to share the load of child-rearing or household management, she is left to carry an even heavier burden. Should she be judged for

this? Absolutely not. Let us not forget that many Indian women are also teachers, a profession that requires nurturing, patience and a relentless dedication to the betterment of future generations. These women are shaping young minds in the classroom while simultaneously caring for their own families at home. The least society can do is give them the space and freedom they deserve, without the weight of judgement. It's time we, as a society, recognise that women's worth is not measured by their ability to "do it all." We must start questioning the unrealistic expectations placed on them and, instead, advocate for a culture that promotes shared responsibilities. Supporting women in their endeavors—whether in their careers or at home—by giving them the freedom to make choices without judgement is essential. Only then can we begin to alleviate the unnecessary pressures that have, for too long, weighed on the shoulders of Indian women. (The author is a motivational speaker and a freelance writer; views are personal)

Haryana setback exposes cracks in INDIA Bloc

The Congress defeat has not only dampened the party's resurgence narrative but also underscored the need for a recalibrated approach to coalition politics



KALYANI SHANKAR

The Grand Old Congress Party faces criticism from its INDIA coalition partners for mishandling the recent Haryana Assembly polls, allowing the BJP to win for a third time despite ten years of anti-incumbency. Most exit polls had predicted a clear win for the Congress, but the BJP secured 48 out of 90 seats, a victory even the BJP itself was surprised by. A win in Haryana would have boosted the Congress resurgence story. However, Congress lost this fifth Assembly election recently due to internal conflicts, adding to its previous losses in Punjab, Uttarakhand, Madhya Pradesh and Chhattisgarh. It is uncertain whether the partners will be united in fighting against the BJP. Questions like whether an alliance with AAP would have favoured Congress to win in the Haryana polls are being debated. Secondly, the defeat would impact the upcoming elections in Maharashtra and Jharkhand. The immediate impact of the Haryana result is likely in seat sharing in the forthcoming Assembly elections in Delhi, Maharashtra and Jharkhand. Thirdly, it is uncertain whether the Congress and AAP will have an alliance. The AAP has already said it will go solo. The INDIA bloc performed well in the 2004 Lok Sabha polls due to its adaptability and compromise. The main aim of the Coalition was to give a one-to-one fight with the BJP and not split the anti-BJP votes. The Coalition put irritable issues on the back burner and managed to work well. They functioned with the sole aim of defeating the BJP and, to a certain extent, succeeded. The BJP majority was reduced, and the government had to be formed with the help of JD (U) and TDP. The Haryana defeat has altered the situation within the Coalition, with the INDIA bloc getting an edge over the Congress. The partners would probably deal with a slightly more restrained and sobered Congress. No one has said so far that the INDIA bloc is finished.



On the contrary, Samajwadi Party leader Akhilesh Yadav's statement a day after the defeat indicated that the alliance with Congress would continue. Akhilesh said, "I want to say that the INDIA bloc will be there. The UP and Congress alliance will remain intact..." The Aam Admi Party has said it will go solo in the Delhi Assembly poll, while it allied with the Congress in the Lok Sabha polls three months ago. Congress won no seat. The other allies criticise Congress for its overconfidence and rigid attitude toward seat sharing. The resurgent Congress, which had doubled its tally in the Lok Sabha polls, weakened after its Haryana shocker. Most exit polls suggested an astounding win for Congress in Haryana because the BJP faced a 10-year anti-incumbency and dealt with a section of disgruntled people. However, the BJP sprung a surprise and registered its most impressive victory in Haryana. No party has ever won a third term in the rural state. Discussions occur between the Congress, the Shiv Sena



THE MAIN AIM OF THE COALITION WAS TO GIVE A ONE-TO-ONE FIGHT WITH THE BJP AND NOT SPLIT THE ANTI-BJP VOTES. THE COALITION PUT IRRITABLE ISSUES ON THE BACK BURNER AND MANAGED TO WORK WELL

(Uddhav) and the Nationalist Congress Party in Maharashtra. Congress needs to be more responsive to the seat-sharing formula and Sena's demand for Thackeray to be projected as the CM's face even before the polls. The AAP won no seat in the Haryana election but got roughly 1.78 per cent of the votes.

It would have undoubtedly added to the INDIA bloc's kitty if Congress had allied with AAP. According to Shiv Sena leader Sanjay Raut, the Congress ignored the smaller parties and their offers for collaboration. Leaders from the Trinamool Congress, AAP, Shiv Sena (Uddhav), National Conference, RJD, Nationalist Congress Party, and others were critical of the Congress for messing up the Haryana polls. Shiv Sena mouthpiece Saamna said, "No one thought the BJP government would be elected in Haryana again. It seems Congress's overconfidence and arrogance of local Congress leaders led to the party's defeat," the Marathi paper said in its editorial on Wednesday. Repeating the formula adopted during the

Lok Sabha polls for seat sharing is crucial, at least in the Maharashtra and Jharkhand polls. The subdued Congress will not have the upper hand in seat sharing with most of its allies. The present mood in the INDIA coalition must impact Congress's relations with its partners.

The Opposition may not be able to withstand any more shocks. Congress must focus on the 286 seats in a direct fight with the BJP. The 2024 polls proved the Congress's strike rate against the BJP rose to 29 per cent from 8 per cent in 2019. Significantly, the number of seats in which the Congress fought with the BJP was 286, down from 370 in 2014. Congress came to power in 2004 and 2009 because of its cordial relationships with the partners. The onus for keeping the alliance is broadly on the Congress. It must realise that every partner, small or big, is essential. Congress has had introspection sessions, and Panchmadi and Shimla are good examples. It is time for one more such session.

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

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

INDIA-CANADA DIPLOMATIC CRISIS

Madam — Apropos to the article "Souring relations," on October 16, India is withdrawing its High Commissioner from Canada after Canadian PM Justin Trudeau again accused India of masterminding the June 18, 2023, killing of Khalistani terrorist Hardeep Singh Nijjar outside the Guru Nanak Gurdwara in Surrey, British Columbia. Trudeau's accusation and mischaracterisation of India is based on the American intelligence's raw data supplied to Canada. But, Sikh militants in both Canada and California are deeply involved in organised crime and gang violence. Perhaps, Trudeau believed the volume and frequency of the accusation could trump the truth. He also may believe that doubling down on Sikh militants might win him votes in key districts. On both points, he is wrong. After Khalistani terrorists blew up Air India Flight 182, ignorance can be no excuse about the movement's lethality. Left unchecked, the Khalistani extremists Trudeau's government shelters can be as lethal as Al Qaeda. The movement would be impotent without funding, however. Here, Canadian banks are as complicit as the Arab and Somali hawala agents who ultimately helped move money around prior to Al Qaeda's 1998 East Africa embassy bombings and the September 11, 2001, terror attacks in New York and Washington. Hence, Canada is guilty of abetting terrorism.

N Sadhasiva Reddy | Washington

END COMMUNAL VIOLENCE

Madam — It is indeed a matter of concern that communal clashes are again showing their ugly faces. No religion can recommend violent reactions for any reason. But every religion suggests being patient even under utter provocation. Therefore, clash in the name of God and religion is only an organised attempt to disturb peace and take undue advantage of it. But the history is clear with its messages that such chauvinists can

Firecracker ban insufficient



This refers to the news, "Delhi government imposes ban on firecrackers to combat air pollution" (October 15). Besides the increasing population density, the air in Delhi remains polluted and it is being inhaled by the majority of the populace and people commuting there. Recently, the AQI level is showing

alarming conditions.

Apparently the decision of the Delhi government to ban the production, storage, sale and use of firecrackers till January 25 seems to help in reducing the worsening pollution condition, but it will irritate the majority of Hindus in view of the upcoming Chhath puja and Diwali festivals.

The State BJP President Virendra Sachdeva has raised a valid question to the Delhi government that the main reasons for pollution are the burning of stubble in the neighbouring state of Punjab and dust is flying on many broken roads. Delhi Pradesh Congress Committee President Devendra Yadav has argued the bitter truth that the arrangements made to control pollution have been inadequate. It would be better to discourage the use of firecrackers in social and religious events.

Yugal Kishore Sharma | Faridabad

attract some people for sometime but not all for all the times. People have their basic livelihood issues and any group interested in relieving them of their plights should come out with constructive ideas and suggestions.

But sharpening the frictions and promoting clashes should be understood by the people as anti-social acts that aim at reaping advantages for the self or the group. If any group plans to promote its cause by promoting differences and violent reactions, it should remember that the results of such activities will be only negative in the long run and the gains, if any, will be purely ephemeral. However, it is for the people to identify such persons and groups and keep them at a distance without falling prey to their deceptive traps.

A G Rajmohan | Anantapur

LIMIT SCREEN TIME

Madam — In our daily lives, mindless scrolling on social media has turned into an addiction fuelled by the constant overflow of news and information.

People often find themselves endlessly scrolling through content without any specific purpose. We must try to acknowledge that this scrolling addiction can lead to a decrease in cognitive ability leading to various psychological disorders, or sometimes it may also hamper the mental well-being of an individual, resulting in a reduction and a lack of focus and attention while doing any job or specific task. Scrolling might give us temporary pleasure, but at what cost?

We are just making ourselves more vulnerable and slowly becoming a puppet of social media and mobile phones. Setting a limit on scrolling, planning a digital free period, and bringing offline leisure activities into our daily routine can help an individual to alleviate this dangerous addiction. So, don't lose yourself for some momentary pleasure because ultimately health is wealth.

Neha Tomar | Ujjain

Send your feedback to: letterstopioneer@gmail.com



FIRST COLUMN

REVIVING FAMILY BONDS

A family can transform a person into an achiever by right encouragement and support



RAJYOGI BRAHMA KUMAR NIKUNJI

Small family, Happy family (Chhota Parivar-Sukhi Pariwar) & 'Hum Do Hamare', these two jingles coined by the administration had changed the family planning scenario in India over the years. But it's so ironic that despite becoming the first country to adopt a national policy for limiting a great Indian proclivity, India is expected to overtake China in 2034. At the time of independence, there were 345 million Indians. The world took 454 years to go from 345 million in 1310 AD to a billion, but India took just 52 years. Looking at the above facts and figures one wonders as to what would be the societal structure in a country that takes the burden of a population of a billion people. Sadly, the situation is quite grim, because today we see fewer families and more individuals living their lives on their terms with an 'I care a damn attitude' which is quite common in the metropolis. Our forefathers were brought up with strong family values, but with passing time and ever-changing scenarios, today those core values have been left behind to adopt new so-called modern values. It's so unfortunate that today very few of us know the importance of living or growing up in a family. One must understand the fact that a family is the first school where the literate and the illiterate have got their first lessons in the art of living and values, traditions, customs and conventions. Also in a family, everyone feels secure and protected. Everyone feels strong because of the strength of the family. Everyone feels that others welcome him or her. Everyone feels a kind of support, sustenance and encourage-



ment. It is, therefore, essential to help and facilitate the growth of good supportive families for foundation as a family tradition rather than promoting an individualistic lifestyle for the sake of the next Gen & future to come.

There is some kind of magnetic force that holds the members of a family together. In other words, it is a feeling of closeness and belongingness in the mind of every person and the feeling of acceptance on the part of the whole group that gives it the nomenclature of a family. This feeling of acceptance is always based on the feeling of mutual love, loyalty and trust and also understanding and accommodation. Today we see that families are splitting up.

Certain values like mutual affection, love & genuine caring that make a family work are vanishing because everyone wants to live an independent life without any kind of family interference. However, if the younger ones continue to give regard to the elders and the elders continue to give love to the younger ones, then the family life will continue to be undisturbed and everyone will act responsibly. But, if each one gives up their responsibility and the feeling of concern for others, then cracks would appear and get deeper. Hence to preserve the family structure & tradition, one needs to have tolerance, sobriety & humility because family is very essential to civilised life, be it a spiritual family or the society as a family or of nations. Hence we should consider family as a place where we can work for physical, mental, moral and spiritual growth and can create an environment where others also can grow. A family can change a person into a great leader, disciplinarian, soldier, criminal or scholar by encouraging or discouraging, supporting or condemning certain positive or negative traits in him.

We must, therefore, pay attention to the transformation of families because families are the breeding grounds for good or bad human beings. So, let us awaken people to observe family values such as mutual love, trust, acceptance, accommodation, consideration and care for the wellbeing of others, the spirit of adjustment, tolerance, responsibility and cooperation because if these family values flourish, the nation and the whole humankind will flourish too.

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

Stubble burning crisis needs practical solutions

Without swift and sustained efforts, northern India would face yet another year of deteriorating air quality, leaving millions to grapple with bad air quality



BISWAJEET BANARJEE



The Supreme Court has taken a strong stance against the Commission for Air Quality Management (CAQM) for its failure to control stubble burning, a major contributor to air pollution in Delhi-NCR. The court's rebuke, delivered during a hearing on October 3, emphasised the need for effective ground-level interventions and questioned why the Commission had not implemented any provisions of the relevant Act to curb pollution from crop residue burning. Stubble burning, especially in the northern states of Punjab, Haryana and Uttar Pradesh, has been a major environmental challenge for years. Farmers often resort to burning crop residue after harvesting paddy and wheat due to the increasing mechanisation of farming, the use of combined harvesters, a shortage of labour, and rising labour costs. This practice, prevalent in October and November following the paddy harvest, results in the release of large amounts of particulate matter into the atmosphere, contributing to the hazardous air quality in Delhi-NCR.

The Supreme Court's criticism of the CAQM reflects a broader frustration over the Commission's inability to effectively tackle this issue. Despite being set up three years ago to address pollution in the National Capital Region and surrounding areas, the CAQM has been criticised for its slow pace and lack of tangible outcomes. The court particularly highlighted that the Commission meets only once every three months, a frequency deemed inadequate for addressing a recurring crisis like stubble burning. Moreover, the Commission has issued only 82 directives since its inception, a number that the court described as insufficient to deal with the scale of the problem. A significant concern raised by the Supreme Court is the lack of adequate staffing within the pollution control boards of Delhi-NCR and other affected states, including Uttar Pradesh. The



FARMERS OFTEN RESORT TO BURNING CROP RESIDUE AFTER HARVESTING PADDY AND WHEAT DUE TO THE INCREASING MECHANISATION OF FARMING, THE USE OF COMBINED HARVESTERS, A SHORTAGE OF LABOUR, AND RISING LABOUR COSTS

court ordered that these vacant posts be filled by April 30, 2025, to improve monitoring and enforcement capabilities. Effective staffing is critical for implementing measures on the ground, particularly when dealing with farmers who rely on burning crop residue as a quick and cost-effective way to clear their fields.

Despite repeated interventions from both the National Green Tribunal (NGT) and the Supreme Court, stubble burning incidents continue to surge. Last year alone, more than 33,000 incidents of stubble burning were recorded in Punjab, even after explicit instructions to engage with farmers to explore alternatives. The lack of a coordinated effort between the state governments and the CAQM has only exacerbated the pollution crisis during the winter months.

Turning Stubble into a Resource: While the focus remains on the failures of the CAQM and the continued challenges in states like Punjab, Uttar Pradesh has emerged as a notable example of how stubble can be managed more sustainably. The state has successfully implemented initiatives that transform stubble into an energy resource and natural fertiliser, benefiting both the environment and the agricultural community.

The key to this transformation has been the establishment of Compressed Biogas (CBG) plants that convert crop residue into energy and high-quality compost. This approach has not only addressed environmental concerns but has also created an additional income stream for farmers, who sell stubble as raw

material for the CBG process. In this way, stubble has shifted from being a burden to becoming a valuable asset in Uttar Pradesh's rural economy. As of last year, Uttar Pradesh led the country in CBG production, with ten operational plants. Currently, 24 CBG units are active, and another 93 are under construction. The state aims to have more than 100 CBG plants operational soon, a goal endorsed by Union Petroleum and Natural Gas Minister Hardeep Singh Puri. During a March 2024 announcement, he highlighted the state's plan to double its bio-coal and biodiesel production by 2025. The success of CBG production in Uttar Pradesh has been bolstered by the Uttar Pradesh State Bio-Energy Policy 2022, which offers various incentives for establishing bio-CNG and CBG units using agricultural waste.

The policy aims to set up CBG plants in every district, providing local solutions for managing stubble while promoting energy self-sufficiency. A significant milestone in this journey was the inauguration of a CBG plant in Dhuriyapar, Gorakhpur, on March 8, 2023, by Union Petroleum Minister Hardeep Singh Puri and Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath. The plant, built for Rs 165 crore, processes 200 metric tonnes of straw, 20 metric tonnes of press mud, and 10 metric tonnes of cattle dung daily. It produces 20 metric tonnes of biogas and 125 metric tonnes of organic manure, contributing to higher agricultural yields while reducing dependency on chemical fertilisers. This initiative allows farmers to diversify their income sources and play

a crucial role in the energy sector. By reducing the practice of stubble burning, the state is making strides in environmental protection. The Yogi Adityanath government has expressed confidence that the enhanced production of bio-coal and biodiesel will help reduce air pollution in the region over the next five years.

The Supreme Court's critique of the CAQM underscores the urgency of finding a balanced approach to stubble burning that respects both environmental concerns and the practical challenges faced by farmers. Uttar Pradesh's model of converting stubble into a resource could serve as a blueprint for other states grappling with similar issues. However, the broader challenge remains: implementing such solutions at scale requires consistent policy support, adequate resources, and a willingness to engage with farmers directly. The court's directive for the CAQM to improve its approach and for state governments to fill vacant posts by 2025 is a step towards accountability.

Yet, the real test will lie in translating these directives into action before another winter brings the familiar, suffocating haze back to the skies of Delhi-NCR. The question remains whether the CAQM, in partnership with state governments, can adapt and adopt innovative solutions like those seen in UP. Without swift and sustained efforts, the region risks facing another year of deteriorating air quality, leaving millions to grapple with the health consequences of inaction.

(The writer is Associate Editor, The Pioneer; views expressed are personal)

Urbanisation and youth: Building a healthier future amid rapid growth

By 2050, with 70 per cent of the global population expected to live in cities, engaging youth in shaping sustainable urban future is more crucial than ever

Urbanisation, an engine for economic prosperity and resources, sits at the centre of modernity and impacts health outcomes. With rapid urbanisation, the UN projects that by 2050, 7 of 10 people will live in cities, and the youth will likely be the most dominant population. The future will be forged by the ever-increasing global youth, who are integral to playing a dynamic and revolutionary role in creating and building strong, prosperous, sustainable, and vibrant societies. In recent years, international organisations have emphasised the meaningful involvement of youth as vital to accelerating progress towards the SDGs while development continues to grow globally. The approach also coincides



ASHWAJIT SINGH

with this year's message of World Habitat Day, which focuses on "engaging youth to create a better urban future." However, while we work towards engaging the new generation in planning their urban present and future through participatory processes and local leadership opportunities, ensuring their healthy livelihood is imperative. Urbanisation's positive attributes also mask the inequalities

that exist within it. Not all city residents experience or can access these benefits equally. For instance, 40 per cent of India's population will reside in the urban setup by 2030, with 24 per cent being the youth (15-29), making it a relatively young country. Although rapid urbanisation will continue to improve India's average household socio-economic condition and child health status, it is expected to disproportionately affect the health of urban youth, who are likely to become more vulnerable to health challenges. Urbanisation without accounting for the primary healthcare amenities results in significant health disparities. As gentrification grows with urbanisation, a large chunk of the youth is likely to reside in

urban slums and low-income areas. These areas carry distinct health challenges that are influenced by broader socio-economic determinants such as poverty, education and employment. Youth from low-income families and areas are more likely to face barriers to accessing education, which in turn limits job opportunities and perpetuates a cycle of poor health outcomes.

These informal settlements may sit adjacent to an affluent neighbourhood. Still, the people living there lack access to safe water and sanitation infrastructure, becoming hotspots for waterborne and vector-borne diseases due to flooding, open sewers, and overcrowding. With such poor hygiene, increased rates of malnutrition



among children and young adults worsen the burden of diseases.

In addition to infectious diseases, urban youth in lower-income areas are increasingly exposed to non-communicable diseases such as diabetes and hypertension, which are often exacerbated by poor diet, stress, and lack of access to early diagnosis or regular health checkups. These substantial regional disparities affecting urban youths

are also caused by the inequitable distribution of clinics and healthcare centres, which limits care options. According to NFHS-3, only 39.9 per cent of urban poor children get full immunisation compared to 65.4 per cent of urban non-poor children. Lower vaccination rates and a lack of awareness of ongoing health issues negatively impact school attendance and cognitive development. The National Urban Health Mission (NUHM), launched in 2013, has been instrumental in meeting the regulatory, reformatory, and developmental public health priorities for urban settings. Over the years, NUHM has improved access to healthcare, allowing the urban poor

to choose public over costly private services. Among the other initiatives to focus on urban youth health, the National Youth Policy (NYP) 2021 outlines a 10-year vision for youth development by 2030, aligning with the United Nations' SDGs. The NYP prioritises youth health as essential for India's holistic growth and progress by addressing critical health components of urban youth and acknowledging mental health. Further, India's pioneering step towards building inclusive health that benefits all and focuses on the youth also found prominence in the recent G20 New Delhi Leaders' Declaration in 2023. The report encompasses ways to eliminate hunger and malnutrition and advance with

more health collaborations, especially when facing challenging mental health. While policies like NUHM and NYP have made strides in addressing urban youth health, more needs to be done and implemented to improve primary healthcare. Many urban healthcare centres still struggle with understaffing, lack of resources, and accessibility issues for slum-dwelling youth. To ensure that India's urban youth thrive, it is crucial to increase investments in health services, prioritise mental health care, and continue engaging youth in the decision-making process for urban development.

(The writer is the Founder and Managing Director of IPE Global; views expressed are personal)

Israel strikes southern suburbs of Beirut for the first time in nearly a week

AP ■ BEIRUT

Israeli jets struck the southern suburbs of Beirut early Wednesday for the first time in six days, Lebanese state media reported. The casualty count was not yet clear. The attack comes just one day after caretaker Prime Minister Najib Mikati said the United States government gave him some assurances of Israel easing its strikes in the Lebanese capital. Israel says it is striking Hezbollah assets in the suburbs, where the militant group has a strong presence, but it is also a busy residential and commercial area. The Israeli military said the Wednesday strike hit a weapons warehouse under a residential building. The Israeli military posted an evacuation warning on the X platform saying it is targeting a building in the Haret Hreik neighborhood. An Associated Press photographer who witnessed the strikes said there were three in the area. The first strike was documented less than an hour after the notice. Hezbollah began firing rockets into Israel on Oct. 8 in solidarity with the Palestinian militant group Hamas, following their surprise attack on southern Israel. A year of low-level fighting escalated



Smoke rise from destroyed buildings that were hit by Israeli airstrikes in Qana village, south Lebanon on Wednesday. AP/PTI

into all-out war last month, and has displaced some 1.2 million people in Lebanon. Elsewhere, Israeli strikes late Tuesday in the southern town of Qana killed at least 15

people, according to Lebanon's Civil Defense. Nuhad Bustanji, a spokesperson for the first responders, said rescue efforts were still underway and the toll could rise. Videos

shared on social media showed the smoking ruins of a building targeted in the strike with surrounding structures damaged as well. Local media said there were several

strikes in the southern town Tuesday night. Qana was the site of an Israeli artillery strike on a United Nations compound that killed dozens of civilians in 1996.

Zelenskyy's 'victory plan' includes big hurdle for West 'NATO membership for Ukraine'

AP ■ KYIV

Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy said Wednesday his plan to win his country's fight against Russia's invasion could bring peace next year, but it contains a step that some crucial Western allies have so far refused to countenance: inviting Ukraine to join NATO before the war ends. "If we start moving according to this victory plan now, it may be possible to end the war no later than next year," Zelenskyy told his country's parliament. He has recently been trying to win approval for the plan from Western partners, who so far have stopped short of publicly voicing their support for it. The first point in Zelenskyy's five-point plan that was presented in a speech to the Verkhovna Rada, Ukraine's parliament, is perhaps the most ambitious and the most likely to make Western allies balk: letting Ukraine into NATO while the fighting continues. Zelenskyy said granting Ukraine membership in the alliance would be a "testament of (allies') determination" to support Ukraine. It may, however, be too ambitious a step. NATO's collective security guarantee — Article 5 of the military alliance's treaty — is the pillar on which its credibility is based. It is a political commitment by all member countries to come to the aid of any member whose sov-

erignty or territory might be under attack. NATO makes its decisions by consensus, and many allies — including the United States and Germany — refuse to allow Ukraine in while fighting continues because they fear being dragged into a wider war with Russia. At their summit in Washington in July, NATO's 32 members declared Ukraine on an "irreversible" path to membership in the Western military alliance. Any decision on offering to start membership talks is probably not likely before the next summit in the Netherlands in June. Ukraine's troops are having trouble holding back Russia's military might, especially in the eastern Donetsk region where they are gradually being pushed backward. Though Russia's gains have been incremental, its steady forward movement is slowly adding up and Ukraine keenly feels the need for more large-scale Western help. But there are signs that Western support may be waning, diminished by a focus on the Middle East wars and domestic political concerns. The US elections next month could bring a major shift in Ukraine's fortunes, as Washington has been the biggest provider of military aid. Zelenskyy publicly acknowledged for the first time that in private talks with Ukraine its Western partners are increasing-

ly talking about "negotiations" with Russia and much less frequently use the word "justice" in conversations about the war. He also dialled up the stakes in Ukraine, repeating his recent claims that North Korea is now sending military personnel to help Russia's war effort, as well as delivering ammunition, and that Iran and China are also aiding Moscow. Zelenskyy's "victory plan" contains confidential sections which he didn't mention in Parliament, officials said. Other aspects of the plan include continued striking of targets on Russian soil, including the incursion into Russia's Kursk border region that began in August and more long-range drone strikes on Russian infrastructure. Ukraine, he said, also needs more air defence systems and access to a broader range of intelligence from allies. Zelenskyy noted that Ukraine is rich in natural resources, including critically important metals "worth trillions of US dollars," such as uranium, titanium, lithium, graphite and others. Those Ukrainian assets, as well as the country's agricultural production, are among Russia's key targets in the war, he said, but could be shared in postwar times with partners. Also in a postwar period, battle-hardened Ukrainian troops would be an asset for NATO efforts to keep Russia at bay.

At least 100 killed as gasoline tanker explodes in Nigeria

AP ■ ABUJA

More than 100 people have been killed and 50 others injured after a gasoline tanker overturned in Nigeria and sparked an explosion as dozens of people rushed to the vehicle to scoop up the fuel, police said Wednesday. The explosion occurred past midnight in Jigawa state's Maijya town after the tanker driver lost control of the vehicle while travelling on a highway close to a university, police spokesperson Lawan Adam said. Deadly tanker accidents are common in Nigeria, Africa's most populous country, where traffic regulations are not strictly enforced in many places and there is a lack of alternatives such as an efficient railway system to transport cargo. It is also common for people to salvage fuel after such accidents, especially with Nigeria's soaring fuel prices. Residents who heard about the latest accident rushed to the scene and were scooping up fuel, "sparking a massive inferno that killed 94 people on the spot," Adam said. Videos that appeared to be from the scene showed a massive fire stretching across the entire area, with what appeared to be bodies littered at the scene.



Jinping's rare visit to province facing Taiwan

AP ■ TAIPEI (TAIWAN)

China's President Xi Jinping made a rare visit to a province facing Taiwan following military exercises that mobilised China's navy, air force, missile force and land troops to simulate a blockade of the self-governing island democracy that Beijing claims as its own territory and threatens to annex by force. Xi did not comment on the military exercises during his visit to Fujian province, according to the official Xinhua News Agency, but his visit came on the heels of China's dispatch of a record 125 aircraft, as well as its Liaoning aircraft carrier and ships, in large-scale military exercises surrounding Taiwan and its outlying islands on Monday. Xi has largely avoided public appearances and foreign travel over the past year, but bringing Taiwan under Beijing's control remains a priority for his administration as head of the ruling Communist Party and its military, the People's Liberation Army. Taiwan's newly elected president Lai Ching-te has been vociferously criticized by Beijing for rejecting its position that Taiwan is a part of China. The drills came four days after Taiwan celebrated the founding of its government on its National Day, when Taiwanese President Lai Ching-te said in a speech that China has no right to represent Taiwan and declared his commitment to "resist annexation or encroachment".

Don't look at China's BRI through 'narrow political prism': Pak

PTI ■ ISLAMABAD

Pakistan Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif on Wednesday rooted for Beijing's Belt and Road Initiative at the SCO summit here, saying such connectivity projects should not be viewed through a "narrow political prism" — an apparent reference to India's reluctance to endorse it. In his opening remarks at the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation summit, he said efforts like China's Belt and Road Initiative and the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor, which is a part of the larger project, should be expanded. India has shown little enthusiasm for the China's "unilateral" initiative. And it has repeatedly criticised the China-Pakistan corridor for violating its territorial integrity as it involves building infrastructure in Pakistan-occupied Kashmir. Indirectly challenging India's position, Sharif said, "Let us not look at such projects through the narrow political prism, and invest in our collective connectivity capacities which are crucial to advancing the shared vision of an economically integrated region." In his speech later, External Affairs Minister S Jaishankar said trade and connectivity initiatives must recognise territorial integrity and sovereignty and it is essential to have an "honest conversation" on lack of trust, a remark seen as an indirect reference to China. The SCO comprises China, India, Russia, Pakistan, Iran, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Uzbekistan and Belarus. Sixteen more countries are affiliated as observers or "dialogue partners".



Pakistan's Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif (centre), China's Premier Li Qiang, Belarus Prime Minister Roman Golovchenko, Russian Prime Minister Mikhail Mishustin, Kazakhstan's Prime Minister Olzhas Bektenov, Tajikistan's Prime Minister Kokhir Rasulzoda, and other leaders pose for group photo at the opening session of Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO) meeting in Islamabad, on Wednesday. AP/PTI

In his closing address, the Pakistan leader condemned the Israeli attacks in Gaza. "We cannot ignore the ongoing genocide in Gaza, the international community bears the responsibility to ensure an immediate and unconditional ceasefire leading to the establishment of state of Palestine on the basis of pre-1967 borders with Al-Quds as its capital," he said. The Pakistan prime minister urged member states to strengthen the SCO framework to tackle regional challenges. "We are at a historic moment of transition where sweeping transformations are reshaping the global, social, political, economic, and security landscape," he said. He affirmed Pakistan's "commitment to regional peace, stability and enhanced connectivity and sustainable socio-economic development". He said the SCO embodies the "collec-

tive voice and wishes of over 40 per cent of the global population anchored in the Shanghai spirit". "Together, we have the potential to drive socio-economic progress, enhance regional peace and stability, and to improve the quality of life for our citizens," he said. Sharif urged the leaders to use the SCO meeting to "exchange ideas, share best practices and forge concrete action plans that will benefit our economies and societies". He expressed hope that "wonderful outcomes that will emerge from our in-depth deliberations". "Our collaboration, joint teamwork expands academic and tourism linkages, poverty alleviation, empowerment of women and youth across the SCO region are reflection and commitment of our determination to promote prosperity through unity," he said. Sharif said Afghanistan provides oppor-

tunities for trade and transit, while also asking the Taliban government in that country to ensure that its territory is not used for terrorism against its neighbours. He called for collective efforts to eradicate poverty. "Poverty is not just a social issue but a moral imperative," he said. He said it is time to tackle the threat of the climate change sweeping across the region. "Climate change is an existential crisis that transcends our borders and its impacts are felt universally," the Pakistani leader said. He said Pakistan was on the frontline of disasters linked with climate change, as shown by 2022 floods that affected millions of people and caused losses worth USD30 billion. There was no direct reference in his speech to bilateral issues with India. Pakistan became a full member of the SCO at its 2017 summit in Kazakhstan.

Mexican president acknowledges killings of 3 civilians by military

AP ■ MEXICO CITY

Mexico's new president acknowledged Tuesday that three civilians including a child died in two shootouts involving the military last week in a violent border city. President Claudia Sheinbaum said a soldier was killed in one of the shootouts, as well as two adults and an 8-year-old girl. She said the events on Friday and Saturday are under investigation. But Sheinbaum gave no sign of backing away from the outsized role that she and her predecessor have given to the armed forces. The events in Nuevo Laredo, across the border from Laredo, Texas, started Friday when a nurse, her husband and son found themselves on a road where soldiers were pursuing suspects' vehicles. The husband, Víctor Carrillo Martínez, told local media there was a confrontation and his wife died in the crossfire. Sheinbaum said the soldier was apparently killed in an exchange of gunfire. "It had to do with criminals who

opened fire on an army vehicle," she said. "It is very important to say that Nuevo Laredo is where criminal groups have carried out the most attacks on the army and the National Guard." The city has long been in the grip of the Northeast Cartel, an offshoot of the old Zetas gang. The second incident in Nuevo Laredo happened Saturday, when the 8-year-old and her grandmother were driving to a store and were caught in the middle of a pursuit by soldiers or National Guard officers. The grandmother told reporters that a military vehicle was pursuing an SUV and her car got stuck between them and the military opened fire. The Human Rights Commission of Nuevo Laredo said a young man's tortured body was found nearby in a truck that the army and National Guard had been pursuing. Sheinbaum confirmed the two deaths, saying the shootings had involved the militarized National Guard. "In case there has been any misbehavior by any member of the guard or the army, or any official,

it will be punished," she said. The Defense Department, which controls the National Guard, said it had no immediate comment on the shootings. Last week, the army was involved in another shooting that killed six migrants and wounded 10. In the incident near Tapachula, close to the border with Guatemala, soldiers claimed they heard "detonations" and opened fire on a truck carrying migrants from Egypt, Nepal, Cuba, India, Pakistan and El Salvador. The dead included an 11-year-old Egyptian girl. The area is often used by migrant smugglers, but warring drug cartels also operate in the region. Former president Andrés Manuel López Obrador, who left office Sept. 30, gave the military an unprecedentedly wide role in public life and law enforcement. He created the militarized Guard and used the combined forces as the country's main law enforcement agencies, supplanting police. But critics say the military is not trained to do civilian law enforcement work.

Bodies of 5 Russian climbers who died on Nepal peak have been retrieved

AP ■ KATHMANDU

The bodies of five Russian mountaineers who died on the world's seventh-highest peak were retrieved from the mountain on Wednesday and flown to Kathmandu. The bodies were picked up by rescue helicopters from base camp on Wednesday. They were then transported from the airport in Kathmandu to the morgue at Tribhuvan University Teaching Hospital. The Russians were climbing the 8,167-metre (26,788-foot) high Mount Dhaulagiri during Nepal's autumn climbing season. The climbers were reported missing on Oct. 6 and a rescue helicopter spotted their bodies two days later. Bad weather and the location of the bodies made it difficult for rescuers to retrieve the bodies. Two of the climbers reached the summit, the while other three had turned around without reaching the top before teammates at base camp lost radio contact with them.

Hong Kong cuts liquor tax in effort to reignite its nightlife industry

AP ■ HONG KONG

Hong Kong's leader announced a cut to liquor tax Wednesday as the Asian financial hub hopes to revive its reputation as a travel destination with a vibrant nightlife and dining scene. After fulfilling Beijing's long-standing imperative to enact a homegrown national security law, Chief Executive John Lee now faces challenges with economic competitiveness against regional rivals like Singapore, Japan, and mainland Chinese metropolises. Changes in residents' lifestyles and a wave of middle-class emigration during the COVID-19 pandemic have dampened local demand. Many residents now prefer to spend their weekends in mainland China, attracted by its lower prices and a wider variety of entertainment options. Visitors from the mainland are also spending less in the city than before. Vacant shops are commonly seen in the city's most popular shopping districts, and rev-



due at the city's bars were down about 28% in the first half of 2024 from the same period in 2019, preliminary official data showed. In his annual policy address, Lee said the duty rate for liquor with an import price of more than 200 Hong Kong dollars (about \$26) would be slashed from 100% to 10% for the portion above that price starting Wednesday. He hoped the policy would foster the logistics, storage, tourism and high-end

dining industries. The government previously told lawmakers that after wine duties were abolished in 2008, imports jumped 80% in a year and the city welcomed hundreds of new wine-related businesses. Lee, a former security chief handpicked by Beijing to lead Hong Kong, pushed through the new security law in March. Critics fear the law will further curtail the civil liberties promised to the former British

colony when it returned to Chinese rule in 1997. That law follows similar national legislation Beijing imposed in 2020 to quell huge anti-government protests. Since that law took effect, many of the city's leading activists have been prosecuted, forced into self-exile or silenced. The Hong Kong government said the security laws are necessary for the city's stability. But in the wake of these dramatic political changes, many middle-class families and young professionals have emigrated to Britain, Canada, Taiwan and the United States. To attract more wealthy migrants, Lee also revised a scheme that awards residency to applicants who invest a minimum of 30 million Hong Kong dollars (\$3.9 million) in certain types of assets. Starting Wednesday, purchases of homes valued at 50 million Hong Kong dollars (\$6.4 million) or more can be counted for up to a third of the requirement, he said.

Indian-origin candidates in race for Oxford University Chancellor

The University of Oxford on Wednesday announced the 38 finalists in the race to be elected the new Chancellor of the University of Oxford...

"Applications were considered by the Chancellor's Election Committee solely on the four exclusion criteria set out in the university's regulations..."

experts had indicated that Khan's criminal convictions in his country may disqualify the former Oxford alumni...

in post for a fixed term of no more than 10 years in accordance with amendments to university statutes enacted earlier this year...

US Deputy Secretary of State Kurt Campbell said on Wednesday that Washington and its allies are "alarmed" by North Korea's nuclear and missile threats...



South Korea's First Vice Foreign Minister Kim Hong-kyun, center, poses for photos with United States Deputy Secretary of State Kurt Campbell (right) and Japan's Vice Foreign Minister Masataka Okano during their trilateral meeting at the Foreign Ministry in Seoul on Wednesday.

to monitor the situation closely," Campbell said about the claims. Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy has claimed that North Korea is sending military personnel to help Russia's war effort...

Jemima calls for Imran's release

Jemima Goldsmith, ex-wife of jailed former Pakistan prime minister Imran Khan, on Wednesday called for his release, lifting a ban on his meetings with family and claimed that these were attempts "to silence them and all political opposition in Pakistan."

General public is hereby informed that my clients Smt. Bhudevji W/o Late Sh. Malakhani Singh & Mr. Jeejevan Singh S/o Late Sh. Malakhani Singh...

It is for general information that R/ SHWETA GUPTA W/O VARUN GUPTA R/O HOUSE NO. 8/7/112-B, SAFADARIJUNG ENCLAVE EXTENSION, NEW DELHI-110029...

Notice is hereby given to the General Public that of Mr. Pawan Kumar Soni is the owner of ENTIRE SECOND FLOOR...

It is known to all that the allottee of Residential Flat No. 43D, Block-B-9, UDAIGIRI-II, Sector-34, NOIDA, M/S PREM ELECTRICAL WORKS, D-374, SECTOR-10, NOIDA, U.P. Through its Prop. SHRI MURLI DHAR S/O SHRI JAWALA PRASAD...

Public Notice: It is known to all that the allottee of Residential Flat No. 43D, Block-B-9, UDAIGIRI-II, Sector-34, NOIDA, M/S PREM ELECTRICAL WORKS, D-374, SECTOR-10, NOIDA, U.P. Through its Prop. SHRI MURLI DHAR S/O SHRI JAWALA PRASAD...

Public Notice: This is to inform the general public that Mrs. Gourika Gadhol is the owner of First floor without roof/terrace rights, built on plot no. 250 (familiar as property no. A-6/250), area measuring 70 sq. mtrs...

Public Notice: It is known to all that the allottee of Residential Flat No. 43D, Block-B-9, UDAIGIRI-II, Sector-34, NOIDA, M/S PREM ELECTRICAL WORKS, D-374, SECTOR-10, NOIDA, U.P. Through its Prop. SHRI MURLI DHAR S/O SHRI JAWALA PRASAD...

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SYMBOLIC POSSESSION NOTICE

The Authorised ICICI Bank Officer under the Securitisation, Reconstruction of Financial Assets and Enforcement of Security Interest Act, 2002 and in exercise of the powers conferred under section 13(12) read with Rule 3 of the Security Interest (Enforcement) Rules 2002...

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TRAI chief highlights balanced satcom spectrum consultation

PTI ■ NEW DELHI
As battlelines are being drawn over the modalities of allocating satcom spectrum, TRAI Chairman Anil Kumar Lahoti on Wednesday said consultation process is currently on and that the telecom regulator will consider all inputs put before taking a considered view. The regulator's comments came as Starlink CEO Elon Musk and Indian tycoons are locked in a standoff over satellite spectrum. Jio recently sought a revision of a consultation paper on recommending norms for "terms and conditions for the assignment of spectrum for certain satellite based commercial Communications services". "We have received reference from the Telecom Department and we have initiated consultation process in response to reference that has been received from DoT and it covers issue that have been referred to TRAI by the DoT... The consultation process is on, we will consider all inputs and views that are received during consultation process and we will come out

with our considered recommendations," TRAI Chairman Anil Kumar Lahoti told reporters on the sidelines of ILC. Asked about the demand by Reliance Jio that the TRAI consultation paper be revised to ensure a level playing field between terrestrial and satellite players, TRAI chairman said, "different stakeholders raise different demands on the consultation process, and we consider all these viewpoints and inputs and take a considered view. World's richest man Elon Musk has taken on Indian billionaires Mukesh Ambani and Sunil Bharti Mittal over the allocation of spectrum used in wireless communication using satellites, calling their demand for the auction of such airwaves "unprecedented". While Ambani's Reliance Jio has been vocal about the need to allocate such spectrum through an auction to give a level-playing field to legacy operators who buy airwaves and set up infrastructure like telecom towers, Mittal on Tuesday articulated the need for satellite companies harboring any urban



ambitions to buy spectrum as telecom companies do. Musk-led Starlink is demanding administrative allotment of licences in line with the global trend, as it looks to tap into the world's fastest-growing mobile telephony and internet market. This has found some backing in Telecom Minister Jyotiraditya Scindia, who said on Tuesday that such airwaves will be given out through administrative allocation and not auctioned. Scindia said the Telecom Act of 2023 passed in December has put the matter in 'Schedule 1', which means that for satcom spectrum will be allocated administratively. "... Spectrum does not come without a cost. What that cost is and what the formula of that cost is going to be, will not be decided by you or me... It will be decided by Trai... And there is a paper that has already been circulated by

Trai, and we have a regulatory authority for telecom, and that regulatory authority has been empowered by the constitution to decide what that administrative pricing is going to be," he had said. The minister had said that he is very confident that Trai will come up with the best pricing that should be adopted, provided that it is being given in an administrative manner. "Satellite spectrum across the world is allocated administratively. So, India is not doing anything different from the rest of the world. Conversely, if you do decide to auction it then you would be doing something, which is different from the rest of the world," the minister said. Pointing out that satellite spectrum is shared airwaves, Scindia said, "If the spectrum is shared then how can you price it individually". Musk first termed the demand made by Jio last week for shunning sector regulator Trai's consultation paper on satellite broadband being allocated and not auctioned as "unprecedented", and then asked if it was "too much trouble" to allow Starlink to provide internet services in India.

India reiterates opposition to China's Belt and Road Initiative

PTI ■ ISLAMABAD
India on Wednesday once again refused to endorse China's ambitious 'One Belt One Road' initiative, becoming the only country in the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation (SCO) not to support the controversial connectivity project. A joint communique unveiled at the end of the SCO's Council of Heads of Government conclave hosted by Islamabad said Russia, Belarus, Iran, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Pakistan, Tajikistan and Uzbekistan reaffirmed their support for the Chinese connectivity initiative. It said the countries noted ongoing work on the implementation of the project, including efforts to link the Eurasian Economic Union with the One Road One Initiative (OBOR). India has been refusing to endorse OBOR in previous SCO conclaves as well. India has been severely critical of the OBOR, previously known as the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI), as the project includes the so-called China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC) that passes through Pakistan-occupied Kashmir. There has been growing global criticism against the OBOR as a number of countries are reeling under the burden of debt while implementing projects relating to the initiative.



In his address at the SCO conclave, External Affairs Minister S Jaishankar said, "debt is a serious concern" but did not elaborate further. "Collaborative connectivity can create new efficiencies," he said. The joint communique said the heads of delegations noted the proposal to create a 'Greater Eurasian Partnership' with the participation of the SCO, Eurasian Economic Union, Association of Southeast Asian Nations as well as other interested states and multilateral associations. "The heads of delegations, reaffirming their desire to ensure stable economic and social development in the SCO region, noted the importance of implementing the SCO Economic Development Strategy for the period up to 2030 and the programme of multilateral trade and economic cooperation of the SCO member states," it said. "They stressed the need for coordinated efforts through the mechanisms of relevant cooperation in order to implement the respective action plans," it added. The SCO conclave was chaired by Pakistan Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif. Besides Jaishankar, the conclave was attended by Chi-n-ese Premier Li Qiang, Belarus Prime Minister Roman Golovchenko, Kaza-kh PM Olzhas Bektenov, Russian PM Mikhail Mishustin, Tajik PM Kohir Rasulzoda, Uzbek PM Abdulla Aripov, Kyrgyzstan's Cha-i-rman of Ministers Cabinet Zhaparov Akylbek and Iran's First Vice Pres-ident Mohammad Reza Aref.

Piyush Goyal urges industry to prioritise quality over subsidies

PTI ■ NEW DELHI
Commerce and Industry Minister Piyush Goyal on Wednesday asked the industry to focus on making high quality products to tap global markets as export competitiveness will not come from government subsidies or support. He also said that the government is putting its effort to nudge industry to get into the manufacturing of high quality products as it is a "tough" task to get industry to accept that they should be making quality goods. Initially, the government faced a huge amount of opposition from the industry on quality control orders. "Our export competitiveness is not going to come from subsidies or government support. It is not going to come from our closing the doors to the rest of the world. If we are looking at self-reliant India, it can only happen when India will be self-confident and that confidence will only come when we all decide that quality is not our job, it is our duty," the minister said. He added that if the Indian industry is not competitive in any product, that can be imported the industry has to work towards competitiveness where it has a comparative advantage with other nations. The government is taking a series of steps such as rolling out Quality Control Orders



(QCOs) to boost manufacturing in the country. Till 2014, he said, only 14 QCOs covering 106 products were issued, but in the last 10 years, the government has issued as many as 174 such orders covering 732 products to ensure that more and more people will become aligned with better quality standards. These orders help curb the import of sub-standard products, prevent unfair trade practices and ensure the safety and well-being of consumers as well as the environment. Under the order, an item cannot be produced, sold, traded, imported and stocked unless it bears the Bureau of Indian Standards (BIS) mark. Violation of the provision of the BIS Act can attract imprisonment of up to two years or a fine of at least Rs 2 lakh for the first offence. In case of second and subsequent offences, the fine will increase to a minimum of Rs 5 lakh and extend up to 10 times of the value of goods or articles. QCOs are issued in accordance with the WTO Agreement on Technical

Ministers' panel discusses merger of GST compensation cess into taxes

PTI ■ NEW DELHI
The group of ministers (GoM) on GST compensation cess, under Minister of State for Finance Pankaj Chaudhary, on Wednesday discussed merger of compensation cess into GST. States suggested that during the transition of cess, once it is decided to merge with taxes no new goods should be added to the list of luxury, sin and demerit goods. States were of the view that since the compensation cess ends in March 2026, the only way to restructure it is to merge the levy with the taxes and bring about separate tax rates for the items on which cess is levied currently. "GST compensation cess is coming to an end. A discussion needed to be done on what will be the future of the cess. Every state has given their views. This was the first meeting," Minister of State for Finance Pankaj Chaudhary said. Should it continue as cess or be converted to tax and whether there would be changes in luxury, demerit and sin goods items, Chaudhary said, "Discussion is going on". The next meeting of the GoM on compensation cess is in the second week of November. Sources said all states have suggested merger of taxes under GST, because

compensation cess has expired. "But no new goods will be added. Compensation period has ended and if it has to be brought under GST then it has to be restructured and brought in as taxes," sources said. The Group of Ministers (GoM), which includes members from Assam, Chhattisgarh, Gujarat, Karnataka, Madhya Pradesh, Punjab, Tamil Nadu, Uttar Pradesh and West Bengal, will submit its report to the GST Council by December 31. In the GST regime, compensation cess at varied rates is levied on luxury, sin and demerit goods over and above the 28 per cent tax. The proceeds from the cess, which was originally planned for five years after GST roll-out or till June 2022, was used to compensate states for revenue loss incurred by them post the introduction of GST. In 2022, the Council decided to extend the levy till March 2026 to repay the interest and the principle amount of the Rs 2.69 lakh crore worth loan taken in the 2021 and 2022 fiscal years to make good states' revenue loss during Covid years. With just one-and-a-half year remaining for the cess to end, the GST Council in its 54th meeting on September 9 decided to set up a GoM to decide the future course of the cess.

RBI celebrates 90th anniversary with nationwide quiz



PNS ■ NEW DELHI
New Delhi was conducted at Hyatt Regency, Bhikaji Cama Place, Delhi, where 136 students (68 teams) competed. The team from Shaheed Sukhdev College of Business Studies comprising Ishaan Yewale & Harshita Jain emerged as the winner, followed by those from Maulana Azad Medical College and Sri Venkateswara College in second and third places, respectively. Prizes for the top three teams are of ₹2 lakh, ₹1.5 lakh, and ₹1 lakh, respectively. The winning team will now compete in the Zonal round, which will take place between November 21, 2024, and December 4, 2024. The national final will be held at Mumbai in December 2024.

STPI Launches LEAP AHEAD 2nd Edition for Startups

PNS ■ NEW DELHI
Building on the success of its inaugural edition, the Software Technology Parks of India (STPI) on Wednesday launched the LEAP AHEAD 2nd Edition at the Indian Mobile Congress 2024 in the national Capital. The initiative was launched by K. K. Singh, Joint Secretary, Ministry of Electronics & Information Technology (MeitY) and Arvind Kumar, Director General, STPI; Dr. Rasappa Viswanathan, Director, ICAR Indian Institute of Sugarcane Research; Pradeep Gupta, Chairman & Managing Director, CyberMedia and Board Member, TIE Delhi-NCR; and Roshan Lal Tamak, Executive Director & CEO, DCM Shriram Ltd, Dr. Sanjay Gupta, Senior Director, STPI; Subodh Sachan, Director, STPI. Following the impactful success of the LEAP AHEAD 1st Edition, which anchored young entrepreneurs and tech startups, the second edition promises to revolutionize tech startups in scaling, product diversification, and regional expansion. With up to Rs One Crore in funding support, the program includes a comprehensive three-month mentorship program offering a mix of virtual and in-person sessions.

Promote Indian firms in infra consultancy: Ex-PIB chief

PNS ■ NEW DELHI
Former Director General of Press Information Bureau (PIB), Govt of India, Rajeev Kumar Jain on Wednesday said the government must take efforts to promote more and more Indian Companies in the infrastructure consultancy space to fully realize the vision of Atmanirbhar Bharat, more so when we are already promoting the manufacturing of train coaches in India. Jain further said that Indian Railways and metro projects have embraced the "Make in India" philosophy by promoting local manufacturing of rolling stock, signaling systems, and other critical components. "This can be done so even for the infrastructure consultancy sector," said Jain who had a stint Rail, Civil Aviation and Urban Affairs



and various ministries in his career spanning over 30 years. He was addressing at the 4th Edition of Urban Infra Business Summit & Awards 2024, hosted by the Urban Infra Group. Anil Kumar (Khandelwal, Former Member (Infrastructure), Railway Board, Ministry of Railways, Prof. Manoj Choudhary, Vice Chancellor, Gati Shakti Vishwavidyalaya, Ministry of Railways, I. Jeyakumar, IRTS, Member Secretary/Special Officer, CUMTA, Ajay Kumar

Lal, Principal FA & CAO (Retd), Ministry of Railways and Rajesh Agrawal, Former Member Railway Board, were also present at the inaugural function. Complimenting the Government for promoting Atmanirbhar Bharat, Jain said that the High-Speed Railway is a classic example of awarding the consultancy contract to all the Indian companies. "The project being highly technical and complex in nature, and being built for the first time in India, the Govt. has relied on all the Indian companies (Tata Consulting Engineers, Consulting Engineers Group for the job of project management consultancy. This makes a compelling case for the Govt. to do so in the other infrastructure works, particularly in metro sector," he stated.

Rubrik launches DSPM

PNS ■ NEW DELHI
US-based cyber security firm Rubrik on Wednesday announced the launch of Rubrik Data Security Posture Management (DSPM) for Microsoft 365 Copilot to provide greater visibility and control of sensitive data, reduce the risk of exposure, and empower organizations to quickly and securely adopt Copilot, an AI-powered assistant that generates answers anchored in an organization's business content to deliver highly relevant and contextual responses. "The announcement comes at a crucial time as many organizations are preparing to embrace AI tools and adopt Microsoft 365 Co-pilot in a big way. The biggest hurdle that's slowing down organizations is the lack of tools and platforms that can identify and control access to sensitive data" said Abhilash

Purushothaman, Vice President and General Manager, Rubrik (Asia). "With the growing volume of Microsoft 365 customers in India, managing and safeguarding sensitive information has become increasingly complex. Rubrik aims to mitigate these risks, strengthen resilience for organizations and enables accelerated adoption of transformational AI tools like M365 Copilot; without worrying about potential sensitive data exposure and associated regulatory fallout that are a slowing down the AI adoption," Abhilash Purushothaman added. "Organizations are facing significant pressure when it comes to improving security of their rapidly growing data," said Mike Tornica, Chief Business Officer at Rubrik. "Microsoft is committed to enabling secure and intelligent productivity tools for our customers," said Tony

Surma, CTO, Americas Partners at Microsoft. Microsoft 365 Copilot is an AI-powered assistant that generates answers anchored in an organization's business content to deliver highly relevant and contextual responses. To ensure Copilot surfaces only data which users have permissions to view, it follows the same data access controls already in place in Microsoft 365. Misconfigurations in these controls could lead to the exposure of sensitive data to unauthorized users. To help mitigate this risk, Rubrik DSPM for Microsoft 365 Copilot is designed to provide the data visibility and control needed to ensure sensitive data is correctly classified, labeled, and segmented - and has the right access permissions. This enables organizations to leverage the power of Copilot while securing sensitive data from the risk of exposure.

INBRIEF

RECPDCL HANDS OVER RAJASTHAN-IV
RAJASTHAN: REC Power Development and Consultancy Limited (RECPDCL), a wholly owned subsidiary of REC Limited, the Maharashtra CPSU under the aegis of Ministry of Power, handed over a project specific SPV on 15th October 2024 at Gurugram.

IIFL FINANCE OFFERS GOLD LOAN AT 0.99% INTEREST RATE PER MONTH
DELHI: IIFL Finance, one of India's leading non-banking financial companies (NBFC), is offering Gold Loan at 0.99% interest rate per month with zero processing fees until October 19, 2024 under its ongoing Gold Loan Mela.

LOCOMOTIVES ACROSS INDIAN RAILWAYS TO BE EQUIPPED
MALIGAO: In a major milestone, Indian Railways is all set to install Kavach 4.0 - an indigenous Automatic Train Protection System on 10,000 locomotives across its network. Recently, after successful trial implementation of Kavach 4.0 was done at a stretch of 108 km in the West Central Railway.

I WAS ON EDGE OF MY SEAT WHEN MY NAME CAME UP IN HIL AUCTION: HARMANPREET

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

On the edge of his seat during Hockey India League (HIL) auctions, India's Olympic medal-winning skipper Harmanpreet Singh was silently praying that Sardar Singh from Soorma Hockey Club makes a winning bid for him. Eventually his wish came true with Harmanpreet becoming the costliest buy in the men's section as Soorma Hockey Club, representing Punjab and Haryana, secured his services for a whopping Rs 78 lakh on the first day of the three-day auction. "I am elated that the Hockey India League is back and in marvellous fashion. I was on the edge of my seat when my name came up during the auction, mentally hoping and urging Sardar Singh to bid for me and I get to play for the Haryana-Punjab region," said Harmanpreet, who led India to the bronze medal at the Paris Olympics. "It was a great relief when Soorma Hockey Club finally landed me in the auction and I could not have been happier," he added. The men's HIL will feature eight teams, while the inaugural women's event will have four teams. The ace drag-flicker was happy with



the combination of the squad, insisting that they managed to get the perfect balance. "We have a very good-looking team at

the Soorma Hockey Club at the end of the auction, the owners and coaching staff have hit the ball out of the park. We have the perfect balance of

experienced, big-name players and young players with the potential to become big names themselves," Harmanpreet said.

The upcoming edition of the event holds greater significance as the Women's HIL will make its debut and will run co-currently with the men's league in two venues — Ranchi (men) and Rourkela (women). India defender Udit Duhan, who was picked by Shrachi Rarh Bengal Tigers for Rs 32 lakh, can't hide her excitement for becoming the costliest buy in the women's auction. "Hockey India is breaking barriers and setting new standards by holding a Women's Hockey India League at the same time as the men's league. This will be a good opportunity to showcase our skills and grow as athletes by playing with players from different nationalities. All of us are eager to give our 100 per cent," she said. "I cannot wait to get on the pitch and aim to win the league." Hyderabad Toofans, Soorma Hockey Club, Shrachi Rarh Bengal Tigers, Delhi SG Pipers, Tamil Nadu Dragons, UP Rudras, Kalinga Lancers and Team Gonasaika are the eight men's teams. In the women's event, Soorma Hockey Club, Shrachi Rarh Bengal Tigers, Delhi SG Pipers and Odisha Warriors will fight it out from December 28 till February 1, with the final of the women's event slated for January 26.



Chennaiyin FC aim to stretch unbeaten away run against NorthEast United

PTI ■ GUWAHATI

Chennaiyin FC will look to prolong their unbeaten away run at the Indian Super League 2024-25 season when they lock horns with determined hosts NorthEast United FC here on Thursday. CFC have been on the road for two out of their first three matches this season. Speaking to the media ahead of their third away match, Chennaiyin head coach Owen Coyle praised NorthEast United while highlighting the need for his team to be more clinical. "What you have is two very good teams," Coyle told the media. "Two very attack-minded teams, going all out to win a tough game. NorthEast (United) are always a very dangerous opponent — they were last year and they certainly are this year. I think Juan Pedro Benali has done a fantastic job." "Equally, we know we have a good team, we know we have good players and can stand toe-to-toe with the best teams in this league when we are at our best. So that's our focus, being very respectful of our opponents but focusing on our qualities. "In truth, we should probably be sitting with 7-9 points; in the last two games alone, we had just under 40 chances, so

we know we have to be more clinical," he added. Due to heavy rainfall in Chennai, the Marina Machans had to travel to Guwahati prematurely and resume training away from home. Coyle expressed gratitude to the Highlanders for their sporting integrity in opening their gates early and also wished for the safety of those back home. "We haven't been able to train for the last three days because of the severe weather in Chennai. But, more importantly, we want to make sure everyone's safe and well, so that's the priority," Coyle said. This was echoed by left-back Ankit Mukherjee, who joined Coyle for the presser. During the international break, CFC's Lalrinliana Hnamte made his international debut for India, while Farukh Choudhary returned to the fold with a goal. Coyle emphasized their achievements and confirmed that they had returned to training ahead of the NorthEast United match. Chennaiyin's clash with NorthEast United will be the 23rd meeting between the teams in the ISL. NorthEast United have played four matches this season, one more than Chennaiyin, with one win, one loss, and two draws.

Thomas Tuchel hired as England head coach ahead of 2026 World Cup

AP ■ LONDON

Thomas Tuchel was hired as England coach on Wednesday and will take on the challenge of ending the national team's decades-long wait for a trophy. The German, who previously managed Paris Saint-Germain, Chelsea and Bayern Munich, will begin his tenure in January ahead of the 2026 World Cup in the United States. The English Football Association said Tuchel had been identified as the "preferred candidate" after what it described as an

extensive search to replace Gareth Southgate, who stepped down after the European Championship in July. Tuchel won major trophies in Germany, France and England and is England's third foreign coach, after the late Sven-Goran Eriksson and Fabio Capello. He succeeds one of England's most successful coaches in Southgate, who led the country to back-to-back European Championship finals and a World Cup semifinals. Southgate stepped down after eight years following defeat to Spain in the final of Euro 2024.



The FA said it had interviewed several candidates before deciding on Tuchel. Tuchel won European club soccer's biggest prize when leading Chelsea to the Champions League title in 2021. He has won league titles with PSG in France and Bayern in Germany. He takes on the England job after leaving Bayern at the end of last season. The 51-year-old Tuchel fits the FA's remit of hiring a coach who has delivered at the highest level and also knows the English game following his time with Chelsea. The FA said in July that it

wanted someone with "significant experience of English football, with a strong track record delivering results in the Premier League and/or leading international competitions." It also said the new coach would develop the team to "win a major tournament and be consistently ranked as one of the top teams in the world." As manager of Chelsea, Tuchel beat Pep Guardiola's Manchester City to win the Champions League within months of taking the job. He also won the UEFA Super Cup and Club World Cup with the Premier League club.



Competition is stronger this year but India can lift SAFF trophy: Ashalata

PTI ■ KATHMANDU

The quality of football has improved immensely in the region but the Indian team is equipped to win the SAFF Women's Championship, senior defender Ashalata Devi said on Wednesday as the side gears up to take on arch-rivals Pakistan in its tournament-opener. The clash against Pakistan on Thursday assumes significance since Ashalata will become India's first woman footballer to play 100 international matches when she takes field on Thursday at the iconic Dasarath Stadium. Ashalata said the first game always sets the tone, and a strong start will help them play freely in the following matches. The last time the two teams clashed, India had emerged a 3-0 winner.

"It's always exciting to face a team like Pakistan. We have a lot of respect for them. They have grown as a unit. Last time, we won against them, but we are not taking them lightly. They are motivated, prepared well and will surely put up a good fight," said Ashalata. India head coach Santosh Kashyap is expecting a close contest. "I have watched Pakistan's recent matches, including the one against Singapore, where they put up a tough fight and narrowly lost 1-0. They have strong physicality and play good football. "All the teams are very close in terms of quality, and they fight hard. Whether it's the men's or women's teams, we can't afford to think we are the favourites and will win easily. When asked about Ashalata

Devi's milestone, coach Kashyap said, "It's a great achievement for her as well as for women's football. I always tell young players to look up to her and how she has maintained herself for such a long time." Pakistan, who have players like Maria Khan and Nadia Khan in the ranks, will not be pushovers. Skipper Maria is an experienced midfielder, who plies her trade for Saudi Arabian pro side Eastern Flames. Two other Pakistan players, goalkeeper Rumaysa Khan and striker Isra Khan, play in Canada and the United States, respectively. "I think it will be an interesting match, India have prepared well. They have a new coach as well, so they have new strategies, we don't know what to expect. It's a good rivalry," Pakistan head coach Adeel Rizki said.

Mbappe's representatives dismiss Swedish reports of a rape claim

AP ■ STOCKHOLM

French soccer star Kylian Mbappé's representatives have rejected as "false and irresponsible" reports in Swedish media saying he is the subject of a rape investigation in the Nordic country. Without citing sources, several Swedish media including tabloids Expressen and Aftonbladet and broadcasters SVT and TV4 reported that the Real Madrid striker was the subject of a rape claim following a visit to Stockholm last week. In response to the reports, Swedish prosecutors issued a brief statement Tuesday saying a rape had been reported to police, but didn't name any suspect. "According to the report the incident took place on October 10, 2024, at a hotel in central Stockholm," said the statement published by the Swedish Prosecution Authority. Prosecutor Marina Chirakova, who is leading that investigation, declined to give any further details. "From my side I cannot confirm whether there is a



suspect in the case," she told The Associated Press. Names of suspects are typically not made public by Swedish authorities until charges are filed or a suspect is ordered held in pre-trial detention. Mbappé's communications team accused Swedish media of spreading "slanderous" rumors. "These accusations are totally false and irresponsible, and

their propagation is unacceptable," they said in a statement sent to the AP and other media. "Kylian Mbappé will under no circumstances tolerate his integrity, reputation and honour being sullied by unfounded insinuations." In a post late Monday on his official X account Mbappé wrote "FAKE NEWS!!!" and linked to a French article

and left the hearing in Paris on Tuesday. Later on Tuesday, a lawyer for Mbappé, Marie-Alix Canu-Bernard, told French broadcaster TFI that her client was "bewildered" by the reports. "We are told that a complaint has been lodged, but at this stage we don't even know against whom. A complaint does not make the truth, a complaint does not prove anything. And once again, I don't even know if the complaint is against him," she said. Swedish media already last week reported on Mbappé's brief stay in Stockholm, publishing pictures of him and his entourage. The French star had been given permission to skip international duty because of a minor thigh injury as France beat Israel and Belgium in Nations League matches on October 10 and October 14, respectively. Mbappé, who won the World Cup with France in 2018, joined Real Madrid this summer after seven years at PSG.

Messi scores hat-trick as Argentina wins in South American World Cup qualifying

AP ■ BUENOS AIRES

A hat trick and two assists: Lionel Messi came back in style for Argentina in its 6-0 home win in a South American World Cup qualifying match. Messi, who missed two rounds of the competition in October due to a right ankle injury, played from start to finish on Tuesday in front of raucous fans at the Monumental de Núñez Stadium, who chanted his name after he opened the scoring in the 19th minute. Its archrival Brazil, whose coach Dorival Júnior was under pressure earlier this month, got some relief with a convincing performance in a 4-0 home win against Peru. Argentina remained as leaders of the round-robin competition with 22 points after 10 matches, three points clear of second-place Colombia, who earlier beat Chile 4-0. Uruguay, which earlier had a goalless draw with Ecuador, and Brazil come next with 16 points.

The Uruguayans are in third position on goal difference. Ecuador and Paraguay follow, with 13 points each, but the Ecuadorians have one more win to take the fifth position. The top six teams in the region will secure automatic berths in the next World Cup. The seventh-place team, currently Bolivia, will play in an international playoff for a spot in the tournament in 2026. Two more rounds of South American World Cup qualifying will be played in November. **MESSI IN STRONG FORM ON RETURN:** Messi's first goal came after a mistake by a Bolivian defender, who missed a pass and allowed the 37-year-old Messi to run freely and finish unchallenged in front of goalkeeper Billy Viscarra. Messi assisted on Lautaro Martínez's goal in the 42nd minute and gave a decisive pass once again in added time on a goal by Julián Álvarez. Argentina appeared to slow its pace



after the break, but scored again with Thiago Almada in the 69th minute. The striker scored from close range after a low cross by Nahuel Molina. Messi's show had

two great finishing touches from the edge of the box, the first in the 84th minute and the second in the 86th minute. "We enjoyed this, we are happy to be here playing in Argentina," said

Messi, who once again refused to say whether he will play in the next World Cup in 2026. "This could be one of the last (matches in front of the Argentinian crowd)."

Bolivia, which is seeking to qualify for the World Cup for the first time in 30 years, remains in contention with 12 points. **BRAZIL REAPPEARS UNDER JUNIOR:** This month's rounds of South American qualifying were important for coach Dorival Júnior. His team was knocked out in the quarterfinals of the latest Copa America and was struggling against rivals it used to beat easily, such as Paraguay and Venezuela. Júnior's chances of success seemed low in matches against Chile and Peru due to injuries affecting several of his starters; goalkeeper Alisson, defender Eder Militao and striker Vinicius Júnior were all out. But a last-minute win against the Chileans and a convincing display against the Peruvians will give the Brazil coach some relief. Raphinha scored from the spot twice to put Brazil in front in Brasilia, in the 38th minute and the second in the 54th. Substitute Andreas Pereira made

more than 60,000 fans at the National Stadium gasp when he scored with a volley in the 71st minute. Another substitute, Luiz Henrique, scored for the second consecutive match for the national team with a classy shot from the edge of the box. "These were two matches that we controlled well," Raphinha said. "We are far from perfection, but we are on the right track." **CHILE IN LAST PLACE:** Chile's loss to Colombia has placed the job of coach Ricardo Gareca at risk. Davinson Sánchez, Luis Díaz, Jhon Durán and Luis Sinisterra scored the goals for Colombia. Chile is in last place in the qualifying group with only five points. Paraguay beat Venezuela 2-1 and moved into a qualifying position in the standings. Jon Aramburo opened the scoring for the visitors in the 25th minute, but striker Antonio Sarabia came off the bench to win it for the hosts with goals in the 59th and 74th minutes.

AUSTRALIA START OVERWHELMING FAVOURITES AGAINST SOUTH AFRICA

PTI ■ DUBAI
Australia will start as overwhelming favourites in their quest for an unprecedented eighth final appearance when they take on South Africa in the semi-final of the ICC Women's T20 World Cup here on Thursday. Australia have now made it to the semi-finals of the global T20 tournament in all its nine editions held so far since 2009 in England. The six-time champions take on the Proteas women in a last-four clash in what seems to be a repeat of the summit showdown during the 2023 edition in South Africa, which the Southern Stars won by 19 runs. Going by pure statistic, South Africa are no match for Australia who have won nine out of the 10 WT20I games, with the former's only win coming in January this year. The head-to-head record at



WOMEN'S T20 WC SEMI-FINAL
Women's T20 World Cup is even more intimidating as Australia have won all the seven encounters. The best part about the current Australian team is the core which has remained intact for years now with only Meg Lanning retiring from international cricket.

All the 10 others, who played in the 2023 final are here with the likes of Alyssa Healy, Beth Mooney, Ellyse Perry, Megan Schutt, Ashleigh Gardner being the pillars of the team. On a slow Dubai track, the depth in batting has been Australia's biggest strength, with Phoebe Litchfield and Annabel Sutherland capable of muscling the balls to the fence. For South Africa, one of their biggest assets has been slow left-arm orthodox Nonkululeko Mlaba, who has so far taken 10 wickets in four group league games. Skipper Laura Wolvaardt, her opening partner Taznim Brits and the seasoned Marizanne Kapp are all match-winners in their own rights but they have always come up short against Healy and company. Hopefully, the Proteas women would be eighth time lucky against familiar foes in their bid to win the maiden global T20 trophy.



Day 1 of first Test between India and NZ called off due to rain

PTI ■ BENGALURU
Unrelenting rain wiped out play on day one of the opening Test between India and New Zealand here on Wednesday. The play was called off at 2.34 PM as heavy rain lashed the M Chinnaswamy Stadium after relenting for about half an hour earlier. The match officials came out to inspect the pitch around 2 PM after outfield and first layer of covers were removed around 1.50 PM. But there were large damp

areas on either side of the pitch as hessians were brought out in a last-ditch attempt to get some game time. However, it was a futile effort as extensive damage was already done by rains of varying intensity from early morning. Earlier, even the toss, which was scheduled at 9 AM, could not take place as rain came down relentlessly over the city from morning. There was a smattering of spectators at the stadium despite the inclement weather. But the only moment of excitement for them was the sighting of star batter Virat Kohli and opener Yashasvi Jaiswal, who went for an indoor net session along with assistant coach Abhishek Nayyar. They might have to wait further for action even on the second day as the current forecast is for more rain on Thursday at least till noon. It may be recalled that even the training sessions of both teams were washed away by heavy downpour on Tuesday. Play on day two is scheduled at 9.15 am and toss at 8.45 am.



When Rohit Sharma explained "significance of Gabba" to young Pant

PTI ■ NEW DELHI
For some time, Rishabh Pant couldn't understand why fans had gone hysterical after his unbeaten 89 against Australia at the Gabba in 2021 until Rohit Sharma stepped in to tell him that his knock was not just another match-winning effort in an epic Test. A second string India, without its then regular skipper Virat Kohli, senior player KL Rahul and three main bowlers, had beaten Australia by three wickets at a venue which was considered a fortress for the home team which hadn't lost a single game there since 1989. It was a chase of 328, and Pant's counter-attacking knock was not just a match-defining one. It was to find a place among the greatest innings by an Indian in adverse overseas conditions. "Sometimes, there are performances that you remember for a lifetime, and one of them for me is the Gabba Test," the 27-year-old told Star Sports' 'Star Nahi Far' event. Initially, it was just satisfaction of winning a tough Test for India but as time went by, Pant understood the magnitude of his achievement, something that Rohit had told him about. "At the time, I didn't realise how significant it was. Rohit bhai was there, and he told me, 'You have no idea what you've done.' I was like, 'What have I done? My aim was just to win the match.' Rohit bhai said, 'Later, you'll understand what you've done,' he recalled. "Now, whenever I hear people

Neetu David becomes second Indian woman to be inducted into ICC Hall of Fame

PTI ■ DUBAI
Former India spinner Neetu David, who still holds the record for the best figures (8/53) by a woman in an individual Test innings, on Wednesday became only the second female cricketer from the country to be inducted into the ICC Hall of Fame. David, the current chairman of selectors for Indian women's team, enters the ICC Hall of Fame a year after the induction of former captain Diana Edulji. David made more than 100 appearances (10 Tests and 97 ODIs) for India as a prolific left-arm spinner and was inducted alongside South Africa and England legends AB de Villiers and Alastair Cook, joining a long list of great cricketers. The 47-year-old David is the second-highest wicket-taker for India in ODIs cricket with 141 scalps and was also the first female player from the country to claim 100 wickets in the 50-over game. Topping the wicket-taking list at the World Cup in 2005, to inspire her country to their first-ever final, is also among her standout achievements. David said in an ICC release: "It is truly an honour to be inducted into the ICC Hall of Fame, something that I consider to be the highest recognition available to anyone who puts on their national team jersey. "This comes after a lifetime of dedication to this great sport, and it caps a very special journey for me to get to this point. "To be considered a Hall of Famer alongside the greatest players that ever lived is humbling, and I am thrilled to be part of this exclusive club." Following some impressive performances with the ball at domestic cricket for Uttar Pradesh, David won a first international appearance for India as a 17-year-old in a



Test against New Zealand in Nelson in 1995. She impressed with four wickets in that contest and was again selected for the ODI leg of that tour as India claimed the New Zealand Women's Centenary Tournament. In late 1995, David truly rose to prominence as she recorded sensational figures of 8/53 — still the best individual bowling spell in a single innings of a women's Test — against England in Jamshedpur as India fell to a narrow two-run loss. While David excelled at Test cricket with 41 wickets from 10 matches, it was in ODI cricket that she performed best with 141 scalps from 97 matches at a miserly bowling average of 16.34. David retired from international cricket in 2006, only to reverse that decision two years later for a brief return in ODI cricket at the Asia Cup and on India's tour of England. She played her final domestic match in 2013, calling time on an illustrious career by helping Railways to the 2012-13 Senior Women's T20 League title. Cook represented England over 250 times in international cricket, making his most significant impact in the longest format. He retired from international cricket in 2018 as England's highest Test run-scorer and century-maker, spearheading notable successes both home and away with the bat and as captain. In his 14-year-long career, de Villiers hit over 20,000 international runs across all three formats. De Villiers, fondly known as "Mr 360", excelled in Test and T20I cricket while setting South African records for the fastest fifty, century and 150 in ODI cricket to earn a reputation of being one of the most feared, destructive batters in the history of the game. The ICC Hall of Fame was launched in January 2009 as part of the global governing body's centenary celebrations. The Class of 2024 will be celebrated in a special series of engagements in Dubai this week, coinciding with the conclusion of the Women's T20 World Cup.



Handling pressure will play a big part in Jaiswal's success in Australia: childhood coach

PTI ■ BENGALURU
Yashasvi Jaiswal was oblivious to the cheers of a handful of spectators as he walked across a soaked M Chinnaswamy Stadium turf on Wednesday, chatting intensely with assistant coach Abhishek Nayyar. There was no pressing demand for him to spend an hour at indoor nets as rain held up the first day's play of the opening Test between India and New Zealand. After all, he is going through a roseate phase in Test cricket for over a year now. But that deep caring for his craft and a focused mind will come handy when Jaiswal crosses over to Australia next month for the biggest challenge yet in his fledgling career, feels his childhood coach Jwala Singh. "At this level, it is more about how you handle pressure. You can always work on technique, but if you don't have the right attitude and mindset then you will end up as a failure. But fortunately, Yashasvi has a mature head on his shoulder," Jwala told PTI when he was informed about skipper Rohit Sharma's high evaluation of his younger colleague. "It is even more true when you go and play in Australia because they play some hard cricket there and put a lot of pressure on opposition," he added. As someone who saw Jaiswal from a very young age, Jwala feels that the 21-year-old has grown as a batsman since making his debut in 2023 against the West Indies. "I think being around players like Rohit and Virat has helped him a lot. After all, there is nothing like learning from such masters," he said. Since his baptism in international cricket, Jaiswal has made 1217 runs from 11 Tests at an average of 64.05 and has three daddy knocks - 171, 209 and 214. So, what are the changes that he has observed in the left-hander in the last one year or so? "He always has been aggressive as a batsman. Earlier, he had a tendency to attack almost every ball, especially fast bowlers, but now he uses aggression more judiciously. "Yashasvi now has more awareness of his game. He has better awareness about which ball to attack and which one to let go. Of course, he has also become a very good fielder now, especially in slip region," Jwala noted. The trait was visible in Jaiswal's batting while going through a breakout series against England earlier this year. The way he handled English legend James Anderson was impeccable. At Rajkot, Jaiswal respectfully patted a fuller length delivery from Anderson back to the bowler in the 85th over. But once the pacer erred in length, Jaiswal creamed the Lancastrian's next three balls for sixes — a sweep over square leg, a loft over mid-wicket and straight mousse over the bowler's head. Jaiswal was highly effective against Anderson throughout the series — extracting 98 runs from 150 balls that he faced off the quick and getting out twice. It was not entirely surprising then that he became only the second Indian batter after the legendary Sunil Gavaskar to score over 700 in a series. But then it is always easy to play down that wonderful run citing home advantage, as Australia offers a vastly different challenge. What are the challenges a sub-continent batter will face Down Under? "First thing first, what India did in Australia during their last two visits here has been fantastic. Not many teams have managed that (winning back-to-back series). So, the Aussies will go hard at Indians to overturn it. "I am sure they are going to pepper them with some short stuff and I guess the pitches too could offer some more spice. "In that sense, I think the batters coming here should be well-prepared to play a few more cuts and pulls," former England pacer Allan Mullyaly, who is now settled in Perth, told PTI. India skipper Rohit Sharma had little doubt about the skill level and adaptability of Jaiswal. "He has got the game to play in all sorts of conditions. You can bet on him and expect him to do wonders for the team. We've found a great player. "Now, it is just about how he manages himself in the next couple of years," said Rohit.

Cricket Australia says 2025-26 Ashes series will begin in Western Australia

AP ■ SYDNEY
Cricket Australia said on Wednesday that the five-Test Ashes series between Australia and England in 2025-26 will begin in Perth, Western Australia. That first Test is scheduled for November 21-25, 2025 with the second a day-night Test at the Gabba in Brisbane from December 4-8. Adelaide Oval will host the



third Test from December 17-21. The Melbourne Cricket Ground will host its traditional Boxing Day Test beginning December 26, and the Sydney Cricket Ground also maintaining its usual time slot for the January 4-8 fifth and final Test. Australia currently holds the Ashes, having retained them with a draw in the 2023 series in England.

WKL unveils plans for women's Kabaddi in upcoming season

RISHABH MALIK ■ NEW DELHI
Women's Kabaddi League (WKL) on Tuesday announcing updates for the upcoming season. This event marked as a significant step toward establishing women's kabaddi as a national sport and creating a thriving ecosystem for female athletes across India. The league will feature several teams, including the Bengaluru Hawks, Delhi Durgas, Gujarat Angels, Haryana Hustlers, Great Marathas, Rajasthan Raiders, Telugu Warriors, and UP Ganga Strikers. The selection trials for WKL are set to be a major highlight of the upcoming season, as they will open doors for thousands of aspiring female players nationwide. The league aims to identify the most talented athletes who will then be selected for the auction process and logically segmented for the playing. The WKL's structure follows a round-robin & Home-away format during selection trials, promoting an exciting and competitive atmosphere that is crucial for player development. This format allows teams to face each other multiple times, fostering not just competition but also camaraderie among



players. The league seeks to in still a sense of unity and collaboration, essential elements in building a robust sporting community for women.

WKL is not just focused on the present; it is actively laying the groundwork for future generations of female athletes. By emphasizing inclusivity and providing resources for training, mentorship, and exposure, the league is cultivating an environment where young women can thrive in sports. WKL's initiatives will include workshops, coaching clinics, and partnerships with schools to inspire and engage the next generation of kabaddi players. HARSHIT MANAV, COO, WKL expressed his excitement for the future of women's kabaddi, stating, "We are committed to creating a strong platform for women athletes, ensuring they receive the recognition and respect they deserve. This is about building a legacy—a national game for women that encourages participation at all levels." As WKL prepares for the upcoming season, the anticipation builds not only for the matches but also for the numerous initiatives aimed at supporting female athletes. With plans for international participation and more exciting announcements in the pipeline, the WKL is poised to elevate women's kabaddi to new heights.