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INSIDE
SPORTS
INDIA SUFFER EARLY BLOW AFTER SUNDAR STIFLES NEW ZEALAND IN SECOND TEST

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ARMY UNDER ATTACK IN KASHMIR



FILE PHOTO

MOHIT KANDHARI ■ JAMMU
A heavily armed group of suspected Pakistani terrorists attacked an army vehicle moving in a convoy near Nagin post in the Butapathri sector of Baramulla district on Thursday. Unconfirmed reports claimed that two army jawans and two army porters have been killed. The security forces have cordoned off the entire area and launched a massive manhunt to track down the footprints of the terrorists. Unconfirmed reports claimed the porter succumbed to his injuries. Srinagar-based Chinar Corps stated, "A brief firefight took place between the Indian army and terrorists in general area Butapathri, Baramulla. Details are being ascertained". Baramulla Police in a post on X also confirmed the incident of exchange of

firing in the Butapathri sector late Thursday evening. "An exchange of fire took place between forces and terrorists in the Butapathri sector of District Baramulla around Nagin post. Further details will be shared after verifying the facts." The attack came barely hours after Lieutenant Governor Manoj Sinha chaired a Unified Headquarters (UHQ) meeting in Srinagar to strategise on counter-terrorism measures and plug the loopholes in the existing security grid ahead of the long winter season. Earlier, a teenager from Uttar Pradesh was injured after terrorists fired on him in Jammu and Kashmir's Tral on Thursday morning. This is the third terror attack in Kashmir within a week. The teenager, Shubam Kumar, 19, from Uttar Pradesh's Bijnor, suffered

bullet injuries in his hand after terrorists shot at him in Batagund village in Tral. He has been admitted to the hospital and is stable. Seven people, including one doctor and six other employees of the construction company, were killed on October 20, after terrorists opened fire at a construction site in the Sonamarg area in the Ganderbal district. On October 18, terrorists killed Ashok Chauhan, a migrant worker from Bihar, in Shopian district. Chauhan's bullet-riddled body was found in the Waduna area of Zainapora by the locals. Meanwhile, Chief Minister Omar Abdullah was not part of the crucial meeting convened against the backdrop of a dastardly terror attack on the construction workers of a strategic road construction project in the central Kashmir district of Ganderbal.

The meeting was attended by the top brass of the central intelligence agencies, senior army officers of the Northern Command, officers of the paramilitary forces part of the security grid, and the Director General of Police, J and K. During the meeting, the senior officers shared their fresh assessment of the prevailing security situation and measures needed to further strengthen the security grid in the region. According to official sources, senior officers expressed their concern over the gaps in the security grid which led to the attack on the construction workers of the project executing agency. During the day, Chief Minister Omar Abdullah remained busy in New Delhi where he called on Prime Minister Narendra Modi, Defence Minister Rajnath Singh, and Union Minister of Road Transport and Highways Nitin Gadkari. Before chairing the Unified Headquarters meeting LG had already chaired two back-to-back security reviews-first at Gagangir on October 22 where he stressed upgrading security cover at all important infrastructure projects ensuring better coordination among various security agencies. On Wednesday, the LG also chaired a security review in Srinagar and directed the security personnel to conduct a fresh security audit of infrastructure projects besides ensuring round-the-clock security checkpoints, night patrolling, and area domination in the Valley.



Government must diffuse bomb threat menace: PM Modi

RAJESH KUMAR ■ NEW DELHI

Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Thursday reportedly advised the "whole of government" approach to tackle the menace of the ongoing bomb threats targeting the aviation sector, schools and vulnerable joints. According to sources, the PM expressed concern over unabated bomb threats and was informed, during the Cabinet meeting, that the security agencies are taking the hoax bomb threat messages and calls "seriously". Threat messages continued to create panic on Thursday as well, as 95 flights got the threats, which later turned to hoaxes. With this the total number of such threats has crossed 250 in the last 11 days. Sources across airlines say the same handle has targeted flights with such threats. Under the newly changed protocol, such mass threats from the same handle are treated as 'non-specific' to minimise disruptions, as they do not require diversions. Taking hoax bomb-threat messages seriously, the government has started identifying those behind the menace, and asked social media platforms like Meta and X to share data on such messages. The government has also asked top multinational technology conglomerates to cooperate with it to identify those behind such hoax calls, saying this involves public good. **Continued on page 2**

Canada backstabbed India: High Commissioner Sanjay Verma

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

Calling Canada's behaviour "the pits", India's recalled high commissioner Sanjay Verma says India was backstabbed and treated in a most unprofessional manner by a country that is supposed to be a friendly democracy. He told PTI that "a handful" of supporters of Khalistan have turned the ideology into a criminal enterprise, which indulges in a range of activities such as gun-running and human trafficking and yet the Canadian authorities turn a blind eye because they comprise a vocal electoral bank for local politicians. In an unexpected downturn of relations, Verma was declared a "person of interest" by Canada on October 13 in its investigation into the June 2023 killing of Hardeep Singh Nijjar, a Canadian citizen who has been declared a Khalistani terrorist by India. Before Canada could take further action, New Delhi recalled Verma and five other diplomats, who were also similarly named. Verma, an Indian Institute of Technology graduate and a nuclear scientist, has previously served as India's ambassador to Japan and Sudan. Asked if he has ever seen anything like this in his 36-year diplomatic career, Verma said: "This is the pits. And, this is the most unprofessional approach to a bilateral relation. If they believe it's a large relationship for them as well, there are other diplomatic tools available in the hands of a diplomat, and those tools could have been used in order to see things falling in place..." Speaking on many other issues at PTI's New Delhi studios on Wednesday in his first interview after returning to India, Verma spoke about the genesis of the Khalistani movement in Canada, the support it has been getting from local politicians for electoral gains, and the kind of criminal activities the



Khalistanis carry out in order to increase their numbers. "A child that cries the most gets fed first by the mother. Similarly, even though they are only a handful, they shout the most and get the most attention from Canadian political backers," he said. Verma said that extreme hard-line Khalistanis are only about 10,000 in number, and supporters amount to perhaps 1 lakh in a Sikh population of about 8 lakh. "To get support they intimidate common Sikhs there, including with threats such as 'we know where your daughter is studying,'" Verma said. "The Khalistanis have made Khalistan into a business in Canada. In the name of Khalistan, they do human trafficking, drug trafficking, gun-running, prostitution and all. They earn a lot of money through that and also through gurdwaras and they use part of that money for all nefarious jobs," he said. "All the dirty things that you can think of, they are involved." Recalling the events leading up to the diplomatic dust-up, Verma said he was at the Toronto airport on October 12 when he received a message from the Canadian foreign ministry asking him to come to their office the same evening. **Continued on page 2**

Nitin Gadkari tells Gurgaon officials to work on decongestion projects

RAJESH KUMAR ■ NEW DELHI

Union Minister Nitin Gadkari has directed officers to prepare detailed reports for a slew of projects in Gurgaon such as the connectivity between Nelson Mandela Marg in Delhi and Mehrauli Gurugram Road in Gurgaon, development of Pehowa-Kurukshetra-Yadunanagar Corridor and Ladwa Bypass including Kurukshetra Bypass, connectivity of Kundli-Manesar-Palwal (KMP) highway with Urban Extension Road-II. The directions with regard to the new projects were issued to reduce traffic congestion between Gurgaon and Delhi, and towards Indira Gandhi International Airport. Originally planned in 2008, the Centre had set up a committee under the erstwhile Planning Commission to study possible road links between the national capital and Haryana. At the time, the Delhi-Gurgaon Expressway was under construction, and two alternative routes - D w a r k a Expressway



and Nelson Marg-MG Road via DLF-2 - were considered. The Nelson Mandela-MG Road link project never took off and was also opposed by environmentalists as the initial plan included construction through the Aravalli Biodiversity Park in the city. Haryana Chief Minister Nayab Singh Saini said the Union Minister for Road had directed the officers to prepare Detailed Project Report (DPR) for providing connectivity from Nelson Mandela Marg in Delhi to MG Road and Chauraha (roundabout) of Gurugram and Faridabad Road to reduce traffic congestion between Gurugram and Delhi. **Continued on page 2**

Team India withdrawn from World Championship: WFI

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

The Wrestling Federation of India (WFI) has withdrawn the Indian team from the upcoming World Championship on Wednesday, citing interference from the sports ministry as the reason for this decision. The championship, which includes 12 non-Olympic categories, is set to take place in Tirana, Albania, from October 28. Recently, the WFI had announced trials for both the U23 and World Championship teams, but the trials were challenged by protesting wrestlers, claiming

that the suspended federation had no legal authority to conduct them. In response, the WFI withdrew the trial notice, and on October 4, the court decided not to proceed with the contempt petition filed by wrestler Satyawart Kadian, husband of wrestler Sakshi Malik. A WFI source expressed frustration, blaming the Ministry for suspension of the WFI, the situation stating that the wrestlers are being impacted because of few individuals and the ministry's declaration to lift the suspension. The WFI was suspended by the Ministry of



Youth Affairs and Sports (MYAS) on December 24, 2023, after elections were held to select new officials. The WFI's president Sanjay Singh addressed a letter to

calling for an ad-hoc committee to manage the WFI. The Indian Olympic Association (IOA) had dissolved the ad-hoc committee in March after the WFI's suspension was lifted in February, with IOA President PT Usha supporting the WFI in the case. However, wrestlers Bajrang Punia, Vinesh Phogat, Sakshi Malik, and her husband Satyawart sought a court order to appoint an administrator to manage the WFI. The court issued an interim order stating that the ad-hoc committee must proceed managing the

federation's affairs until the suspension is lifted, though the IOA has said it cannot reinstate the committee. The WFI has now requested UWW to invoke Article 6.3 of UWW regulations, which emphasises that National Federations must govern independently without political interference, and has asked for appropriate action. In an Olympic year, World Championships feature four categories in each of the three styles men's freestyle, women's, and Greco-Roman rather than all 10 categories. **Continued on page 2**

Justice Sanjiv Khanna is new CJI, to take oath on Nov 11

NEW DELHI: Justice Sanjiv Khanna was on Thursday appointed the 51st Chief Justice of India. He will take oath on November 11, a day after incumbent Justice D Y Chandrachud demits office on attaining the age of 65. Justice Khanna took over as the CJI on November 8, 2022. Justice Khanna will have a tenure of a little over six months as CJI and would demit office on May 13, 2025.



"In exercise of the power conferred by the Constitution of India, Hon'ble President, after consultation with Hon'ble Chief Justice of India, is pleased to appoint Shri Justice Sanjiv Khanna, Judge of the Supreme Court of India as Chief Justice of India with effect from 11th November, 2024," Law Minister Arjun Ram Meghwal posted on X. **PTI**

Delhi cop, pals nabbed in abduction case

PARVESH SHARMA ■ GURUGRAM

The Gurugram police rescued two young men from the clutches of kidnapers who had demanded a ransom of Rs one crore. Those rescued were identified as Aman and Ganesh, who had been abducted from Sector-15 Part-2 area under the Civil Lines police station area of Gurugram on Wednesday. At the time of the incident, the victims were on their way to Galleria Market, Gurugram in their Scorpio car.



According to the police, the arrested individuals include Delhi Police constable Sunil (32) a resident of Jind district in Haryana, Rishi Pal (35) a resident of Sonapat district, Kuldeep alias Monu (31), a resident of Jind, Deepak alias Dumbbell (21), of Jind

district and Sonu (21), a resident of Bhiwani district in Haryana. The victims' father told the police that Aman and Ganesh had gone to Galleria Market in their Scorpio car but did not return. Around 3.30 pm on Wednesday, he received a call from Aman's friend who informed him about his kidnapping, and the abductors were demanding Rs 1 crore ransom. He immediately informed the police about the incident. **Continued on page 2**



Too many cooks, keep Delhi's traffic cauldron boiling

Police has identified 134 congestion points in the city

BY SAUMYA SHUKLA

Encroachment on roadside, construction work by different agencies, heavy volume of traffic on narrower roads, paucity of parking spaces, and broken roads - these are some of the reasons that have been causing jams in a total of 134 traffic congestion points of the national Capital according to a list shared by the Delhi Traffic Police to the Secretary of Ministry of Home and Urban Affairs (MoHUA). This list, accessed exclusively by The Pioneer, consisting of areas which was shared by the Delhi Traffic Police to the ministry in a high level meeting convened recently included 23 such points in the Northern range of the city, 20 in Central, 20 in Eastern range, 33 in Southern, nine in New Delhi range, and 29 in Western.

In the reasons for congestion, cited by the traffic police department in their report to the MoHUA, encroachment on the roadside was listed as the top cause of traffic jams in the Northern range of Delhi. This area includes Kingsway Camp to Hakikat Nagar, H-Point in Azadpur to Rana Pratap Bagh, Mukarba Chowk to Jahangirpuri Metro Station, Azadpur Chowk flyover, Mukarba Chowk flyover, Sanjay Gandhi Nagar to Metro Station Samaypur Badli, Swami Suroopnand Marg from Ramdev Chowk to Y-Point Narela and Bawana Chowk to Kanjhawala T-Point. "In the Central range, the encroachment by local vendors and hawkers in roads those including from New Delhi Railway Station to Ajmeri Gate Chowk, Netaji Subhash Marg



Representative File Photo

(Delhi Gate to Nukkad Faiz Bazar), Shadipur Chowk and R/A Bagga. Other areas marred with similar problems also include Uttam Nagar Chowk in Najafgarh Road and Sagar Pur in Pankha Road," a traffic policeman stated. Moreover, construction works by different government agencies including Delhi Metro Rail Corporation (DMRC) and Public Works Department has also resulted in the curtaining of the movement of vehicles. Take Mehrauli Badarpur road from Sainik Farm to IGNOU cut for example where the metro work has severely impacted the roads with all kinds of vehicles including DTC buses, cars and bikes moving from a very narrow lane, creating persistent congestions. He added, "DMRC work has also

impacted traffic movement in Madhuban Chowk to Power House in Outer Ring Road, Pul Bangash to Roshanara road, Sadar Bazar to Qutub Road, Bhajanpura, IGNOU Road (IGNOU cut to Z-more), Khanpur T Point, Hamdard T Point and Pul Prahladpur Red Light to Lal Kuan Red Light on MB Road, Bhera Enclave in Outer Ring Road." Construction work of Delhi-Meerut Regional Rapid Transit System RRTS has also created congestion points in IBS T Anand Vihar, Kondli bridge and Sarai Kale Khan. Due to ongoing construction of Urban Extension Road-II (UER II) or NH-344M, congestion is also created on Barwala Red Light to Barwala Village and Khampur Red Light to Bakoli. **Continued on page 2**

Erstwhile bus marshals to be deployed on pollution mitigation related duties

STAFF REPORTER ■ NEW DELHI

In a big relief to erstwhile Civil Defence Volunteers (CDVs) who were terminated as bus marshals by the then Chief Minister, Arvind Kejriwal last year in October, will be deployed on pollution mitigation related duties for four months beginning November 1, 2024. The Lieutenant Governor, who is also chairman of the Delhi Disaster Management Authority, has advised the city government and the chief minister to come up with a concrete scheme based on due process for their future engagement after the four-month employment period. They may be deployed at PUC centres, hotspots, DPCC, concerned departments and Urban Local Bodies under supervision of district magistrates for the purpose of air pollution mitigation. The scheme -- to be prepared by the Delhi government for regular employment of the civil defence volunteers -- will include details of their deployment, budgetary pro-



vision, financial approvals, post creation and reservation. There are over 10,000 CDVs who were terminated by the government last year. Recruitment rules may also be framed by the relevant department and a proposal be moved to the Services department for initiating the process of recruitment, after approval of Finance Department and make adequate budget provision," he said. In the letter, LG said the core

of the entire argument for CDV's revolves around their deployment as bus marshals. The Council of Ministers needs to deliberate on the scope of job of such bus marshals, the number of positions required for this role, the conditions of eligibility etc. More importantly, a decision is required on whether these would be temporary positions or permanent posts. In either case, a due process would need to be followed to fill such positions.

"In the meantime, it is important to take a humanitarian view of the hardship being faced by CDV's who were misled into being deployed as bus marshals. Though this is a transferred subject, but no proposal was forthcoming from your end so I am being forced to step in. I have been mulling over a solution for this vexed problem involving livelihood of thousands of CDV's and their families. Today in the DDMA meeting, Delhi Pollution

Control Committee (DPCC) presented a grim prognosis of air quality in the coming months. Air quality reaches hazardous levels on multiple occasions when the Commission for Air Quality Management (CAQM) is forced to invoke GRAP IV measures, which also have a cascading impact on the economy. This unabated winter phenomenon is nothing short of a disaster, given the severe implication on public health," reads the letter. The LG said he would suggest that the Divisional Commissioner be advised to call out services of CDV's, specifically of those who were engaged as on 31st October 2023, for a duration of say four months and engage them for air pollution mitigation activities. "This measure shall serve the twin objective of providing relief to these families who were misled into being engaged for non-existent jobs, and also mitigating the impact of the disaster of air pollution in Delhi," the letter said.

AAP, BJP battle it out over cornering credit for reinstatement of CDVs

STAFF REPORTER ■ NEW DELHI

The ruling Aam Aadmi Party (AAP) and the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) are seemingly battling it out over cornering the credit for reinstating civil defence volunteers (CDVs) in Delhi. A delegation of CDVs also met BJP leaders, expressing thanks for their re-employment. Addressing a press conference, Delhi minister Saurabh Bharadwaj called the move a victory of the struggle of the bus marshals and the AAP against the BJP. "The struggle of the bus marshals and Arvind Kejriwal's hard work has yielded results. The BJP-led Central government had to bow down as these volunteers will now be given jobs for four months to help mitigate pollution in the national capital," Bharadwaj said. The bus marshals will now assist the government in implementing the anti-pollution

measures in Delhi, he added. Bharadwaj also accused the BJP of doing "shoddy" politics which led to the loss of volunteer jobs, and claimed that the Delhi government would make efforts to ensure the marshals receive permanent employment at the end of the four-month period. The AAP also claimed that as promised by former chief minister Arvind Kejriwal the AAP government has reinstated the CDVs for a period of four months to mitigate air pollution in the city. The BJP also welcomed the move and accused the AAP government of "misleading" the volunteers. BJP MLA and Leader of the Opposition in the Delhi Assembly, Vijender Gupta, said, "This not only marks a victory for the BJP but also exposes the AAP government which was deliberately misleading them (bus marshals)."

"The AAP government continuously misled these volunteers as they could not be reinstated solely as bus marshals since they were temporarily recruited as civil defence volunteers for disaster management purposes, Gupta said. Scores of volunteers also met Delhi BJP President Virendra Sachdeva who expressed his gratitude to the Lieutenant Governor for renewing the contract of hundreds of contract nursing staff a few days ago and restoring the services of CDVs. "The result of Arvind Kejriwal's directionless politics is that today thousands of youth who have worked on contract in the Delhi government are unemployed. As soon as BJP comes to power in 2025, it is committed to regularize the contracts of all Civil Defence Volunteers as well as all contract workers," Sachdeva said.

Dust removal to be focus area of multiple agencies: LG chairs meet with DDMA

STAFF REPORTER ■ NEW DELHI

Lieutenant Governor Vinai Kumar Saxena on Thursday chaired a meeting of Delhi Disaster Management Authority (DDMA) where it was decided that dust removal and mitigation will be the focus area of the multiple agencies engaged with the implementation of anti-pollution measures in the city grappling with deteriorating air quality. To take stock of the situation arising out of prevalent air pollution in the city, Saxena held a meeting which was attended by Chief Minister Atishi, Vice-chairperson of DDMA, Delhi Environment Minister Gopal Rai, Chief Secretary and all senior officers and members of the authority. "At the outset, the need to mitigate internal sources of air pollution in the city was emphasized upon by the LG to which all agreed. Dust was identified as the biggest internal source of air pollution that could be addressed immediately, as even pollution arising



out of vehicular emission, etc. required a long-term solution," a statement said. The LG pointed out that following a recent meeting of Commission for Air Quality Management (CAQM), he had directed Municipal Corporation of Delhi (MCD) and Delhi Development Authority (DDA) to start the exercise of collecting dust-generating C&D waste, dried-up silt and cleaning road dust in a mission mode. Delhi Environment Minister Gopal Rai, after the meeting,

said that the timings of the government offices in Delhi may be changed to control pollution. "There was discussion on changing the timings of both central and state government offices in Delhi to reduce the number of vehicles on the roads at the same time," he said in a statement. Delhi government has requested the LG to discuss with the central government the possibility of conducting artificial rain in Delhi on a pilot basis, so that action can be taken in emergency situa-

tions, he said. The LG has assured of the same. A statement by the authority said, "The Chief Minister and Environment Minister acknowledged that this drive has helped salvage the situation to a large extent and directed officials of the Public Works Department (PWD) and Environment department to undertake similar exercises in a mission mode. "Cleaning of roads by MRS trucks with simultaneous washing as well as installing rotating smog-guns over high rise buildings had also been started and as of now, about 300 MRS trucks were operating with rotating smog-guns having been installed over 160 high rise buildings in the city," it added. In the meeting, Rai said that vehicles were entering the city despite alternate routes, being there via the Eastern and Western Peripheral Expressways and enforcement was required to deter the same. "Similarly, the issue of strict enforcement with regards to open fires, garbage burning and compliance of

PUC also came up for discussion and the lack of manpower for such enforcement was highlighted," it added. Officials said that Delhi Pollution Control Committee (DPCC) presented a grim prognosis of air quality in the coming months. "Air quality was projected to reach hazardous levels on multiple occasions when the CAQM will be forced to invoke GRAP IV measures, which also have a cascading impact on the economy," he said. He added that in the course of the meeting, the committee was informed about lack of adequate enforcement machinery which hampers their efficacy for various measures invoked by CAQM and the state government and other government agencies. "In these months, multiple factors - transport, road dust, construction dust, stubble burning, waste burning, fire-wood burning etc. need to be addressed simultaneously. This requires adequate manpower to be activated in a decentralized fashion," it stated.

City grapples with rising pollution

STAFF REPORTER ■ NEW DELHI

Delhi on Thursday continued to grapple with rising pollution as the air quality index (AQI) settled in the 'very poor' category in most areas of the city. The average AQI recorded in the national capital was at 306 in the 'very poor' category at 4 pm with 18 areas of the city crossing the 300 mark according to the Central Pollution Control Board (CPCB). At 7 pm, the CPCB revealed that Anand Vihar recording an aqi of 366, NSIT Dwarka recording 345, Jahangirpuri recording 338, Bawana recording 331, Vivek Vihar recording 327, Rohini recording 326, Sonia Vihar recording 323, Burari crossing recording 323, Mandir Marg recording 312, Alipur recording 311, Mundka recording 310, Ashok Vihar recording 310, Dwarka sector 8 recording 307, Najafgarh recording 307, Major Dhyana

Chand National Stadium recording 306, Wazirpur recording 305, Nehru Nagar recording 304 and Patparganj recording 301. The AQI was recorded at 328 at 9 am with a thick layer of smog shrouding the city in the morning hours, according to the Central Pollution Control Board (CPCB). During the winter months, Delhi experiences severe pollution, driven by a combination of factors such as low wind speeds, dropping temperatures, high moisture levels and the presence of pollution particles that act as surfaces for condensation. According to the Air Quality Early Warning System for Delhi, the air quality is likely to be in 'poor' category on Friday and 'very poor' category from Saturday to Sunday. "The outlook for subsequent 6 Days: The air quality is likely to be in Very Poor to Severe category," it said. Furthermore, it said that the

relatively low wind speeds is also not helping in reducing the high aqi in Delhi. "Meteorological conditions are unfavourable for effective dispersion of pollutants as calm winds prevail during night," it said. However, the average AQI has seen a dip in that of Wednesday even as the city recorded 364 aqi a day before according to the CPCB. The deteriorating air quality in the national capital has triggered a 30 to 40 per cent surge in respiratory issues, with children and the elderly the worst hit. Anti-pollution restrictions under the Graded Response Action Plan (GRAP)-II came into force on Tuesday. Meanwhile, the minimum temperature in the city was recorded at 20.7 degrees Celsius, three notches above the season's normal, according to the India Meteorological Department (IMD).

MCD allocates fund of Rs 20 lakh per zone to enhance air quality

STAFF REPORTER ■ NEW DELHI

The Municipal Corporation of Delhi (MCD) has allocated a fund of Rs 20 lakh per zone to enhance air quality management in the city. The funds will be utilised to strengthen machinery and manpower to mitigate dust pollution. Specifically, the money will be used to make sprinklers operational and to hire drivers, based on an assessment of the overall manpower required at the zonal level. With this funding, all 12 zones will ensure the efficient operation of anti-smog guns and adequate manpower in their respective jurisdictions, MCD noted in a statement.

As part of efforts to curb pollution, the MCD will purchase dust suppressants for use in anti-smog guns and water sprinklers. The MCD has also decided to implement strict measures to regulate the construction and demolition of waste dump sites. In addition, all Zonal Deputy Commissioners (DCs) are directed to take action within their respective zones. They are to continue the collection drive for construction debris (malba), which includes strict monitoring of certifications and inspections conducted by maintenance teams, the statement said. "Designated inspection teams are to conduct daily checks to

prevent violations related to construction and demolition (C&D) waste and garbage burning. Teams may be adjusted based on need, but each team must actively monitor and issue challans to the violators," it said. Furthermore, the civic body said all Public Works Department (PWD) roads, including central verges, will be thoroughly cleaned on a weekly basis to minimise dust accumulation. "The Municipal Corporation of Delhi is strictly implementing the directions issued by the Commission for Air Quality Management. The corporation is taking all possible measures to control air pollution," the statement added.

AAP's promise to clean Yamuna: BJP sets up stage at Chhath Ghat

STAFF REPORTER ■ NEW DELHI

The Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) on Thursday set up a stage at the Yamuna's Chhath Ghat with two chairs for Delhi Chief Minister Atishi and her predecessor Arvind Kejriwal to remind them of the AAP's promise to clean the river. Delhi BJP president Virendra Sachdeva took a dip in the Yamuna and "sought forgiveness" for the "corruption" of the Delhi government, which he alleged looted funds meant for cleaning the river, a party statement said. Meanwhile, the Aam Aadmi Party has sharply criticised the BJP's politics around Chhath Ghat in Delhi. AAP leader and Rajya Sabha MP Sanjay Singh stated that while Arvind Kejriwal supports Purvanchal



facilities for Chhath Puja, BJP leaders insult people from

Minister, JP Nadda, and the BJP asking whether the people of Delhi did not vote for them. On Wednesday, Sachdeva had challenged Kejriwal to take a dip in the river, saying that he had promised the people of Delhi that he would clean it before Chhath puja 2025 so that they could bathe in it. Ahead of the Purvanchali festival of Chhath, which is celebrated days after Diwali, the ruling AAP and the BJP have been slugging it out over heavy pollution and toxic froth in the river. On Thursday, the BJP set up a stage at Chhath Ghat near ITO. On the stage, which was covered with a red carpet, were two tufted chairs with the names of Kejriwal and Atishi. "We have been waiting for Kejriwal and Delhi Chief Minister Atishi to come and have a look at the condition of

the Yamuna. Two chairs and a red carpet have also been put here to welcome them," Delhi BJP spokesperson Praveen Shankar Kapoor said. Sachdeva took a dip in the river in the morning and "sought forgiveness from Maa Yamuna as (the governments of) Arvind Kejriwal and Atishi Marlena looted funds worth Rs 8,500 crore for cleaning the Yamuna but did not clean the river." "This Kejriwal-Marlena government is shameless but the people of Delhi seek Maa Yamuna's forgiveness for their corruption," he said. The AAP has accused the BJP-ruled Uttar Pradesh and Haryana of releasing untreated industrial wastewater in the Yamuna ahead of the festive season, leading to unprecedented pollution and frothing in the river.

Police bust fake visa syndicate, man nabbed from Gujarat

STAFF REPORTER ■ NEW DELHI

The Delhi Police on Thursday said it busted a fake visa syndicate and nabbed a 35-year-old man from Gujarat's Surat. According to the police, the accused, who was brought to Delhi and arrested, has been identified as 35 year old Prateek Shah alias Abhijit. Deputy Commissioner of Police (IGI Airport) Usha Rangnani said that on September 28, 21 year old Kuldeep arrived at Delhi's Indira Gandhi International (IGI) Airport to depart for Canada. "During scrutiny of his travel documents, it was found that a fake Canadian visitor visa was affixed to his passport. An FIR was registered under section 318(4), 336(3) and 340(2) of the BNS and 12 PP Act and investigation taken



up in the matter," she added. The police learnt about Prateek through investigations of five gang members including 28 years old Gaurav, 33 years old Nitin Sharma, 29 years old Sarabjeet Kaur, 32 years old Gagandeep Kaur and 42 years old Reena Kaushal who were arrested earlier in the month. During interrogation, Kuldeep disclosed that he

met an agent, who identified himself as Sandeep, through Prateek through investigations of five gang members including 28 years old Gaurav, 33 years old Nitin Sharma, 29 years old Sarabjeet Kaur, 32 years old Gagandeep Kaur and 42 years old Reena Kaushal who were arrested earlier in the month. During interrogation, Kuldeep disclosed that he

said. The police said Sandeep arranged tickets and a visitor visa for Canada for Kuldeep. Sandeep, who was apprehended from Kaithal in Haryana late in September, told the police that he ran a "syndicate" with his associates. "The team later nabbed Gaurav, Nitin Sharma, Sarabjeet Kaur, Gagandeep Kaur and Reena Kaushal, who were found actively involved in this case," Rangnani said. During their interrogation, the police learnt that Sarabjeet Kaur and Gagandeep Kaur used to post video advertisements on their social media accounts in which they guaranteed Canadian visas, even in refusal cases. Interrogations revealed that the fake Canadian visa for Kuldeep was prepared by an agent -- Prateek Shah -- an expert in design who prepared fake visa stickers for multiple countries from a

factory in Surat. "A team was formed and Shah was apprehended from Gujarat. During the police raid on his hideout, Shah was found hurriedly packing his equipment. He was preparing to relocate his factory, having received word about the arrest of his associates and realising that the police could arrive at his location," said Rangnani. The police seized 14 fake visa stickers in the name of different people, nine rubber stamps of different countries, 16 dyes of countries such as Canada, Serbia, Azerbaijan, Macedonia and Bosnia, among others, 80 blank PR card chips, one large printer, a plastic sealing machine, gumming sheets containing holograms of Serbia, Bosnia, Azerbaijan, the UK, and Macedonia, two laptops, five basic mobile phones, 18 original passports and various stationery items.

HC stalls relocation of 48-year-old female elephant to temple in city

STAFF REPORTER ■ NEW DELHI

The Delhi High Court on Thursday stalled the relocation of a 48-year-old female elephant from Assam to a temple in the national capital, observing there was no clarity on the need and purpose of moving the animal from its present location. Chief Justice Manmohan and Justice Tushar Rao Gedeala was informed that a large number of animals, including horses and camels, were sheltered at the facility owned by a religious trust, and spreading across 1.5 acres in the South Delhi's Sainik Farms area. Issuing notice to the Maa Baglamukhi Mandir Trust, the bench said, "Since the court has been informed that elephant Ranjitha has not started her travel to Delhi, we direct that



she should not be moved from her place of residence. The union of India shall ensure that the direction is intimated to the relevant authorities and the same is complied with." The court while hearing a plea by the Federation of Indian Animal Protection Organisations (FIAPO) challenging the transfer of the captive elephant noted there was still no clarity on the need for shifting the elephant from Jorhat in Assam to Delhi. The court posted the hearing

on November 28. Earlier in day, the court asked the chief wildlife warden, Delhi, to visit the temple area and assess the living conditions, number of staff and animals over there. The FIAPO counsel submitted the change in climate conditions would be traumatic for the elephant, who was used living in a place like Jorhat, which has considerable greenery. The court wondered if it was safe to subject the 48-year-old pachyderm to over a 2,000-kilometre road travel. "Is she fit enough to travel so far? She is already 48 and the average age of female elephants is 60 years. Elephants require a huge space, they move alot. Unnecessarily, why do you want to confine the elephant here at a small place," the bench said.

Peace in border areas essential for normalisation of bilateral relations

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE/PTI
NEW DELHI/BEIJING

China on Thursday said the meeting between Prime Minister Narendra Modi and Chinese President Xi Jinping in Kazan, Russia on Wednesday carries a "great significance" as they reached an "important common understanding" to improve the bilateral ties. Defence Minister Rajnath Singh on Thursday said in New Delhi, a broad consensus has been achieved by India and China on restoring the "ground situation" along the Line of Actual Control (LAC) pursuant to talks, including that "Modi made suggestions on improving and developing the relationship, which Xi agreed to in principle", Lin said "both sides were of the view that this meeting is constructive and carries great significance". "They agreed to view and handle China-India relations from a strategic height and long-term perspective, the course to steer bilateral relations back on the path of steady development."

Replying to a question on how Beijing viewed the outcome of the meeting, Lin said, China stands ready to work with India to view and handle the bilateral relations from a strategic height and long-term perspective. China is also ready to step up communication and cooperation, enhance strategic mutual trust, properly handle differences, and bring bilateral relations back to the path of steady development as soon as possible, Lin said. Asked about a Chinese official media report stating that "Modi made suggestions on improving and developing the relationship, which Xi agreed to in principle", Lin said "both sides were of the view that this meeting is constructive and carries great significance". "They agreed to view and handle China-India relations from a strategic height and long-term perspective, the course to steer bilateral relations back on the path of steady development."



prevent specific disagreements from affecting the overall relationship, and contribute to maintaining regional and global peace and prosperity and to advancing multiplicity in the world," he said. Modi and Xi, who met on the sidelines of the BRICS

summit at Kazan, endorsed Monday's India-China agreement on patrolling and disengagement along the Line of Actual Control (LAC) in eastern Ladakh. While speaking at the Chanakya Defence Dialogue 2024 in New Delhi, Rajnath described the pact reached

between the two countries as a "significant development" that underscores the importance of defence dialogue on the global stage. "India and China have been involved in talks both at military and diplomatic levels to resolve differences in certain areas along the

LAC. Pursuant to the talks, a broad consensus has been achieved to restore the ground situation based on the principle of equal and mutual security," Rajnath said. "The consensus achieved includes patrolling and grazing (cattle) in traditional areas. This is the power of engaging in continuous dialogue because sooner or later, solutions will emerge," the defence minister said. Following nearly 50-minute talks between Modi and Jinping, directions were issued to revive various bilateral dialogue mechanisms, signalling attempts to normalise ties that were hit by a deadly military clash in 2020. The two sides agreed to strengthen communication and cooperation, enhance strategic mutual trust by holding talks between their foreign ministers and officials at various levels to bring the relationship back to steady development at an

early date, he added. The two leaders also have agreed to "make good use of the Special Representatives mechanism on the China-India boundary question, ensure peace and tranquility in the border areas, find a fair and reasonable settlement, step up communication and cooperation in multilateral fora, and safeguard the common interests of developing countries," the spokesperson said. The Special Representatives mechanism, currently headed by National Security Advisor Ajit Doval and Chinese Foreign Minister Wang Yi, played a key role in the past to develop and improve the relations since it was set up in 2003 with 22 meetings to address the boundary question. The last meeting between Doval and Wang under the mechanism was held in 2019. On the meeting between the two leaders, Foreign Secretary Vikram Misri, at a media briefing at Kazan, said both Modi and Xi stressed

that India and China can have a "peaceful, stable and beneficial bilateral relationship" with maturity and wisdom, and by showing mutual respect for each other's sensitivities, interests, concerns and aspirations. Referring to New Delhi's consistent position on the eastern Ladakh row, Misri said restoration of peace and tranquillity in the border areas will create space for returning towards the path of normalisation of bilateral relations between the two sides. In the coming weeks and months, both the countries are expected to revive the ties with a flurry of high level visits to improve the relations on all fronts. In a major breakthrough in ending the over four-year-long military standoff, India on Monday announced that it has reached an agreement with China on patrolling along the LAC in eastern Ladakh.

7,50,000 courses successfully completed in four days: Ministry

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE
NEW DELHI

More than 7.5 lakh courses were successfully completed by the employees using the integrated online training (iGOT) platform, during the first four days of the National Learning Week. Giving details, the Personnel Ministry said on Thursday, Prime Minister Narendra Modi on October 19 launched the 'Karmayogi Saptah' or the National Learning Week (NLW). "In just four days, over 7,50,000 courses were successfully completed on the



iGOT platform, showcasing India's drive for continuous learning and professional growth," the ministry said in a statement. "The surge in participation reflects the commitment of

civil servants to upskilling and staying ahead of evolving demands in public service," it said. As the NLW continues to gain momentum, pioneers from India and around the

world have come together with passionate Indian learners to push the boundaries of knowledge and growth, the ministry said. This dynamic initiative under the Mission Karmayogi the National Programme for Civil Services Capacity Building has empowered civil servants to rise to the challenges of modern governance, it said. A key highlight was the participation of 33 ministries in 'Samuhik Charcha,' fostering collaboration and collective learning. The discussion (Samuhik Charcha) was also organised

in the Prime Minister's Office (PMO) and was led by Minister of State for Personnel Jitendra Singh, wherein Modi's vision of leveraging advanced technologies to create a more agile, responsive administration was emphasised. The session underscored the importance of shared knowledge in driving the nation's progress, the statement said. "Influential thought leaders like Nandan Nilekani, Raghava Krishna and Puneet Chandok, among others, presented inspiring webinars,

sharing global perspectives on critical topics. "These sessions sparked fresh ideas and provided innovative approaches to tackle the complexities of the Indian administrative landscape," it said. The NLW is dedicated to equipping civil servants or 'Karmayogis,' with the skills they need to build a brighter and more empowered India, the ministry said. As public servants continue to embrace lifelong learning, they contribute to a more dynamic, effective and forward-thinking governance framework, it said.

CM Nitish Kumar launches projects worth ₹7160 crore

BIHAR-PROJECTS
PTI ■ PATNA/BIHAR

Bihar Chief Minister Nitish Kumar on Thursday inaugurated and laid the foundation stone for various projects worth Rs 7,160 crore. The projects for which the CM virtually laid the foundation stones include 2,615 panchayat government buildings in different blocks in the state and a panchayat resource centre in Sonapur in Saran district. Kumar also inaugurated 13 district panchayat resource centres, 65 panchayat government buildings, e-gram kachhari court management system and portals of several district councils at a function held at the official residence of the CM. According to a statement issued by the Chief Minister's Office, the government has been emphasising on the construction of panchayat government buildings. "There should be the same system in the panchayati raj institutions as that of the state government...therefore, we call these buildings 'panchayat government buildings' instead of Panchayat Bhawan. The CM instructed officials to get the construction work of all these buildings completed by June 2025," the statement said. The government has set a target of constructing such buildings in every gram panchayat. Initially, 330 panchayat government buildings were built.

"Of 8,053 panchayat buildings in the state, 6,858 have been approved. Out of these, 1,548 are complete and the rest are under construction", the statement said. The CM was quoted as saying that now land is being searched for the construction of 1,195 buildings. District officials concerned have been directed to identify suitable land in their respective villages/panchayats and start the construction immediately, it said. "Officials have also been instructed to install solar panels on the roof of such buildings...this will save electricity expenses," the statement said. "All new panchayat government buildings should be maintained in a better manner. The foundation stone for the resource centre in Sonapur was also laid," it said. Besides, the CM said there are 1,09,321 wards in the state and there is a target to install 11,75,740 street lights in these areas. "The work of installing 8,00,740 street lights is being done in different areas of the state...which should be completed by March 2025," Kumar said in the statement. The event was also attended by Deputy Chief Ministers Samrat Chaudhary and Vijay Kumar Sinha, state Panchayati Raj Minister Kedar Prasad Gupta, Building Construction Minister Jayant Raj and Additional Chief Secretary of Panchayati Raj Department Mihir Kumar Singh.

Centre earned ₹100 crore from ongoing cleanliness drive: Official



PIONEER NEWS SERVICE
NEW DELHI

The Centre has earned over Rs 100 crore in revenue from the disposal of scrap during the month-long ongoing special cleanliness campaign, a government official said on Thursday. Besides this, different central government departments have so far weeded out more than 12 lakh files and freed 97.2 lakh sq feet of space during the campaign period, he said. The special campaign 4.0, being carried out from October two-31 implements the vision of Prime Minister Narendra Modi for institutionalising 'swachhata' and reducing pendency in

government. The campaign has gathered significant momentum after the first two weeks of its implementation and several innovative best practices are seen - in terms of easing rules and ease of citizens lives, said V Srinivas, Secretary of the Department of Administrative Reforms and Public Grievances (DARPG) nodal department for the special campaign. "During the campaign period so far, 2.7 lakh offices have been covered. A revenue of Rs 101.48 crore has been earned from scrap disposal. As many as 12,33,638 files have been weeded out and 97.2 lakh square feet of space has been freed," he told PTI. In the years 2021-2023, special campaigns have grown in size and scale, implemented in 4.5 lakh offices, freeing 355 lakh sq ft of office space and earning a whopping Rs 1,162 crore of revenue from scrap disposal. Nearly one crore physical files were weeded under these special campaigns, said Srinivas, a 1989 batch Indian Administrative Service (IAS) officer of Rajasthan cadre.

The special campaign 4.0 is India's largest G2G (government to government) campaign for reducing pendency which will conclude on October 31. "The key performance benchmarks of the special campaign will be sustained in the post-campaign period with three hours/week being devoted to swachhata in all ministries/departments," Srinivas said. Giving details on the campaign, he said 369 rules have been eased and 3,86,539 public grievances have been redressed as of October 23. In addition to these, 22,85,564 physical files and 2,96,373 e-files have been reviewed. The ongoing campaign focuses on field/outstation offices responsible for service delivery or having a public interface, in addition to the ministries/departments and their attached/subordinate offices. This year's special campaign is expected to bring in significant innovative practices and systemic reform for a conducive work environment.

CDS calls for industry, RD synergy to achieve defence self reliance

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE
NEW DELHI

Chief of Defence Staff General Anil Chauhan on Thursday urged the industry, R&D organisations and the Services to embrace fusion and synergy in order to achieve 'Aatmanirbharta' in defence and make India a 'Sashakt, Surakshit and Viksit Bharat'. Inaugurating in the virtual mode a two-day national conference on Technology Management (TECHMA 2024), he also stressed upon the need to change the mindset to keep pace with the evolving times. The CDS called for coming up with innovative and unique ideas which can prove to be advantageous to the Armed Forces, and in turn the nation, defence ministry said here. Themed 'Technology Management in Defence Sector for Vision India @2047', the conference has been organised by Defence Research and Development Organisation (DRDO) at the Institute of Technology Management, Mussoorie. It



aims to align the country's defence technologies with the national objective of becoming self-reliant by 2047. The conference began with a roundtable discussion on 'Harnessing Futuristic Technologies and Strengthening Indigenous Capabilities for Vision India @ 2047'. Secretary, Department of Defence R&D and Chairman, DRDO Samir V Kamat attended the inaugural function as Guest of Honor. The themes of TECHMA-2024 are futuristic defence technologies, technology

management with strategic vision for 2047, project management excellence in defence and value engineering and commercialisation. The insights gained from TECHMA-2024 are expected to strengthen India's indigenous R&D ecosystem, identify multidisciplinary research areas, improve project management processes and develop solutions for future defence technologies to overcome technical, logistical, and implementation challenges, ensuring India becomes a global leader by 2047.

SEBI chairperson skips Parliament's PAC meeting amid controversy

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE
NEW DELHI

Securities and Exchange Board of India (SEBI) chairperson Madhabi Puri Buch skipped a Parliament's Public Accounts Committee (PAC) meeting on Thursday, prompting panel head K C Venugopal to postpone the sitting, with NDA members accusing him of taking unilateral decisions and lodging a protest with the Lok Sabha speaker. Venugopal told reporters that the committee received a communication from Buch at 9.30 am that she and her team will not be able to appear before the panel due to "exigencies". He indicated his disapproval of her decision noting that Buch had confirmed her presence after her earlier request for an exemption was denied. "Considering a woman's request, we thought it better to postpone today's meeting for another day," Venugopal



said as he along with other Opposition members left the venue minutes after the meeting began amid sharp exchanges between the ruling alliance and INDIA bloc MPs. An opposition member alleged that Buch informing the committee about her decision with less than two hours to go for the meeting to begin virtually amounts to contempt of the parliamentary panel.

BJP members accused Venugopal, a senior Congress leader, of not letting them put across their views. They later charged him with acting in a "suo motu" manner, suggesting that his decision to summon Buch and even some other regulatory bodies established by the acts of Parliament was his own and guided by partisan politics. PAC member and BJP MP

Ravi Shankar Prasad told reporters that there are many standing committees that review the performance of various bodies. "Your (Venugopal) own words are 'suo motu'. How did you decide? The PAC's job is to consider CAG reports. We have this information from reliable sources that the CAG has made no mention of SEBI. This entire conduct is unparliamentary. The conduct of chairperson in the way he adjourned, did not allow us to speak. And (he) walked out (which) shows he has extraneous political considerations," Prasad said. The former law minister said ruling National Democratic Alliance was in a majority at the Thursday's meeting. "Our main objection was how did he (Venugopal) make suo motu selection of subjects without consulting other members. Nobody had an inkling of the list that was prepared," said

Prasad, flanked by other NDA members of the panel. He also objected to the PAC secretariat officials leaving the venue after Venugopal adjourned the meeting when many other members remained inside. The NDA members met Speaker Om Birla later to register their protest against Venugopal. The committee's decision to include in its agenda the performance review of regulatory bodies established by legislations had invited no protest, but Venugopal's move to call Buch raised hackles of the BJP members as she has been at the centre of a political row ignited by US firm Hindenburg's allegations against her. Hindenburg's accusation of conflict of interest against Buch over the SEBI's probe into the short-seller's allegations against the Adani Group was seized upon by the Congress to seek her ouster and to attack the government, giving political

dimensions to the panel's missive to her to appear before it. PAC member and BJP MP Nishikant Dubey wrote to Speaker Om Birla last month against Venugopal, accusing the senior Congress leader of raking up "non-existent" issues to defame the central government and allegedly destabilise the country's financial structure and economy. Accusing Venugopal of "unconstitutional and disdainful" conduct, Dubey claimed the committee's chairperson actions are guided by political motivations after the Congress was "compelled" by voters to sit in the opposition benches following the Lok Sabha polls. Claiming that unverified allegations by a foreign company like Hindenburg against Buch were part of such a campaign, he alleged that the "India Chapter" of this toolkit has become active.

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE
NEW DELHI

The BJP charged that Priyanka Gandhi Vadra's nomination for the Wayanad bypoll is a victory of dynastic politics and defeat of merit. BJP national spokesperson Gaurav Bhatia also alleged discrepancies in the declaration of assets in Congress general secretary Priyanka Gandhi's poll affidavit. Addressing a press conference at the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) headquarters here, he also accused the Gandhi family of "insulting" Congress president Mallikarjun Kharge, a Dalit, by not allowing him to accompany Priyanka Gandhi to the returning officer's office for filing her nomination. "It is a victory of the Gandhi family's corruption and dynastic politics, and defeat of merit," Bhatia said, slamming the Congress over Priyanka Gandhi's nomination for the Wayanad Lok Sabha bypoll in Kerala. Bhatia claimed that the assets declared by Priyanka Gandhi in her poll affidavit are way



below the assets she and her husband Robert Vadra possess. "The assets of Robert Vadra declared in the poll affidavit are lower than the income-tax department's demand.... The total demand raised by the income-tax department is Rs 75 crore," he said, alleging that Priyanka Gandhi's poll affidavit is a confession of corruption committed by the Gandhi family and Vadra. She has also shown the value of her house in Shimla much lower than what it is, Bhatia alleged. Priyanka Gandhi on Wednesday filed the nomination for her maiden electoral battle from Wayanad. In her affidavit filed for the bypoll, she has declared assets worth more than Rs 12 crore, including a Rs 5.63-crore house in Shimla.

BJP announces seven candidates for UP Assembly by-elections

BISWAJEET BANERJEE ■
LUCKNOW

The Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) has announced candidates for seven seats out of nine in the upcoming Uttar Pradesh assembly by-elections, setting up a high-stakes contest against the Samajwadi Party (SP). A notable candidate is Anuj Yadav, a relative of SP chief Akhilesh Yadav, who has been fielded from the Karhal constituency. Anuj Yadav is the brother-in-law of MP Dharmendra Yadav and, through this relation, is also the brother-in-law of Akhilesh Yadav and the son-in-law of the late Mulayam Singh Yadav.

His candidacy is seen as a significant move by the BJP to challenge the influence of the Yadav family in the region. Among other BJP candidates, Suresh Awasthi has been given the ticket from Sisamau in Kanpur, while Dharamraj Nishad will contest from the Katehari seat in Ambedkarnagar. Ramveer Singh Thakur has been fielded from the Kundarki seat in Moradabad, Sanjeev Sharma from Ghaziabad, Surendra Diler from the Khair seat in Aligarh, Deepak Patel from the Phulpur seat in Prayagraj, and Suchismita Maurya from Majhawan in Mirzapur. Additionally, in line with its alliance with the Rashtriya

Lok Dal (RLD), the BJP has given the Meerapur seat of Muzaffarnagar to RLD candidate Mithlesh Pal. This alliance is part of a broader strategy to consolidate votes in key constituencies. Out of the seven BJP candidates, four belong to the Other Backward Classes (OBC), showcasing the party's focus on appealing to OBC voters. Additionally, the BJP has fielded one Dalit candidate and two from forward castes. Among the forward caste candidates, Sanjeev Sharma represents the Brahmin community, while Ramveer Singh Thakur is from the Thakur community. Among the backward caste



candidates, Deepak Patel represents the Kurmi community, Suchismita Maurya the Maurya community, Dharamraj Nishad the Nishad community, and Anuj Yadav the Yadav community. Surendra Diler, from the Valmiki community, has been given the ticket for the Khair

seat, which is reserved for Scheduled Castes (SC). "Battle between BJP and SP, not uncle and nephew" Anuj Yadav, upon receiving the ticket from the BJP, arrived at the party office directly from his village, Bharol. Addressing journalists, he downplayed the narrative of a family rivalry, stating, "The fight for the Karhal assembly is not a battle between uncle and nephew but between the BJP and the SP. The public will give victory to the BJP in this contest." SP has fielded Tej Pratap Yadav, Akhilesh's nephew, who also happens to be nephew of Anuj Yadav. When asked if his candidacy

would strain relationship within family Anuj remarked, "We have an example of Uncle Shivpal who had previously contested elections by forming a separate party. This election is about political differences, not personal ones." With the BJP and SP fielding strong candidates, the by-elections have set the stage for a fierce political contest in Uttar Pradesh. The focus on caste dynamics, alliance strategies, and the high-profile Karhal contest between the BJP and SP adds to the anticipation. The outcomes of these by-elections will have a significant bearing on the political landscape of the state ahead of

the 2027 assembly elections. By-elections are being held for 9 seats: Katehari (Ambedkar Nagar), Karhal (Mainpuri), Meerapur (Muzaffarnagar), Ghaziabad, Majhawan (Mirzapur), Sisamau (Kanpur city), Khair (Aligarh), Phulpur (Prayagraj), and Kundarki (Moradabad). In the 2022 assembly elections, the SP had won five of these seats — Sisamau, Katehari, Karhal, Milkipur, and Kundarki. The BJP had secured victories in Phulpur, Ghaziabad, Majhawan, and Khair. The Meerapur seat was won by the Rashtriya Lok Dal (RLD), which was then allied with the SP

Omar calls on PM Modi Congress backs out of Assembly by-elections, joint candidate to contest on SP symbol

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■
NEW DELHI

Jammu and Kashmir Chief Minister Omar Abdullah called on Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Thursday during his first visit to the national capital after assuming office last week, officials said. Omar Abdullah's National Conference won 42 of the 90 assembly seats in the recently held polls. In its first cabinet meeting, the new government passed a resolution urging the central government to restore the statehood of Jammu and Kashmir. This restoration, according to the officials, is seen as a crucial step towards initiating a healing process, reinstating constitutional rights and safeguarding the unique identity of the region's residents. The chief minister has been authorised by the cabinet to engage with the prime minister and the central govern-



ment to advocate for the reinstatement of Jammu and Kashmir's statehood. This resolution was also approved by Jammu and Kashmir Lieutenant Governor Manoj Sinha. Abdullah's meeting with Modi comes four days after terrorists of banned Lashkar-e-Taiba gunned down seven people -- a local doctor and six non-local labourers -- in Ganderbal district's Gagangir. Earlier in the day, Abdullah met Union Minister of Road

Transport and Highways Nitin Gadkari at his office. During the meeting, Abdullah apprised Gadkari about the road connectivity projects in Jammu and Kashmir, the officials said. The chief minister presented Gadkari with a traditional Kashmiri shawl. He called upon Defence Minister Rajnath Singh. Abdullah had met Union Home Minister Amit Shah on Wednesday and the meeting lasted nearly 30 minutes.

BISWAJEET BANERJEE ■
LUCKNOW

In a significant political move, the Congress party will not field its candidates in the upcoming assembly by-elections in Uttar Pradesh. Instead, the joint candidate of the INDIA alliance will contest under the Samajwadi Party (SP) symbol. This decision was announced by SP President Akhilesh Yadav on social media late Wednesday night, signaling a united front between the two parties in the state. Sources within the SP revealed that a crucial phone conversation took place between SP President Akhilesh Yadav and Congress leader Rahul Gandhi on Wednesday night. Initially, the SP had allocated the Ghaziabad and Khair seats to Congress for the by-elections, but Congress remained firm on its demand to contest in five seats. On Tuesday, Akhilesh Yadav had agreed to grant an additional seat, Phulpur, to



Congress. However, following the direct communication between Rahul and Akhilesh, the Congress decided not to field its candidates under its own symbol. The move mirrors the political strategy adopted during the Haryana assembly elections, where the SP refrained from fielding its candidates due to a lack of agreement over seat-sharing with the Congress. The breakthrough in Uttar

Pradesh is attributed to the election seats using the Samajwadi Party's 'cycle' symbol. He further emphasized the alliance's united stance, saying, "Congress and Samajwadi Party are standing united, shoulder to shoulder for a big victory. The INDIA alliance is poised to write a new chapter of triumph in these by-elections." Akhilesh highlighted the enhanced strength of the SP with the support of Congress,

from its top leadership down to grassroots workers. "With this unprecedented cooperation and support, every worker of the 'India Alliance' across all nine assembly seats is energized and resolute in their mission to win," he added. The SP President also underscored the significance of the upcoming by-elections, describing them as a fight to protect the country's constitution, harmony, and the honor of the PDA (Pichda, Dalit, Alpashankyak). He made a fervent appeal to voters, saying, "Not even a single vote should be reduced, not even a single vote should be divided." Akhilesh expressed confidence that this unity within the INDIA alliance, driven by a commitment to national interest, would pave the way for a new era of political success. Meanwhile, Samajwadi Party has announced Sri Singh Raj Jataw as Party candidate from Ghaziabad and Charu Kain from Khair.

Indian Navy preparing to conduct HADR operations in anticipation of severe impact of Cyclone Dana



PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■
NEW DELHI

In anticipation of the severe impact of Cyclone Dana along the coast of Odisha and West Bengal, the Indian Navy is preparing to conduct Humanitarian Assistance and Disaster Relief (HADR) operations, defence ministry said here on Thursday. Giving details, officials said Eastern Naval Command, in coordination with Naval Officers-in-Charge (NOIC) in Andhra Pradesh, Odisha, and West Bengal, have activated a comprehensive disaster response mechanism. The command is working closely with units such as the Base Victualling Yard (BVY), Material Organisation and the naval hospital INHS Kalyani to provide essential supplies and medical support

if sought by the state administration. As part of this preparation, HADR pallets, including essential clothing, drinking water, food, medicines, and emergency relief materials, have been deployed by road to key locations in the areas that are likely to be affected. In addition, Flood Relief and Diving Teams are being mobilised to assist in coordinated rescue and relief operations if needed. Moreover, to support relief efforts from sea, two ships of the Eastern Fleet are standing by with supplies and rescue and diving teams. The Indian Navy continues to monitor the situation closely and remains on high alert, ready to extend its support to the civil authorities and the people affected by the cyclone.

Centre approves new rail line in Bihar for semi high speed trains

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■
NEW DELHI

In a major rail project to benefit Bihar as well as north eastern region, the Centre on Thursday approved a new rail line in north Bihar to hold capacity of running of semi high speed trains and further connecting the ports in West Bengal and Odisha. The approved doubling of the Narkatia ganj - Raxaul-Sitamarhi-Darbhanga and Sitamarhi-Muzaffarpur section in Bihar covering 256 km will also strengthen the connectivity to Nepal, Northeast India and border areas and facilitating movement of high speed passenger trains along with goods train resulting in the socio-economic growth of the region. The Union Cabinet also approved a 57-km-long line to connect Andhra Pradesh's new capital Amravati and both the Bihar and Andhra rail projects are worth Rs 6,798 crore. "To provide connectivity to Amravati, a new 57-km-long line worth Rs 2,245 crore will be constructed. For this, a 3.2-km-long new bridge will be constructed on the Krishna river which will be among longest bridges of the Indian Railway," Railway Minister Ashwini Vaishnav said. He added that this ambitious project will provide connectivity from Amravati to all metros including Hyderabad,



Chennai and Kolkatta. "The new rail line project Erupalem - Amaravati - Namburu traverses through NTR Vijayawada and Guntur districts of Andhra Pradesh and Khammam district of Telangana," it added. Vaishnav also spoke to Andhra Pradesh Chief Minister N Chandrababu Naidu and Deputy Chief Minister Pawan Kalyan about the decisions of the Union Cabinet. According to the government, these two projects covering eight districts in Andhra Pradesh, Telangana and Bihar will increase the existing network of Indian Railways by about 313 km. Highlighting the benefits of these two projects, it said the new line project will provide connectivity to approximately 168 villages and about 12 lakh population with 9 new stations. Besides, it added, the multi-

tracking project will enhance connectivity to two aspirational districts (Sitamarhi and Muzaffarpur) serving approximately 388 villages and about 9 lakh population. According to the government, these are essential routes for transportation of commodities such as agriculture products, fertilizer, coal, iron ore, steel and cement. Talking about the impact on freight operations, it mentioned that the capacity augmentation works will result in additional freight traffic of magnitude 31 MTPA (million tonnes per annum). "The Railways being an environment friendly and energy efficient mode of transportation, will help both in achieving climate goals and minimizing logistics cost of the country, lower CO2 emissions (168 crore Kg) which is equivalent to plantation of 7 crore trees," the release said.

HP CM Sukhu meets Shekhawat, seeks help to develop tourist destinations

PTI ■ SHIMLA

Himachal Pradesh Chief Minister Sukhvinder Singh Sukhu on Thursday sought support from Union Tourism Minister Gajendra Singh Shekhawat to develop new and integrated tourist destinations in the state. Sukhu, who on Thursday met Shekhawat in Delhi, also urged the minister to support the state under special central assistance schemes, according to a statement. He sought the Centre's help in constructing a wellness centre-health resort in Kangra district's Dehra and an integrated tourism complex in Bilaspur's Auhar. Detailed project reports will be submitted to the Centre in a couple of weeks, Sukhu said. The chief minister said the state government was promoting water sports to attract tourists and added that the Pong and Bhakra dams had huge potential in this connection, reiterating his government's commitment to sustainable development and tourism promotion. Emphasis is being laid on developing infrastructure and improving connectivity to facilitate high-end tourists. Heliports to connect all district headquarters are being developed, besides expanding Kangra airport, he added. Himachal Pradesh envisages developing new tourist desti-



nations, Sukhu said and urged Shekhawat to support the state for constructing golf courses. He said the Pong dam reservoir had been selected as a tourist destination under Swadesh Darshan 2.0 and requested the minister for expedited release of funds for executing the project. A revised detailed project report for development of the Chintpurni temple complex under the PRASAD scheme has been sent to the Centre, the chief minister said and requested that funds be sanctioned for it. Shekhawat assured Sukhu to support Himachal Pradesh in its tourism promotion activities, besides releasing funds soon. Sukhu later met Union Minister for Road Transport and Highways Nitin Gadkari and discussed various road,

bridge and ropeway projects while also seeking liberal central assistance. The chief minister submitted a proposal for constructing four new road projects. He suggested that the National Highways Authority of India explore the possibility of tunnelling wherever feasible to reduce maintenance costs, the statement said. Sukhu requested reviewing the realignment of the Solan-Parwanoo Road and urged the Union minister to consider preparing a new detailed project report with the many blind spots and curves that lead to more accidents in mind. Four-laning of the remaining portions of the Shimla-Mataur National Highway was also discussed. Gadkari assured full support to the Himachal Pradesh government.

IT-department names companies liaising with Maharashtra Ministries in Rs 1,050 crore graft scam

T N RAGHUNATHA ■
MUMBAI

In a major development, the Director General of Income Taxes (DGIT) has in a fresh affidavit filed before the Bombay High Court has disclosed the names of companies linked to four middlemen and their close associates engaged in liaising activities in close coordination with various Ministries of Maharashtra government in an alleged corruption case involving the allotments of land belonging to the state government. In its fresh affidavit before Chief Justice Devendra Kumar Upadhyaya and Justice Amit Borkar, the Director General of Income Taxes (DGIT) disclosed the names of four companies and

their sub-group from belonging to middlemen involved in an alleged corruption in the allotment of allotments of land belonging to the Maharashtra government. In a fresh affidavit before the HC bench in a PIL filed by Advocate Pravin Wategaonkar, the DGIT made the disclosure after conducting raids on the companies involved under section 132 of the Income Tax Act, 1961, a revelation provides evidence to the alleged compliance of middlemen involved in the case, the names of whom were disclosed earlier by the department. Following disclosure made in an affidavit filed before it on October 19, the HC bench took into consideration the new information provided



by the DGIT and allowed the department to file an additional affidavit before it and scheduled the next hearing of the case for November 26, 2024. It may be recalled that in her affidavit before the HC bench of Acting Chief Justice Nitin Jamdar and Justice Arif S Doctor in August 2023 in a case involving irregularities in the government land allotment, Ms Teresa Joseph, Deputy Director of Income Tax (Investigation) Unit 32 (2) had confirmed that "the relatives/ family members/ references of the bureaucrats in whose name the properties were purchased" were under investigation. Following raids conducted on 25 residential, 15 office premises and some suites in a five-star hotel in south

Mumbai between September and November 2021, the IT officials had detected total transactions to the tune of Rs 1,050 crore. The syndicate - comprising businessmen, middlemen, their associates and also those public offices had used code names in their records and in one case, they had backdated records by 10 years. Huge cash exchanges were involved in the overall transactions. The investigations had revealed that businessmen and middlemen had permanently rented out suites in a five-star hotel in south Mumbai for meeting their clients and striking nefarious deals. In her affidavit, Ms Teresa Joseph had identified the businessmen/middlemen as Prashant Prakash Nilawar,

Jayant Hiralal Shah, Girish Narayan Pawar and Kirti Vishwanath Kedia who along with their close relatives and others were allegedly engaged in liaising activities in close coordination with various Ministries of Maharashtra government in an alleged corruption case involving the allotment of land belonging to the state government. The affidavit had brought out the offence of bribery of public servants by middlemen in allotment of land belonging to Maharashtra. Undertaking to industrialists; extension of contracts etc. In his PIL, Wategaonkar has sought an investigation by the SIT of Director General (ACB) & Jt. Director (ED) into the alleged corruption in the questionable government land deals.



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PAPER WITH PASSION

Breakthrough

India and China reach complete disengagement deal as Modi and Xi finalise the agreement in Kazan

The Kazan BRICS Summit on October 23 marked a historic moment as Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi and Chinese President Xi Jinping met on the sidelines to finalise a breakthrough agreement on border disengagement. This bilateral meeting, the first in five years, comes after years of strained relations following the Galwan Valley clash in June 2020, which led to a tense standoff at the Line of Actual Control (LAC). The resolution at Kazan is the result of months of high-level diplomatic and military negotiations, culminating in a commitment to complete disengagement at the disputed border. Tensions at the India-China border had been simmering since the deadly Galwan Valley clash in June 2020, where soldiers from both nations lost their lives in the most severe border conflict between the two countries in over four decades. The incident exacerbated existing disagreements and led to a military standoff at multiple points along the LAC, including the Depsang Plains and Demchok. Despite some disengagement efforts over the years, troops from both sides remained in a face-off at key locations.



Efforts to resolve the standoff included 31 rounds of diplomatic meetings and 21 rounds of military talks over the past four years. Two crucial meetings between Indian External Affairs Minister S Jaishankar and his Chinese counterpart Wang Yi in July helped pave the way for a comprehensive resolution. Despite pressure from the United States to adopt a more confrontational approach toward Beijing, Modi's outreach to Russia, a key ally of China, proved instrumental in bringing about a shift in China's stance. The Kazan summit saw both leaders agree on a roadmap for the complete disengagement of troops along the LAC, with an emphasis on expediting the process. The plan involves a phased approach, starting with the immediate cessation of confrontational positions at disputed areas, followed by the re-initiation of patrolling along agreed sections of the border. The final phase will be the de-induction of troops, which will proceed under India's "watch and verify" policy to ensure that China upholds its commitments. The disengagement deal marks a significant step in stabilising bilateral relations between two of the world's largest nations. But it is just the beginning and there is a long way to go. Indeed disengaging on borders would ease the tensions but the core issues of border disputes still remain unresolved. Now is the time to build upon this breakthrough and take this process forward and make it a permanent solution so that these untoward incidents do not happen again. It will be a great relief for the business community on both sides which was facing multiple issues in trading with each other due to strained relations between the two countries. Kazan agreement has opened a path for dialogue and cooperation, setting the stage for the two Asian giants to navigate their differences and work towards a peaceful and stable future.

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PICTALK



A myna bird perches on a branch of a floss silk tree, in New Delhi

PTI

Saree: An eternal symbol of Indian culture and elegance

Saree, a lengthy piece of fabric – usually six to nine yards – is a visual representation of the diverse cultural heritage of India

Today, millions of Indian women wear it, regardless of region, socio-economic class, or age. Yes it is saree we are talking about. For some, it is a part of their daily lives, serving as both comfort and functionality. While some regard the saree as a sophisticated status symbol, at its core, it represents much more: it houses the beauty, grace, and essence of India itself. A saree can be found everywhere in India, from the bustling streets of cities to the peaceful nooks of rural villages. Versatility is unmatched. The kaleidoscope of traditions is reflected in a single piece of cloth, which is worn differently across the country's many regions. It includes the vivid bandhani of Gujarat, the red-and-white Garad of Bengal, and the transparent silk of Kanchipuram. Each of them has a unique story, and each fold depicts the cultural diversity of its region. The saree has great cultural and emotional significance, regardless of how one views its aesthetic



merit. For many women, their first saree is a rite of passage, a moment that marks an important milestone in life. Whether draped by a bride on her wedding day or by a mother passing down a family heirloom to her daughter, the saree carries with it memories, emotions, and history. The act of draping a saree is itself an art form, handed down through generations, symbolising a connection between past and present. In a world rapidly influenced by fast fashion and global trends, the saree remains a steadfast emblem of tradition. Yet, it has adapted to modern

sensibilities. Fashion designers have reinterpreted the saree, infusing contemporary designs, bold prints, and innovative draping styles. From Bollywood red carpets to international runways, the saree has evolved, but its essence remains unchanged—it continues to be a garment that celebrates femininity, confidence, and culture. For some, the saree is a status symbol. Luxurious silk sarees adorned with intricate zari work or hand-painted masterpieces showcase India's rich textile heritage and are often worn at grand occasions and festivals. These sarees, crafted with love and precision by



RACHNA LAKHPATRI

artisans, are not merely garments; they are wearable art, reflecting the wearer's appreciation for craftsmanship and elegance. At the same time, for millions of women across India, the saree is simply everyday wear. Cotton sarees, lightweight and breathable, are the attire of choice for women who go about their daily routines—whether they are tending to fields, managing homes, or leading boardroom meetings. Despite its ubiquity, the saree never loses its charm. It transforms the mundane into the majestic, turning an ordinary day into a celebration of self-expression. Ultimately, the saree is more than just a draped cloth. It is an embodiment of India's diverse cultures, its history, and its enduring beauty. Whether worn as a necessity or as a statement of style, the saree continues to unite women across time, reminding us all of the timeless elegance and grace that define India's soul. (The writer is a motivator and freelance writer; views are personal)

RSS centenary: A legacy of service and cultural revival

During the hundredth year of its existence, it is a relatively rare occurrence for an organisation to reach its pinnacle, writes KAMALESH KUMAR TIWARI

The Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS), which is widely acknowledged as the largest non-governmental organisation in the world, began its centenary year this month. The group has built a significant presence inside the social and cultural framework of India, with daily 'Shakha' gatherings taking place in a wide variety of venues around the country and even further and further afield. 'Namaste Sada Vatsale Matribhume' is an incantation that represents the Sangh's continual expansion, strength, and effect while it deftly navigates a variety of problems and opposition at the same time.

On three separate occasions—in 1948, 1975, and 1992—the Sangh was subject to prohibitions enforced by its rivals. On the other hand, these prohibitions were lifted without conditions each time, and on each of the three occasions, the Sangh reemerged with greater strength. This is the reason why it continues to be a matter of discussion in a variety of circles. Throughout its history, the RSS has been instrumental in preserving and advancing India's rich cultural heritage, which is rich in diversity. For a period that is defined by rapid globalisation, the activities that the Sangh is undertaking to protect indigenous traditions carry a tremendous amount of relevance.

The basic unit of Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh is its branches which combine the sense of 'self' with the sense of larger social interest. The real strength of Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh is its self-motivated workers who are called volunteers. Volunteer means a self-motivated and self-driven person. Through the service, contact and publicity department of the Sangh, volunteers are engaged in the work of social awareness to reach remote people. In its 100th year, the RSS's influence is not only widespread but is active across 40 countries, including India. In these hundred years, the RSS has trans-



formed into a huge banyan tree with 73 thousand 'Shakha'. Today its network is so strong that in future it will be very challenging to remove its hold on every aspect of Indian politics and life.

The Sangh has a wing for every section of the society, today there are more than 80 like-minded or affiliated organisations in the Sangh Parivar. The socio-cultural organisation Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh was founded by Dr Keshav Baliram Hedgewar in the year 1925 on the auspicious occasion of Vijaydashami (September 27). The first Sarsangchalak of the Sangh, Hedgewar, planned the formation of the Sangh in a seminar at his home. Vishwanath Kelkar, Bhauji Kavre, Anna Sahne, Balaji Huddar, Bapurao Bhedi, etc. were present in this meeting along with Hedgewar.

The Sangh got its present name Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh about six months after its foundation. On April 17, 1926, Dr Hedgewar called a meeting at his home in which about 26 volunteers participated. A detailed discussion took place to decide the name of the organisation for which everyone gave their ideas. After much discussion, the name 'Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh' was unanimously chosen. The first daily 'Shakha' of the RSS started on May 28, 1926, with Dr Hedgewar car-



PROMOTING MUTUAL UNDERSTANDING AND MAINTAINING SOCIAL HARMONY THROUGH UNITY EFFORTS IS OF UTMOST IMPORTANCE IN A NATION AS LARGE AND DIVERSE AS INDIA

rying forward the Sangh work through gymnasiums and akharas. It was in his imagination to be a healthy and fit volunteer. Its emphasis on physical fitness, moral values, and national pride has appealed to millions of individuals, making it the largest voluntary NGO in the country and the world. Today more than 50 lakh volunteers of the Sangh visit the shakhas regularly. Modi himself was a full-time member of the RSS before shifting to the BJP. With the inspiration and cooperation of the Sangh, various organisations are running in every sector of society, which are contributing to nation-building. Indian thought is reflected in the functioning of the Sangh. The Sangh emphasises the continuous process of making the entire personality of the volunteer useful to society.

Many research scholars around the world have studied RSS and described it as an organisation with a different and unique methodology in the world. Different types of celebrations are celebrated on the occasion of the completion of 100 years of any social organisation or political party in the world, but there is no celebration on the completion of 100 years of the world's largest social organisation. Even if the volunteers of an organisation hold high positions like Vice President, Prime Minister, Deputy

Prime Minister, and Chief Minister, and yet when this organisation reaches its centenary, it does not celebrate any celebration, this is what makes it different from other organisations and it is also free from the arrogance of being a widespread organisation. Sarsangchalak Dr Mohan Bhagwat has clearly said that there is no need to boast of achievements, we just need to bring reforms that will win the society and whatever the circumstances, RSS volunteers should keep doing their work.

As the RSS prepares to celebrate its 100th anniversary, it has set a target of reaching every block of the country and increasing the number of shakhas to 100,000.

A full-time worker is known as an evangelist in the organisation. He does not live with his family and spends all his time in organisational work. The RSS plans to increase the number of workers manifold by motivating them to give at least two years of their lives as pracharaks. This is expected to give a great boost to the organisation. Promoting social cohesion and nation-building is the RSS's distinctive focus. Promoting mutual understanding and maintaining social harmony through unity efforts is of utmost importance in a nation as large and diverse as India.

(The writer is historian and founder of 'Itihas Kumbh', Varanasi; views are personal)

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

AIR QUALITY DETERIORATES

Madam — The editorial, 'Breathless in Delhi' (October 23) should sensitise all the concerned. Air quality in Delhi remains poor all through the year. During this season, it worsens with the unchecked activity of burning stubble in the surrounding states. When stubble burning is identified as an aggravating factor, not attending to it with all seriousness depicts the utter callous attitude of the Union as well as the concerned state governments. We have enough agroscientists and technocrats who can be entrusted with the responsibility of studying and suggesting ways of utilising the stubble in a better way than simply burning them.

Farmers may be taught of the alternate ways of using stubble to generate further income and they may be incentivised to fall in line. The equipment required may also be supplied at a substantially subsidised cost. Instead of catching the offender after burning stubble, the process of educating the farmers may start well before the harvest with an adequate and rational system of follow-up in vogue. But the fact is that Delhi has the maximum number of vehicles contributing the maximum pollution. The other factors should also be identified and attended to in a comprehensive manner. But the government is in a mood to fell trees and destroy the natural forests for whatever reasons. A democratic movement of the people may be taken to sensitise all the concerned.

A G Rajmohan | A G Rajmohan

RUSSIAN ARMY STRUGGLING

Madam — Russian President Putin may be smiling, shaking hands, hugging and getting photographed with the heads of state of dozens of countries in the Russian city of Kazan at the BRICS conference. But from within, he is completely broken over the attack on Ukraine. It has been more than two and a half years and he has not been able to fully capture Ukraine. Many western agencies have claimed in their reports that more than 50 thousand

Australia revamps CWG



The Commonwealth Games will be held in the city of Glasgow in Australia in 2026. Interestingly, hockey, badminton, shooting, cricket, table tennis and wrestling have been removed from this competition. Also, the reason behind the removal of some sports from the competition is to control the huge expenses incurred for the competition. In fact, taking some sports

out of the competition is a matter of concern for India. India has more medals in the sports that have been withdrawn from the competition. For the players, this is like taking away the opportunity to show their skills. It is surprising that a country like Australia is so tight with money for the tournament. Movements should be made at the political level for this. Due to this, the number of players will also decrease.

There is a picture that these competitions will be held only in name. In fact, if a new sport was included, Australia would have been thanked. But the situation is exactly opposite. If the competition cannot be held properly, then the post of host should not be taken. Other countries in the Commonwealth Games should also protest and persuade Australia to do so. This is the first time in the history of World Games that many games have been cancelled for financial reasons.

Shantaram Wagh | Pune

Russian soldiers have been killed in this war so far. The Kremlin has also been crippled by the rebellion of the Wagner group of mercenaries and the death of its director Prigozhin in a mysterious plane crash. Moscow is also facing a severe shortage of ammunition and war equipment at this time. This is the reason why it has to extend its hands to Iran and North Korea for drones and missiles. North Korea has even sent its 3 thousand soldiers to fight against Ukraine. North Korea has agreed to send 12 thousand more soldiers.

The Russian army is so short of fighters that many young people from countries like India and Africa who went in search of jobs were forcibly recruited into the army. Even criminals serving sentences in jails there or who have been recently arrested for some reason are being forcibly recruited into the army. The Russian parliament has passed a controversial law that allows people facing prosecution to appeal to the courts to drop the charges against them if they sign contracts to fight in the army in Ukraine. Deputy Andrey

Kartapolov, who pushed the bill through the State Duma, said that this is a golden opportunity for criminals to repay their debt to society and serve the country.

Jang Bahadur Singh | Jamshedpur

NAIDU COURTS CONTROVERSY

Madam — This has reference to the exhortation by CM Chandrababu Naidu to people to have more children, followed by a similar call by Stalin that every family should have 16 of them. Whatever their logic or reasoning, such a call has left many perplexed as to how these families will be able to raise, educate and prepare the children for their good future when even raising two children is proving to be fraught with uncertainties and hardship for a very large segment of our population. Unless these leaders can also show an easy way for people to achieve this, the call to have more children (sixteen!) is totally inexplicable in today's world.

N S Rajan | Bangalore

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FIRST COLUMN

BRICS SUMMIT: THE INDIA-CHINA TANGO

The Summit was an interplay between India's ties with the US and its issues with China



KUMARDEEP BANERJEE

The BRICS summit in the historic city of Kazan, in Russia this week, was an important attempt to reset the balance of power between India and the member countries. It was another opportunity for the Indian Prime Minister to meet President Putin in a relatively short time interval. The highlight of the visit was a bilateral meeting between PM Modi and Chinese President Xi, specially, after it was signalled that the Indo-Chinese troops would follow a structured disengagement process, on the borders.

The Indo-China relations had hit the lowest since the military escalation by China on Indian borders in 2020 and there have been no bilateral conversations since. While China maintained claims to parts of the Indian territory, even through military interventions, it wanted to engage with India on social and economic terms. India maintained that any further engagement with China would be based on an effective structured military de-escalation at the borders. The BRICS summit in Kazan was a sort of showcase meant for the Western countries regarding a parallel world order being in good health. China continues to view the India bilateral relationship through the US-India prism.

On the eve of the bilateral meeting between PM Modi and President Xi, a Chinese state-owned Global Times published an editorial that read "In recent years, the US has intensified its efforts to court India while applying pressure on China. China has maintained its position without wavering, remaining undeterred by the strengthening US-India cooperation. India has also observed that as US-India



defence ties deepen, both countries claim to share "values," but in reality, the US only wants to use India to exhaust China while being unwilling to provide India with guarantees. On the contrary, it may push India to the front line of confronting China." At the same time, the long-standing border standoff with China has added extra defence burdens for India; policies aimed at "decoupling" from China's economy have not prevented trade data between China and India from continuously rising. All these changes indicate that cooperation, rather than confrontation, aligns with the common interests of both countries and their peoples.

The BRICS summit served as an important reminder for India and China that both countries need to find peaceful resolutions to their mutual concerns while finding new partnership opportunities. The summit also showcased Russian President Putin's prowess in attracting several important global leaders to his country, even as he is increasingly isolated by the Western Bloc. India has been actively engaging with every stakeholder in the Russian-Ukraine war. There have been several high-level engagements between top officials of all of these countries involved in the war zone. India has restrained itself from offering a peaceful solution to the Russian-Ukraine war, unlike the other BRICS member countries such as China and Brazil. In Kazan during the bilateral meeting with President Putin, PM Modi mentioned "We have remained in regular contact regarding the ongoing conflict between Russia and Ukraine. As I have stated before, we believe that the resolution of issues should be achieved through peaceful means only. We fully support the earliest possible restoration of peace and stability." Elaborating on India's efforts towards peace efforts Indian Foreign Secretary Vikram Misri said "starting from the Prime Minister's visit to Moscow in July this year and subsequently his visit to Kyiv in August this year and his engagement with the leadership of both countries must be seen as India's efforts to foster peace." The outcomes of the US presidential election in the next few weeks would further hasten a new global order. (The writer is a policy analyst; views are personal)

Cyber security: Time for India to be cyber-wise

As cyber threats grow more sophisticated and pervasive, 'cyber security awareness month,' serves as a timely call to action for governments, industries and the public



ABHILASH PURUSHOTHAMAN



Celebrated annually for over two decades now, the world now observes October as "Cybersecurity Awareness Month". Initiated by the US Cybersecurity and Infrastructure Security Agency (CISA) in 2004, it aims to promote cybersecurity awareness and encourage both public and private sectors to take proactive steps in securing their digital landscapes.

In its 21st year, Cybersecurity Awareness Month remains focused on fostering collaboration between governments, industries and the public to enhance awareness about cyber threats, promote safe online behaviour, and equip organisations with the necessary tools to combat emerging digital risks. This month-long campaign is not just a reminder to stay vigilant but a call to action — a time for every nation to bolster its defences against the ever-evolving cyber threat landscape.

India: A Prime Target for Cybercriminals as India's digital economy continues its rapid expansion, the country has become an attractive target for cybercriminals looking to exploit vulnerabilities. According to Rubrik Zero Labs research, 75 per cent of Indian organisations reported they experienced an increase in ransomware attacks in the past year, with 96 per cent of these reported incidents specifically targeting backups—74 per cent of which were at least partially successful. The report further revealed that: 69 per cent of Indian IT and security leaders identified SaaS platforms as the most common targets for cyberattacks in 2023. 98 per cent of these leaders experienced a loss of sensitive information due to cyber incidents. 55 per cent of companies reported paying a ransom because of data extortion threats.

53 per cent confirmed that malicious actors successfully damaged their backup and recovery options. These figures are alarming, to say the least, positioning India among the top three most targeted countries in the Asia-Pacific region. Since September 2022, ransomware attacks in India have surged by a staggering 195 per cent. This increase is not just in vol-

ume but also in sophistication, as attackers adapt their strategies to evade detection and increase their chances of success.

The Rising Cost of Data Breaches in India The financial implications of these attacks are becoming more severe. According to recent studies, the average cost of a data breach in India now stands at a staggering Rs 19.5 crore — an all-time high.

Since 2020, the financial impact of these breaches has soared by 39 per cent, reflecting the increasing complexity and disruptive nature of modern cyber threats. Critical infrastructure industries such as healthcare, financial services, and energy have been hit the hardest, with breach costs in these sectors ranking among the highest globally. However, the financial ramifications are just one part of the equation.

The reputational damage caused by data breaches can have long-lasting effects on customer trust and business sustainability. In today's digital world, data is the new currency, and its protection should be a top priority for every organisation. Unfortunately, the reactive approach of defending against threats is no longer sufficient. As cybercriminals continue to evolve and become more sophisticated, businesses must shift their focus to building a proactive and resilient cybersecurity posture.

Understanding Cyber Resilience: The Key to a Safer Digital Future To effectively combat the growing threat landscape, organisations need to embrace the concept of cyber resilience. Cyber resilience goes beyond traditional cybersecurity measures, emphasising not only the defence against attacks but also the ability to recover quickly and continue operations in the face of an incident.

This approach is vital in a world where threats are not only becoming more frequent but also more damaging. Cyber resilience is no longer just a technical requirement but a strategic imperative. Cyber threats are constantly evolving, making it crucial for businesses to understand and implement effective strategies for cyber resilience. Its importance in the modern digital landscape has been accentuated due to the evolving threat landscape and common cyber threats.

Building a Strong Cyber Posture Creating a resilient organisation starts with developing a robust cyber posture. This involves conducting comprehensive risk assessments, defining clear frameworks, and implementing methodologies to identify strengths and weaknesses within the digital ecosystem. Understanding the role of risk assessment is critical in developing a strong cyber posture. Organisations must evaluate their existing security measures, identify potential vulnerabilities, and develop a strategic roadmap to address these gaps.

A resilient cyber posture is not just about deploying advanced technologies; it's about integrating cybersecurity into every aspect of the organisation's operations and culture. Employee training and awareness programmes are essential to instil a mindset that prioritises security across all levels of the organisation. Building a culture of security is pivotal, as it helps transform cybersecurity from a mere compliance requirement into a core business priority. The Role of Regulatory Measures In response to the rising threat landscape, regulatory bodies like the Reserve Bank of India (RBI) have stepped up their efforts to strengthen the nation's cyber resilience.

The RBI has issued comprehensive guidelines on Cyber Resilience, requiring financial organisations to implement robust governance frameworks for identifying, assessing, monitoring, and managing cyber risks.

These regulations also mandate the adoption of baseline security measures to ensure system resiliency and secure digital transactions. The RBI's guidelines are designed to address the unique challenges faced by the financial sector, which remains one of the most targeted industries globally. Financial institutions are now required to migrate to the latest security standards, deploy advanced monitoring systems, and establish strong incident response protocols to safeguard customer data and ensure business continuity.

Learning from Real-World Cyber Resilience Examples Governments and companies need to learn from real-world examples to understand the impact of cyber resilience strategies.

The consequences of cyberattacks on organisations are well documented, and businesses can gain insights from real-world examples of successful and unsuccessful cyber resilience. One of the key lessons from these examples is the need to focus on the outcome. Cyber resilience is not just about preventing an attack; it's about minimising the impact and ensuring that the organisation can bounce back quickly. We don't just want people to be aware; we want people to be resilient and become, along with their organisation, harder targets for cybercriminals. Resilient is the new black!

(The writer is vice president, Asia Rubrik; views are personal)



THE REPUTATIONAL DAMAGE CAUSED BY DATA BREACHES CAN HAVE LONG-LASTING EFFECTS ON CUSTOMER TRUST AND BUSINESS SUSTAINABILITY. IN TODAY'S DIGITAL WORLD, DATA IS THE NEW CURRENCY, AND ITS PROTECTION SHOULD BE A TOP PRIORITY FOR EVERY ORGANISATION

Understanding Cyber Resilience: The Key to a Safer Digital Future

Art therapy: A creative solution to rising mental health challenges among youth

By using creative expression to help children manage emotions, schools can foster resilience and emotional wellbeing

Mental health concerns among children and teenagers have become more common than ever before. As per a National Mental Health Survey (2015-2016) conducted by the Ministry of Health and Family Welfare, it is estimated that 10 per cent to 20 per cent of children and adolescents in India will be prone to suffer from mental challenges by 2030, with many going undiagnosed and untreated.

Although mental health concerns have gained a lot of attention over the past couple of years, it is unfortunate that many youngsters are still unable to access the care that they require. Mental health experts cite examples of how instead of attempting to engage in unique therapy formats,



MADHURI SAGALE

most conversations tend to remain on the surface leading many children to miss out on required assistance.

Up until a few decades back, the methods for addressing mental health issues were traditional and limited. Interventions such as art therapy were occasionally employed but were not commonly recognised as a formal tool. Today art therapy is a widely practiced therapy

attracting many professionals who want to heal and help others using self-expression. Children and adolescents are generally known to show initial apprehensions when it comes to choosing special therapy methods, as stigma related to mental disorders leads to non-compliance with these approaches. Additionally, some traditional programmes may not appeal to younger generations, resulting in a loss of interest.

On the other hand, creative treatment methods, like art therapy, have distinct advantages since they encourage them to actively engage in the healing process. For children and adolescents, art can be a nonverbal and compassionate way of shaping emotions, and this is especially effective for

those who have trouble verbalising their emotions. Findings from UNSW highlight the effectiveness of art therapy in helping young people develop and manage emotional pain, allowing for artistic self-expression when it is most needed. The process of making art increases psychological health by encouraging emotion regulation and self-reflection. This provides children with a way to address their emotions creatively and naturally. **Bringing Art Therapy to School and Beyond:** Getting art-based interventions included as part of the school curriculum can have a big impact. The creation of special art therapy programs in schools where they are incorporated into the existing health framework can be an excellent way to enhance



their sense of worth, pride, and accomplishment. This also aids in improving problem-solving skills and social interaction and communication, particularly for those who have anxiety and coping issues leading to a positive impact on overall well-being and educational performance. Furthermore, according to the National Mental Health Survey (2015-2016), 7.3 per cent of

teenagers aged 13 to 17 years suffer from psychiatric disorders, which range between 29.4 per cent and 5.84 per cent in urban and rural settings respectively. This disparity can also be associated with urban lifestyle issues where parents experience much stress due to extreme jobs and long hours taken at work, leaving less quality time to be spent with kids. Additionally, many urban

parents are not aware of the mental health issue or consider it as a stigma to be discussed. Artistic and creative involvement also tends to enhance the mental health of families. Strong awareness can enable parents to look for signs of distress in their children and appropriately address their needs. The level of resilience among families increases and creates new bonds by raising levels of strength.

By highlighting awareness of mental health and creativity involvement for both, urban families can have an enhanced social context to create a huge difference regarding the well-being of adolescents' mental health.

Towards a brighter future: There are numerous benefits of including art-based therapies

in children's and teenagers' mental health care.

These therapies provide a unique method of addressing mental health concerns, facilitating emotional expression, and enhancing therapeutic participation. Policymakers, mental health providers, and schools must therefore be encouraged to include art therapy as a regular practice in classrooms. This work will eventually lead to strong mental health care among future adults. Such efforts are prone to promote resilience, creativity, and emotional well-being in the next generation, paving the way for a brighter, more supportive environment for all children and teens.

(The writer is head of ARTS, Orchids, The International School; views are personal)

Putin presides over BRICS summit seeking to expand Russia's clout

AP ■ KAZAN

Russian President Vladimir Putin on Thursday presided at the closing session of a summit of the BRICS bloc of developing economies, praising its role as a counterbalance to what he called the West's "perverse methods."

The three-day summit in the city of Kazan covered the deepening of financial cooperation, including the development of alternatives to Western-dominated payment systems, efforts to settle regional conflicts and expansion of the BRICS group of nations.

The alliance that initially included Brazil, Russia, India, China and South Africa has expanded to embrace Iran, Egypt, Ethiopia, the United Arab Emirates and Saudi Arabia. Turkey, Azerbaijan and Malaysia have formally applied to become members, and several other countries have expressed interest in joining.

The summit was attended by leaders or representatives of 36 countries, highlighting the failure of US-led efforts to isolate Russia over its actions in Ukraine. The Kremlin touted the summit as "the largest foreign policy event ever held" by Russia.

Speaking at what was dubbed the "BRICS Plus" session, which included countries that are considering joining the

bloc, Putin accused the West of trying to stem the growing power of the Global South with "illegal unilateral sanctions, blatant protectionism, manipulation of currency and stock markets, and relentless foreign influence ostensibly promoting democracy, human rights, and the climate change agenda."

"Such perverse methods and approaches -- to put it bluntly -- lead to the emergence of new conflicts and the aggravation of old disagreements," Putin said. "One example of this is Ukraine, which is being used to create critical threats to Russia's security, while ignoring our vital interests, our just concerns, and the infringement of the rights of Russian-speaking people."

Russia has specifically pushed for the creation of a new payment system that would offer an alternative to the global bank messaging network SWIFT and allow Moscow to dodge Western sanctions and trade with partners.

In a joint declaration Wednesday, participants voiced concern about "the disruptive effect of unlawful unilateral coercive measures, including illegal sanctions" and reiterated their commitment to enhancing financial cooperation within BRICS.

They noted the benefits of "faster, low-cost, more effi-



Chinese President Xi Jinping (left) and Russian President Vladimir Putin attend a family photo ceremony prior to Outreach/BRICS Plus format session at the BRICS Summit in Kazan, Russia on Thursday. AP/PTI

cient, transparent, safe and inclusive cross-border payment instruments built upon the principle of minimising trade barriers and non-discriminatory access."

China's President Xi Jinping has emphasized the bloc's role in ensuring global security. Xi noted that China and Brazil have put forward a peace plan for Ukraine and sought to rally broader international support

for it. Ukraine has rejected the proposal. "We should promote the de-escalation of the situation as soon as possible and pave the way for a political settlement," Xi said Thursday.

Putin and Xi had announced a "no-limits" partnership weeks before Russia sent troops into Ukraine in 2022. They already met twice earlier this year, in Beijing in May and at a

Minister Narendra Modi has avoided condemning Russia while emphasising a peaceful settlement.

Putin, who held a series of bilateral meetings on the summit's sidelines, was set to meet Thursday with UN Secretary-General Antonio Guterres, who is making his first visit to Russia in more than two years. Guterres's trip to Kazan drew an angry reaction from Kyiv.

Addressing the BRICS Plus session, Guterres urged an immediate end to the fighting in Gaza, Lebanon, Ukraine and Sudan. "We need peace in Ukraine, a just peace in line with the UN Charter, international law and General Assembly resolutions," he said.

Russia's Kremlin-controlled media touted the summit as a massive policy coup that left the West fearing the loss of its global clout. State TV shows and news bulletins underscored that BRICS countries account for about half the world's population comprising the "global majority" and challenging Western "hegemony."

TV hosts elaborately quoted Western media reports saying that the summit highlighted the failure to isolate Moscow. "The West, the US, Washington, Brussels, London ended up isolating themselves," said Yevgeny Popov, host of a popular political talk show on state channel Rossiya 1.

Jinping asks BRICS Plus countries for common security

PTI ■ KAZAN

Global South marching together is monumental in world history and unprecedented in human civilisation, Chinese President Xi Jinping said on Thursday and called on BRICS Plus countries to firmly uphold peace and strive for common security.

Addressing the BRICS Outreach/BRICS Plus meeting, Xi said the 'BRICS Plus' countries should be a stabilising force for peace, strengthen global security governance, and explore ways to address both the symptoms and root causes of hotspot issues.

Noting that the collective rise of the Global South is a distinctive feature of the great transformation across the world, Xi said that Global South countries marching together toward modernisation is monumental in world history and unprecedented in human civilisation.

According to Russia's state-run TASS news agency, the Outreach/BRICS Plus is an extended format, which includes more than the 10 BRICS members, and was host-

ed by Russian President Vladimir Putin on the final day of the BRICS Summit.

According to China's state-run Xinhua news agency, Xi said the Global South "emerges for development" and prospers through "development" and urged BRICS Plus countries to make themselves the main driving force for common development.

BRICS Plus countries should play an active and leading role in the global economic governance reform, and make development the core of international economic and trade agenda, Xi added.

These countries should also be advocates for exchanges among civilisations, he said, and called on the BRICS Plus countries to enhance communication and dialogue, and support each other in taking the path to modernisation suited to their respective national conditions.

He also said that China will coordinate with others to form a Global South Think Tanks Alliance to promote people-to-people exchanges and experience-sharing in governance.

Turkiye strikes Kurdish militant targets in Syria and Iraq for second day

AP ■ ANKARA

Turkiye struck suspected Kurdish militant targets in Syria and Iraq for a second day on Thursday following an attack on the premises of a key defense company which killed at least five people, the state-run news agency reported.

The National Intelligence Organization targeted numerous "strategic locations" used by the Kurdistan Workers' Party, PKK, or by Syrian Kurdish militia that are affiliated with the militants, the Anadolu Agency reported. The targets included military, intelligence, energy and infrastructure facilities and ammunition depots, the report said. A security official said armed drones were used in Thursday's strikes.

On Wednesday, Turkiye's air force carried out airstrikes against similar targets in northern Syria and northern Iraq, hours after government officials blamed the deadly attack at the headquarters of the aerospace and defense company TUSAS,

on the PKK.

Defence Minister Yasar Guler said Thursday that 47 alleged PKK targets were destroyed in Wednesday's airstrikes — 29 in Iraq and 18 in Syria.

"Our noble nation should rest assured that we will continue with increasing determination our struggle to eliminate the evil forces that threaten the security and peace of our country and people, until the last terrorist disappears from this geography," Guler said.

The assailants — a man and a woman — arrived at the TUSAS premises in the outskirts of Ankara in a taxi they commandeered after killing its driver, reports said. Armed with assault rifles, they set off explosives and opened fire, killing four people at TUSAS, including a security personnel and a mechanical engineer.

Security teams were dispatched as soon as the attack started at around 3:30 pm, the interior minister said. The two assailants were also killed and more than 20 people were injured in the

attack. There was no immediate statement from the PKK on the attack or the Turkish airstrikes.

In Syria, the main US-backed force said Turkish strikes in the north of the country killed 12 civilians and wounded 25.

The Kurdish-led Syrian Democratic Forces said Turkish warplanes and drones struck bakeries, power stations, oil facilities and local police checkpoints.

TUSAS designs, manufactures and assembles civilian and military aircraft, unmanned aerial vehicles and other defense industry and space systems. Its defense systems have been credited as key to Turkiye gaining an upper hand in its fight against Kurdish militants.

The attack occurred a day after the leader of Turkiye's far-right nationalist party that's allied with President Recep Tayyip Erdogan raised the possibility that the PKK's imprisoned leader could be granted parole if he renounces violence and disbands his organization.

Abdullah Ocalan, who was captured in 1999, is serving a life sentence on a prison island off Istanbul.

In a related development, his nephew Omer Ocalan announced on the social platform X that on Wednesday family members were allowed to visit him for the first time since March 2020.

Omer Ocalan, a lawmaker from Turkiye's pro-Kurdish Peoples' Equality and Democracy Party, also conveyed a message from Abdullah Ocalan, saying he was being kept in isolation and offering to work to end the conflict "if the conditions are right."

"I have the theoretical and practical power to (transform) this process from one grounded in conflict and violence to one that is grounded on law and politics," Omer Ocalan quoted his uncle as saying.

The PKK has been fighting for autonomy in southeast Turkiye in a conflict that has killed tens of thousands of people since the 1980s. It is considered a terrorist group by Turkiye and its Western allies.

Blinken in Doha to discuss Gaza cease-fire with Qatari officials

AP ■ DOHA

US Secretary of State Antony Blinken was in Doha on Thursday to meet with Qatari officials who have been key mediators for Hamas, as the US struggles to break the logjam of cease-fire negotiations between Israel and the militant group.

Blinken is on his 11th trip to the Middle East since the start of the Israel-Hamas war.

Meanwhile, the Lebanese military said Thursday an Israeli strike killed three of its troops, including an officer, as they were evacuating wounded people in southern Lebanon, and French President Emmanuel Macron said his country will provide a 100 million-euro (\$108 million) aid package to support Lebanon.

The Israel-Hamas war began after Hamas-led militants on Oct 7, 2023, blew holes in Israel's security fence and stormed in, killing some 1,200 people — mostly civilians — and abducting 250 others. Israel's offensive in Gaza has

Lebanon's caretaker PM calls for immediate truce

BEIRUT: Lebanon's caretaker prime minister is calling for an immediate cease-fire, the full implementation of the UN resolution that ended the last Israel-Hezbollah war and the deployment of 8,000 Lebanese troops to a buffer zone along the border with Israel. Najib Mikati spoke Thursday at a conference in Paris in support of Lebanon. The Lebanese army has largely kept to the sidelines in the latest conflict between Israel and Hezbollah. It says Israeli forces have targeted its soldiers on eight occasions, killing and wounding several. Israel apologised for a deadly strike on Sunday. UN Security Council called for Hezbollah and Israeli forces to withdraw from areas south of Lebanon's Litani River and for the area to be controlled by the Lebanese army and UN peacekeepers.

Hezbollah confirmed Wednesday that Hashem Safieddine, one of its top officials who had been widely expected to be the group's next leader, was killed in an Israeli airstrike. Over the past several weeks, Israeli strikes have killed much of Hezbollah's top leadership. At least one person was killed and others wounded in Israeli airstrikes targeting Syria's Damascus and Homs countryside, the Syrian Observatory for Human Rights and Syria's state media reported. Israeli warplanes targeted a government building near a military fuel station in the Kafr Sousa neighbourhood in Damascus, killing one person and injuring three others, according to the Syrian Observatory. The strike also triggered fires in the area.

Citing a military source, the Syrian Arab News Agency (SANA) reported that the Israeli strikes were launched from the direction of the Golan Heights and from the direction of northern Lebanon.

Christians in Pak seek action against preacher Zakir Naik 'For discrediting their faith'

PTI ■ LAHORE

Pakistan's Christian leaders have written to President Asif Ali Zardari and Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif, seeking action against controversial Islamic preacher Zakir Naik for allegedly discrediting their faith during his ongoing tour of the country.

He arrived in Pakistan at the government's invitation on a month-long visit during which he delivered "controversial" lectures in cities like Kara-chi, Islamabad and Lahore. It is his first visit to Pakistan in three decades — the last time he visited was in 1992.

Naik, wanted in India for alleged money laundering and inciting extremism through hate speeches, left the country in 2016. He was granted permanent residency in Malaysia by the previous government led by Mahathir Mohamed.

President Bishop of the Synod, Church of Pakistan, Rev Dr Azad Marshall and other Christian leaders have written a letter to Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif and President Asif Ali Zardari condemning Naik for his adverse remarks about the Christians and their faith during his visit here as a state guest. He also regretted that the Pakistani government did not express any concern over Naik's "anti-Christian" remarks.

The Christian leaders have

requested the premier and president to take action against him and effective steps to prevent such divisive and harmful incidents, particularly those occurring under state sponsorship, from happening in the future.

"Dr Zakir Naik's public addresses have caused significant distress within the Christian community as he openly questioned the authenticity of our faith, discredited our sacred texts, and made statements that undermine the beliefs of Christian pastors and scholars," the letter says.

Naik's remarks not only have caused religious offence but also undermined the national pride of all regardless of their faith, it adds.

"Naik's comments have further intensified the sense of marginalisation felt by the Christian community, despite the government's repeated assurances of upholding religious harmony and mutual respect for all."

The letter further says Naik spoke in open forums against Christians' faith where Pastors and Christian scholars were denied the opportunity to adequately respond or correct the misinformation spread by his ill-informed and biased views. It says that Naik has disrespected the founding father Mohammad Ali Jinnah's vision in public gatherings in Pakistan as a state guest, which is unfortunate.



Members of the National Rescue Agency assist a woman to leave a boat carrying Rohingya Muslims to evacuate them to land, in the waters off Labuan Haji, Aceh province, Indonesia on Thursday. AP/PTI

Israeli strike on shelter kills 16

AP ■ DEIR AL-BALAH (GAZA)

An Israeli strike on a school where displaced people were sheltering in the central Gaza Strip killed at least 16 people on Thursday, Palestinian medical officials said.

Another 32 people were wounded in the strike in the built-up Nuseirat refugee camp, according to the Awda Hospital, which received the casualties.

There was no immediate comment from the Israeli military. Israel has carried out several strikes on schools-turned-shelters in recent months, saying it precisely targets Hamas militants hiding out among civilians. The strikes often kill women and children.

The war began when Hamas-led militants stormed into southern Israel on Oct 7, 2023, killing some 1,200 people, mostly civilians, and abducting another 250. Around 100 hostages are still inside Gaza, a third of whom are believed to be dead.

Israel's retaliatory offensive has killed over 42,000 Palestinians, according to Gaza's Health Ministry, which does not say how many were combatants but says women and children make up more than half the fatalities. The Israeli military says it has killed over 17,000 fighters, without providing evidence.

The war has displaced around 90% of Gaza's population of 2.3 million, often multiple times. Hundreds of thousands of people are crammed into tent camps along the coast after entire neighbourhoods in many areas were pounded to rubble.

N Korean trash balloons reach presidential compound in Seoul

AP ■ SEOUL

Trash carried by a North Korean balloon fell on the presidential compound in central Seoul on Thursday in a second case raising concerns about the vulnerability of key South Korean sites during potential North Korean aggression.

The incident comes after the rival Koreas ramped up threats and rhetoric against each other over North Korea's claims that South Korea flew drones over its capital Pyongyang to scatter propaganda leaflets this month.

No dangerous items were found in the rubbish that was dropped on the ground when one of the North Korean balloons burst over the South Korean presidential compound on Thursday morning, South Korea's presidential

security service said in a statement.

North Korea has sent thousands of balloons carrying bags of rubbish like plastic and paper waste into South Korea since late May in a resumption of a Cold War-style psychological campaign. The trash that fell on the South Korean presidential compound in July contained no hazardous materials as well. It wasn't immediately known whether South Korean President Yoon Suk Yeol was at the compound during the latest incident. Later Thursday, he met visiting Polish President Andrzej Duda at his office. South Korean media reported that North Korean leaflets criticising Yoon and his wife Kim Keon Hee were found on Thursday in Seoul's Yongsan district, where Yoon's presidential office is located. Media published pho-

tos of some leaflets that described Kim as a latter-day Marie Antoinette, the queen who was beheaded in 1793 during the French Revolution.

The reports said it was the first time that North Korean propaganda leaflets have been found in South Korea since the North began its balloon campaign five months ago. The South Korean presidential security service didn't immediately confirm the report. Experts say North Korea likely lacks sophisticated technology to drop balloons on specific targets.

"Whether the balloons have GPS or not, it's all about launching them in large numbers and hitting the right altitude based on wind direction and speed, so that they can ride those winds to travel," Lee Choon Geun, an honorary research fellow at South

Korea's Science and Technology Policy Institute, said.

"While some media are saying the accuracy of the balloons has improved, that improved accuracy isn't because they equipped them with some sort of guidance system, but rather because it's the season when winds blow southward," Lee said.

North Korea has earlier accused South Korea of infiltrating drones to drop propaganda leaflets over Pyongyang three times this month and threatened military responses if it happened again. South Korea has refused to confirm whether it sent drones but warned that North Korea would face the end of its regime if the safety of South Korean citizens is threatened.

North Korea said its balloon activities

were a tit-for-tat action against South Korean activists launching anti-Pyongyang leaflets via their own balloons.

South Korea responded by restarting propaganda loudspeaker broadcasts at border areas, prompting North Korea to turn on their own frontline loudspeakers.

The Korea's Cold War-style campaigns come as North Korean leader Kim Jong Un has increased the pace of his weapons tests and expanded military cooperation with Russia.

US and South Korean officials said Wednesday that 3,000 North Korean troops have been deployed to Russia and are training at several locations.

South Korean officials say North Korea eventually aims to send a total of 10,000 troops to Russia to support its war efforts in Ukraine.

Need to have roadmap for multilateral development banks: Nirmala Sitharaman

PTI ■ WASHINGTON

Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman on Wednesday underscored the need for a roadmap for reforms of Multilateral Development Banks (MDBs) to deal with the growing needs of emerging economies. "The Bretton Woods institutions should not allow themselves to have a 'Mission Drift' and should address it. IMF resources will have to be available for all countries," Sitharaman said during a panel discussion organised by the Centre for Global Development. The minister arrived here on Tuesday afternoon to attend the annual meetings of the International Monetary Fund and the World Bank.



The Bretton Woods Institutions are the IMF and the World Bank Group, established in 1944 at a conference in Bretton Woods, New Hampshire in the US. "We need to have a roadmap for concrete reform-based steps to be initiated. We started it during our G20 Presidency after a lot of thinking and introspection. A shift in thinking of Bretton Woods institutions to meet the needs of the next decade is absolutely necessary," she

said. Prime Minister Narendra Modi once said India's priority is not to impose its dominance, she said, adding that India has followed the policy of strategic and peaceful multilateralism and the country has always stood in favour of multilateral institutions. Multilateral institutions should focus on their core competencies and strengthen themselves for the global good, she said. "Shaping the future is one very ambitious goal which we need to follow and we need to have Bretton Woods institutions work on that," she said. Pointing towards the slow and lengthy process adopted by the IMF, the minister said that much before the IMF

reaches some countries in the neighbourhood in times of distress, India has given sums of money with no conditions attached. "We have extended 'Line of Credit' at highly discounted rates to many African countries for building their institutions, bridges, railway stations, ports and secretariats. We will continue to do it because we think the Global South is with us, we want to be with them and help them," she said. Ownership doesn't only come with just quantum of money being given, she said, adding that it can also come when decisions are made in consultations, when decisions can be transparent and made to benefit the recipient and not so uni-focused on the donor.

India, ASEAN can work on policy framework for green energy transition: CERC

PTI ■ SINGAPORE

India and ASEAN can work together to create a regional policy framework for green energy transition with increasing usage of small modular nuclear reactors, a senior official of Indian power sector regulator CERC has said.

According to Harish Dudani, Member, Central Electricity Regulatory Commission (CERC), the ASEAN (Association of Southeast Asian Nations) region provides a lot of opportunities for mutual cooperation to make low-carbon energy transition less disruptive. "ASEAN countries, including India, are showing increasing interest in Small Modular Nuclear Reactors (SMRs) as part of their broader strategy to diversify energy sources and meet growing energy demand while reducing carbon emissions," Dudani said at the ongoing Singapore International Energy Week. SMRs can be deployed in smaller, more localised grids, particularly in remote or rural areas where traditional large nuclear reactors are not feasible. This could be a significant advantage for the ASEAN region, where regional energy access and grid infrastructure vary widely, he told PTI on Wednesday on the sidelines of the global event being held on October 21-25. In regions where renewable energy sources such as solar and wind are dominant, SMRs can provide baseload power, helping stabilise grids by filling the gap during periods of low renewable energy generation, he explained. SMRs, he said, offer a promising way to meet growing energy demand and reduce carbon emissions, but at the same time, ensuring



their safe and secure development is critical, especially in areas with limited nuclear infrastructure and expertise. To ensure that civilian nuclear energy development is safe and secure in ASEAN, several key measures must be taken, focusing on regulatory frameworks, technical engagement, and international cooperation, Dudani said. Adopting best practices from international nuclear standards and collaborating regionally and globally will be essential to managing the risks associated with nuclear energy, he added. He further said that long-term planning for waste management, decommissioning, and non-proliferation will be crucial for the success of SMR projects. With a strong nuclear energy programme and ambitious climate goals, SMRs could offer ASEAN countries a flexible and safer way to expand its nuclear capacity, he added. While noting that India has been increasingly expanding its bilateral electricity trade network with a number of neighbouring countries, he said countries in South Asia and Southeast Asia can significantly benefit from closer cooperation to build cross-border grid connections.

"Such connections enhance grid resilience, facilitate the efficient imports and exports of renewable energy, and contribute to regional energy security," he said. Dudani cited examples of the bilateral energy trade between India and its neighbours Nepal, Bhutan and Bangladesh, and said these trades are focussed mainly on meeting each other's base energy need. However, "focus has not been on utilising resources to improve RE integration." "I certainly believe in fostering regional cooperation and collaboration in the development and deployment of clean energy technologies. This can include harmonizing regulatory frameworks, sharing best practices, and coordinating efforts to tackle shared challenges." "And hence, I believe that India can work together with ASEAN countries to create a regional policy framework for green transition," said the electricity industry veteran. He also called on international capital and multilateral development banks (MDBs) to play a crucial role that makes grid investment attractive. "They can provide direct financing through concessional loans, grants, and guarantees to support the construction and modernisation of grid infrastructure," he suggested.

Money laundering big threat to online gaming and digital economy

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

The fast-growing Indian online gaming sector is facing a significant threat from money laundering, necessitating urgent steps to ensure its sustained success and protect the country's robust digital economy, a report said on Thursday. The essential measures outlined in a report by the Digital India Foundation include forming a dedicated task force for illegal operators, creating a whitelist of legal operators, combating misleading advertisements, and incorporating principles of financial integrity and international cooperation. Other critical measures include public awareness and providing education to help users make informed decisions and avoid platforms that engage in deceptive practices. A comprehensive assessment of in-game assets, financial institutions should deploy AI/ML-driven detection models, build strong investigative teams, implement a robust programme and take decisive actions to combat money mules, it said. The Indian Real Money Gaming (RMG) sector has become a key player in the global market with a Compound Annual Growth Rate (CAGR) of 28 per cent from FY20 to FY23. The sector's revenue is projected



to reach USD 7.5 billion within the next five years, according to the report. A gaming community of millions of gamers is driving this immense growth and also creating employment opportunities in ancillary sectors like fintech, cloud services, and cyber-security. The report further said, there are several challenges in the sector, such as issues of financial integrity, cybersecurity, and user protection, which could impede progress. The severity of these challenges is underscored by the fact that the illegal betting market in India attracts over USD 100 billion in deposits annually, it said, adding that the critical issue of money laundering has been emphasised to show how in-game currencies, cryptocurrencies, and offshore betting platforms are increasingly being used for illicit activities. "Despite regulatory efforts to curb illegal operators, many platforms circumvent

restrictions through mirror sites, illegal branding, and disproportionate promises, highlighting the pressing need for stronger oversight and enforcement," Digital India Foundation co-founder Arvind Gupta said. "With over 400 homegrown startups and 100 million daily online gamers, including 90 million who pay to play, the sector employs directly and indirectly approximately one lakh individuals, with the potential to create 2,50,000 jobs by 2025. This report has come at the right time to chart the way forward," Gupta added. Pointing out the gaps that may increase its vulnerability, the report said, there is a lack of regulation and uniform standards, no single supervisory or regulatory authority, and an absence of published external audit reports. Besides, it said, there is a lack of appropriate enforcement mechanisms leading to sporadic action against notorious offenders.

Agriculture ministry to host seed sector summit

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

The agriculture ministry will host its 13th National Seed Congress (NSC) in Varanasi from November 28-30, bringing together stakeholders to address challenges in the agricultural seed sector amid growing concerns over climate change and food security. The event will be organised in partnership with the International Rice Research Institute (IRRI) South Asia Regional Centre and the National Seed Research and Training Centre (NSRTC), an official statement said. "Access to high-quality, climate-resilient, and nutritious seeds, along with improved cultivars, is more crucial than ever," said Shubha Thakur, Additional Secretary at the Department of Agriculture and Farmers' Welfare. The congress, themed "Fostering Regional Cooperation, Partnership, and Knowledge Exchange in the Seed Sector," will focus on developing sustainable and resilient seed systems through topics including breeding for climate resilience, digital solutions, and public-private partnerships. IRRI Director General Yvonne Pinto said the event comes at a critical time as agriculture faces "evolving market demands and a need for more inclusive and sustainable seed systems." The congress will be held at IRRI's South Asia Regional Centre, which has developed climate-resilient rice varieties and facilitated cross-border seed exchange through initiatives like 'Seeds Without Borders' since its inauguration by Prime Minister Narendra Modi in 2018.

infrastructure powered by Nvidia's accelerated computing stack comprising tens of thousands of its most advanced GPUs, high-performance networking, and AI software platforms and tools. At the Nvidia AI Summit 2024 here, Ambani and Huang had a fireside chat to discuss India's transformative potential in AI and its emerging role as a global leader in this field. The partnership between Reliance and Nvidia aims to build a robust AI infrastructure in the country, which Ambani believes will not only enhance local capabilities but also position

Nvidia, Reliance to build AI computing infrastructure in India

PTI ■ MUMBAI

Nvidia Corp has struck a deal with billionaire Mukesh Ambani's conglomerate Reliance Industries to build out an artificial intelligence (AI) computing infrastructure as well as an innovation centre in India, the AI chip giant's CEO Jensen Huang said on Thursday. A new major data centre by Reliance Industries will use the latest Nvidia's Blackwell AI chips. Nvidia already has presence in six locations across India. The US firm works with enterprises, cloud providers and startups to build AI

innovation centre as part of the tie-up," he said. He did not quantify the size of the infrastructure to be built. "India is already world class in designing chips, Nvidia's are designed here in Bengaluru, Hyderabad, Pune. A third of Nvidia is Indian, may be more," Huang said. During the fireside chat, Ambani said India is on the brink of a new intelligence age and will surprise the world with its achievements in intelligence technology over the coming years. New technologies like AI and the aspirations of people are driving the Indian economy, he said. "We are at the doorsteps of the

new intelligence age. India will be one of the biggest intelligence markets. It's not just our aspiration, but also the raw gene power which will help drive intelligence. "India will not just deliver CEOs to world, but also AI services," Ambani asserted. He noted that apart from the United States and China, India boasts one of the best digital connectivity infrastructures, with extensive networks of 4G, 5G, and broadband services. He said Reliance Jio is the largest data company globally, pointing out that it delivers data at a low cost of 15 cents per GB, compared to USD 5 per GB in the US.

Reliance Power gets shareholders' nod to raise funds



PTI ■ NEW DELHI

Reliance Power said it has received shareholders' approval to raise Rs 1,524.60 crore through issuance of preferential shares. A resolution through a postal ballot notice has been passed with requisite majority, the company said in a late night stock exchange filing on Wednesday. According to the postal ballot notice, the company will raise up to Rs 1,524.60 crore by preferential issue of up to 46.20 crore equity shares and/or warrants convertible into equivalent number of equity shares at a price of Rs 33 per piece. On September 23, the board of Reliance Power Ltd had approved raising Rs 1,524.60 crore through issue of preferential shares, wherein

promoters will infuse Rs 600 crore into the company to advance its business. Reliance Infrastructure, the promoter of the company, will enhance its equity stake by over Rs 600 crore. The other investors who will participate in the preferential issue include Authem Investment and Infrastructure Ltd and Sanatan Financial Advisory Services. The fresh fund would be utilised for expansion of business operations directly and/or through investment in subsidiaries and joint ventures, debt reduction and for general corporate purposes, the company said. The preferential issue will enhance the company's net worth from about Rs 11,155 crore to over Rs 12,680 crore, it said.

Kärcher India Outlines Expansion and Innovation Plans

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

Kärcher India, a leader in cleaning technology, showcased its growth strategy at a PR meet on 8th October in Delhi. The company emphasized innovation, sustainability, and market leadership, with India being a critical market for its future growth. Kärcher aims for double-digit growth by expanding its product range, including new detergents and robotic cleaners, and enhancing its rental solutions. It also launched advanced cleaning equipment like the KIRA B 50 scrubber-dryer and KIRA CV 50 vacuum to elevate industry standards. The company's infrastructure expansion will support customer reach and service, while training programs will upskill the workforce and partners. Kärcher's initiatives align with the Swachh Bharat mission, contributing to major cleaning projects in cities like Ayodhya and Navi Mumbai. The event also highlighted efforts to empower women in the workforce and preserve cultural heritage.

Battery recycling industry faces risks

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

Battery recycling industry is facing risks due to underpriced recycling system, which may lead to entry of fraudulent players and environmental disasters, experts said making a case of raising the threshold for achieving sustainable level of circular economy. Some industry experts warn that the current pricing structure could cost India an estimated USD 1 billion in foreign exchange losses for import of critical minerals like lithium, cobalt, and nickel. The issue gains importance as the country's reliance on cleaner alternative sources of energy is increasing day by day which makes the sustainable recycling of batteries a major prerequisite for clean energy. The Material Recycling Association of India (MRAI) and experts thus suggest setting the EPR floor price for Lithium recycling at a higher rate to ensure sustainable, competitive, and standardized recycling. "Extended Producer Responsibility (EPR) mandates that battery producers ensure safe



recycling, yet low EPR floor prices hinder the collection and management of low-value or hard-to-recycle batteries. A higher EPR price is crucial for achieving sustainability and scale of battery recycling," MRAI said in a statement. Additionally, it said, safe transport and pollution control measures are essential to mitigate risks and costs in battery recycling. Incorporating a sufficient EPR price into the costs incurred by the producer will only increase the commodity's selling price by a small fraction, by around 0.6 per cent in the case of a Rs 4,000 power bank, it said. Recently, the MRAI made a presentation to the Central Pollution Control Board (CPCB) requesting to revise the EPR floor price upwards. The government has been urged to set a fair EPR floor price and ensure implementation, transparency, and regular auditing to build a sustainable battery recycling industry.

Universities strategise at India GHEAF 2024

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

The India Global Higher Education Alliance Forum 2024, hosted by College Board at The Lalit, brought together prominent international and Indian universities, as well as K12 schools, for a day of collaboration and strategy aimed at enhancing global student transitions to higher education. Key attendees included representatives from prestigious institutions such as MIT, Cambridge, and the University of Michigan, alongside Indian universities like Ashoka, Shiv Nadar, and Amity. The forum addressed vital issues including access to education, student success, and the evolving role of assessments in admissions. Panel discussions featured topics like "Passport to Global Higher Education" and "The Evolving Role of Assessment in Admission," complemented by a keynote from College Board on the impact of AP coursework. The forum concluded with a strong commitment to innovation collaboration in promoting quality education globally.

INBRIEF

GNU'S C-ZONE YOUTH FESTIVAL KICKS OFF IN STYLE

AMRITSAR: The C-Zone (Jalandhar District Colleges)- Youth Festival of Guru Nanak Dev University was inaugurated here today in the Dashmesh Auditorium of the University with a showcasing the vibrant talent of youth.

INAUGURAL DAY OF THE 1ST INTERNATIONAL CONFERENCE



GHAZIABAD: the 1st International Conference on Computing, Sciences, and Communications (ICCS-2024) was inaugurated at ABES Engineering College, Ghaziabad. This conference is technically co-sponsored by IEEE U.P. Section (India).

SPECIAL TRAINS OPERATED BY NFR WITNESS SIGNIFICANT GROWTH

MALIGAON: The Northeast Frontier Railway (NFR) has successfully operated 74 special trains from April 1, 2024 to October 14, 2024, providing commendable services to passengers across the region and beyond. During this period, NFR conducted 673 trips, catering above 9.9 lakhs passengers till the above defined period. The earnings generated from these special train operations amounted to an impressive figure of above Rs.94.13 Cr approximately, reflecting the railway's commitment to enhancing service quality and addressing the growing travel demand of rail passengers.

SRM INSTITUTE CELEBRATED WORLD CHEFS DAY

Kattankulathur: SRM Institute of Hotel Management at SRM Institute of Science and Technology (SRMIST), Kattankulathur, celebrated World Chefs Day recently. This event brought together esteemed chefs from across the globe.





REALISM IN FESTIVE CHAOS



'This Winter' by Alice Oseman is a poignant novella that takes readers through the emotional highs and lows of a family Christmas, focusing on the Spring siblings Tori, Charlie and Oliver. Set against the festive backdrop, the story explores themes of mental health, family dynamics and the bittersweet nature of the holiday season, all brought to life through Oseman's sharp writing and illustrations, says **SAKSHI PRIYA**

Reading *This Winter* by Alice Oseman felt like opening the door to a family Christmas. I wasn't expecting the real, raw and far-from-idealised holiday scenes we're so often shown. From the first few pages, I was completely immersed in the story, not just because of the emotional weight it carried but also due to the beautiful illustrations scattered throughout the novella. Each sketch felt like a pause in the narrative, giving me a moment to visually connect with the characters' emotions before diving back into the heart of the story.

Oseman's writing is as sharp and relatable as ever. From the outset, we are drawn into Tori's introspective thoughts, revealing her internal battle with the weight of her brother's eating disorder and the family tension that permeates their holiday celebrations.

The way Tori copes with her feelings attempting to block out the painful reality and focus on the present resonates with anyone who has ever felt overwhelmed during family gatherings. Oseman captures the awkwardness and rawness of sibling relationships beautifully, especially in the way Tori and Charlie communicate through shared moments, gaming, and humour. What really struck me as I read was how deeply relatable the characters were. Tori Spring, as the narrator, brings a sharp, dry humour that resonates with anyone who has ever felt overwhelmed by family drama. Her internal monologue is full of wit and sarcasm, but beneath it, you can sense the love she has for her brother Charlie and the sheer exhaustion she feels from carrying the emotional weight of her family. Oseman perfectly captures that feeling of being torn between wanting to escape everything and



ABOUT THE BOOK

Book : This Winter
by ALICE OSEMAN
Publisher : HarperCollinsChildren'sBooks
Number of Pages: 144
₹350.00

knowing you can't leave the people you care about behind.

Charlie's character, who struggles with an eating disorder, is written with so much sensitivity. His experience isn't romanticised or exaggerated, and Oseman gives his journey the space and

respect it deserves. The tension he feels during the Christmas gathering caught between wanting to seem "fine" for the sake of his family and grappling with his own mental health was portrayed with such raw honesty that it left me thinking long after I'd finished the

novella. The illustrations of Charlie enhance this portrayal, visually showing his fragility and the quiet strength he's trying to hold onto.

Then there's Oliver, the youngest sibling, who adds a lovely contrast to the more serious tone of the story. His excitement for Christmas, innocent enthusiasm and bright energy felt like a breath of fresh air amidst the heavier themes of the novella. Author uses him brilliantly as a reminder that even in the darkest moments, there are glimpses of light small things that pull us back to the simplicity of joy, especially during the holidays.

What I loved most about *This Winter* was how balanced it felt. Yes, it deals with tough subjects like mental health, family pressure and the suffocating expectations that can accompany Christmas but it's also full of moments that made me smile. The banter

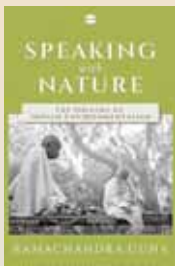
between Tori and Charlie, the quiet understanding between siblings and the warmth of shared moments, even amidst emotional chaos, kept the story from feeling heavy. It reminded me that while the holidays can be complicated, they're also a time for connection and understanding, however imperfect that might be.

In the end, *This Winter* felt like a comforting, bittersweet read - one that acknowledged the reality of mental health struggles during the festive season but also left me feeling hopeful. It's a story about love, family and the small moments that carry us through tough times. Alice Oseman, with her sharp writing and heartwarming illustrations, created something that's both poignant and uplifting and I found myself thinking about the characters long after I finished reading.

NEW ARRIVALS

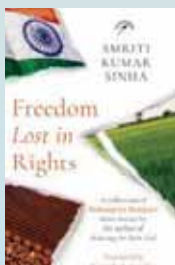
OCTOBER RELEASES

Speaking with Nature: The Origins of Indian Environmentalism
By RAMACHANDRA GUHA
(PRICE: ₹799, PAGES: 440)



In *Speaking with Nature*, published by Fourth Estate India, Ramachandra Guha challenges the conventional view that countries like India lack environmental consciousness due to poverty. This meticulously researched work uncovers a largely overlooked prehistory of environmentalism, showcasing the insights of ten remarkable Indian thinkers long before the modern environmental movement gained traction. Figures such as Rabindranath Tagore, J.C. Kumarappa, and Mira articulated profound concerns about environmental degradation, addressing issues like urbanisation, industrialisation and the sanctity of nature. By contrasting 'livelihood environmentalism' with the 'full-stomach environmentalism' of wealthier nations, Guha illustrates how these pioneers significantly shaped global discussions on humanity's relationship with nature. This book serves as a vital resource for understanding the current climate crisis through an Indian lens.

Freedom Lost in Rights
By SMRITI SINHA
(Price: ₹395, Pages: 204)



Freedom Lost in Rights, published by Niyogi Books and translated by Ramal Sinha, is Smriti Sinha's poignant second collection of short fiction that delves into the Bishnupriya Manipuri saga. Through a series of heartfelt stories, Sinha explores themes of belonging and identity, capturing the struggles of characters as they navigate a world of tradition and modernity. Readers will encounter a nostalgic old man longing for his village, lovers caught in cultural conflict, a revolutionary village, and children dreaming in their mother tongue. Ramal Sinha's sensitive translation enhances the lyrical quality of the prose, beautifully representing the resistance, community, and spiritual joy of the Bishnupriya Manipuri culture. This collection weaves the vibrant tapestry of Northeast India's syncretic culture, making it a noteworthy contribution to the Indian literary landscape.

BREAKING BARRIERS

The Journey of Bihar's Woman IPS Officer

"Madam Sir: The Story of Bihar's First Lady IPS Officer" by Manjari Jaruhar is the inspiring memoir of a pioneering woman in law enforcement, detailing her remarkable journey and challenges in a male-dominated field

BY NILIMA SINHA

"Madam Sir: The Story of Bihar's First Lady IPS Officer" is a memoir of Bihar's first lady IPS officer, Manjari Jaruhar. It is published by Ebury Press, an imprint of Penguin Random House. The book is remarkable for more than one reason. It not only gives a glimpse of Manjari's illustrious career but also outlines the gender-based discrimination women face in their professional lives, especially in the police and armed forces. Manjari Jaruhar was a 1976-batch officer of the Indian Police Service (IPS). She has served in Bihar and Jharkhand, at the SVP National Police Academy, and with the Central Industrial Security Force (CISF) and Central Reserve Police Force (CRPF). She retired as Special Director-General, CISF, in 2010. As the first woman IPS officer in Bihar and the fifth in India, she built a reputation as a highly effective, professional yet caring officer. In recognition of her contributions, she has been awarded the Police Medal for Meritorious Service and the President's Police Medal for Distinguished Service. After retiring, she headed the anti-piracy wing of the Indian Music Industry and currently serves as a consultant to TCS on homeland security. She is also an adviser to the FICCI Private Security Industry Committee. She has been a student of English literature. Besides reading, she enjoys travelling, cooking, and spending time with her grandchildren. She lives in Delhi with her husband, Rakesh, a fellow IPS officer.

In this book, she has described her life journey and experiences from childhood to the present day. She narrates her story with an ease that also changes the narrative of "Poor woman, what will she do now?" Becoming an IPS officer in India is an arduous journey, with millions of aspirants vying for a limited number of coveted positions. In this challenging pursuit, retired IPS

officer Manjari Jaruhar's story stands out as a testament to her unwavering determination and resilience. Her memoir, titled "Madam Sir," chronicles her remarkable journey from early struggles to becoming the first lady IPS officer in Bihar. Hailing from a prestigious family in Bihar, where several members have held illustrious positions as IAS and IPS officers, Manjari faced unique obstacles in her path to success. Despite her family's esteemed background, they did not actively support her academic pursuits, harbouring the belief that she should embrace the role of a homemaker. Manjari recalls growing up knowing that career, ambition, independence, and self-reliance were not for girls, for they were supposed to study well, be groomed well, and marry well. She was deeply assimilated into the patriarchal setup in which she was raised. However, Manjari's thirst for knowledge and her relentless spirit pushed her to pursue her educational goals. Manjari had secured admission into Lady Irwin College in New Delhi to study domestic science. But her ticket was cancelled at the last moment, as it felt like "bidai," a farewell to her father, who wasn't ready for it. She writes that she sat in silence amid a sea of open suitcases and new clothes in her room while a storm of disappointment raged within her. But she did not say a word in protest, no angry scenes, no rebellion, no tantrums. But it didn't help either that Manjari wasn't a rebellious child.

At the tender age of 19, Manjari was married. Unfortunately, the marriage did not work out. Despite societal expectations to remarry, Manjari decided to pursue a career. Armed with an Honours degree in English from Patna Women's College and a



ABOUT THE BOOK

Book: Madam Sir: The Story of Bihar's First Lady IPS Officer
by MANJARI JARUHARI
Publisher: Ebury Pr
Pages: 327 | ₹399.00

postgraduate degree from Delhi University, she embarked on her civil service examination preparation journey. Her dedication paid off in 1976 when she successfully cracked the UPSC examination, earning the distinction of becoming the first lady IPS officer from Bihar and one of the fifth in all of India. Her accomplishment was a resounding testament to her resilience and unwavering commitment to her dream.

In due course, Manjari's journey took another significant turn when she tied the knot with Rakesh Jaruhar, an IPS officer. Together, they embarked on a new chapter in their lives, sharing the remarkable journey of serving the nation in the Indian Police Service. Manjari's initial posting as Assistant Superintendent of Police in the Criminal Investigation Department was a desk job, far from the field posting she aspired to. It was frustrating for her; however, her persistence to be given a field job led her to seek help from a senior officer, who was her close friend's father. He played a pivotal role in facilitating her transition to a field posting, which was her cherished goal. In the initial years, she had to prove herself at every turn.

The title "Madam Sir" is a unique coinage the constabulary invented to address Manjari. On her first reporting day, besides getting "curious glances" from the staff in the Inspector General (IG's) office, this was the IG's response, "But I don't know what to do with you. I cannot post you until I study Kiran Bedi's file. I have asked for it from Delhi." While it must have crushed a newly appointed officer's spirits, Manjari probably understood that she had to prove her mettle repeatedly because of her gender.

F r o m
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her cadre to her being assigned women-centric cases to the assumption that, being a woman, she'd inevitably be biased towards a female complainant, everything had to do with her being a woman. At this juncture, it's one's attitude that can make all the difference, and Manjari's was never one to give up. Her persistence, clarity of thought, and duty-bound nature helped her sail through tumultuous times and sensitive cases. In fact, she, along with her team, solved the first bus dacoity case in Bihar, which gave her a lot of recognition in the initial years of service. She was part of the team which investigated the Bhagalpur Blindings against police officers, a horrific strategy adopted by Bihar Police to blind the suspects to control crime.

On promotion as SP, she was posted to Bokaro Steel City, where she acquitted herself well. Bokaro was badly affected by anti-Sikh riots after the assassination of Smt. Indira Gandhi. She was away from the district, but on arrival, she took complete charge and soon restored law and order in the district besides rehabilitating the affected families. She was selected for the National Police Academy at Hyderabad, where she was involved with training young IPS officers. After this posting, she did not look back but went on to become DIG, Patna, then was selected to the CISF and later to the CRPF in the Government of India. When Jharkhand state was created, she was recalled to establish the new state. She finally retired from the CISF as Special DG in CISF in 2010 after a very successful and challenging career.

The writer is one of the best-known children's authors of mystery-adventure stories. As a translator, editor, researcher, and storyteller, Nilima Sinha is President of the Association of Writers and Illustrators for Children (AWIC), the Indian Section of the International Board on Books for Young People (IBBY).



INDIA SUFFER EARLY BLOW AFTER SUNDAR STIFLES NEW ZEALAND IN SECOND TEST

PTI ■ PUNE
All-rounder Washington Sundar justified his selection with a career-best 7/59 to help India bowl out New Zealand for 259, but the hosts lost skipper Rohit Sharma early in their first innings when stumps were drawn on day of the second Test, here on Thursday. India crawled to 16 for one in 11 overs with Yashasvi Jaiswal (6 not out) and Shubman Gill (10 not out) at the crease, trailing by another 243 runs in the first innings. Tim Southee cleaned up Rohit for a nine-ball duck, forcing the hosts to be extra cautious with the debacle of first innings in the Bengaluru Test still fresh in the mind. Rohit, who was cleaned up for the third time in the series and for the second time by Southee, was squared up as he looked to defend in the line of the delivery but the ball moved away to beat his outside edge and crash into the off-stump. Southee thus became the first among fast bowlers to take a wicket in this Test after a dominating show by the Indian spin duo of Sundar and R Ashwin (3/64), who did not allow New Zealand to break free. The 25-year-old Sundar, playing his first Test for India since March, 2021, ran through New Zealand after



Ashwin claimed the first three wickets in the innings to move past his Australian peer Nathan Lyon in the list of highest wicket-takers in Tests. Ashwin began by trapping New Zealand captain Tom Latham (15) in front of the wickets and getting Will Young (18) caught behind in the first session, while Sundar took the

centrestage towards the end of the second. While he was measly to begin with as New Zealand batters looked to consolidate, Sundar reaped rich dividends for his perseverance. He swung the momentum in India's favour with two late wickets in the second session, including the in-form Rachin

Ravindra, as New Zealand stumbled to 201/5 at tea. Ravindra's dismissal close to the tea break proved instrumental as New Zealand could never recover from the blow and folded in the final session without much resistance. The young batter looked primed for another big knock

but Sundar's brilliance stopped him in his tracks. Of his seven dismissals in an outstanding spell on a day one wicket, Sundar showed mastery in hitting the off-stump to snare five of his victims bowled, one pinned in front of the wickets while the other caught by fellow tweaker Ashwin. Among those who were

cleaned up by the Indian spinner were Ravindra, Tom Blundell (3), Mitchell Santner (33), Tim Southee (5) and Ajaz Patel (4). The highlight, however, was the manner in which he cleaned up the in-form Ravindra, who looked good after his efforts of 134 and 39 not out in New Zealand's eight-wicket win in the opening Test. Sundar pitched the ball just perfectly to have it spinning away from Ravindra's bat and crash into the off-stump, beating the in-form batter fair and square who had otherwise struck a perfect balance in attack and defence. At the top, Conway managed 76 from 141 balls with 11 fours but he was among Ashwin's three wickets at the top. The Kiwis' opener used his reverse sweeps against the spinners and drives down the wicket against the Indian pacers to good effect to accumulate his runs, but he had only himself to blame for missing out on scoring a century again. On an innocuous delivery outside off, Conway went for a stroke but got an edge to be caught behind off Ashwin. New Zealand's woes compounded when off-colour batters in skipper Latham and Mitchell continued to struggle for runs despite spending considerable time in the middle.



Clarke wants specialist Test opener, not Smith, for Australia series against India

PTI ■ SYDNEY
Former Australia skipper Michael Clarke has asked Australia to consider a specialist opener instead of a misfiring Steven Smith during the upcoming Border-Gavaskar Test series against India at home, starting next month. The batting stalwart's preferred batting position in Tests is No. 4 but he took on the role of opener after David Warner's retirement. However, Smith hasn't enjoyed great success at the top of the batting order. Clarke's comments come days after former opener Warner expressed his desire to come out of retirement, which he announced earlier this year, for the crucial series. While tall all-rounder Cameron Green is another good option for the opener's slot, the Aussies will miss his services against India due to a back injury. "We made a mistake in getting Steve Smith to open the batting in Test cricket, so let's not make the same mistake. Let's pick a specialist opener, whoever is best equipped," Clarke told Sky Sports Radio. While Australia have the option of picking up Sam Konstas and Marcus Harris for the opener's slot, reports have also suggested that the selectors might be considering Josh Inglis and Nathan McSweeney. However, despite Inglis and

McSweeney's recent good run in Sheffield Shield, they haven't really batted as openers. Clarke is not quite in favour of the two, considering the kind of bowling attack India possess. "How can you justify Josh Inglis is a better person to open the batting in a Test match against this Indian attack than a specialist opener?" he wondered. "He scored Shield runs, yes, but he bats in the middle order. It's not just about who's making runs right here, right now. That is not how you select an Australian cricket team. "The problem they (Australia) have at the moment is the top three contenders who are specialist opening batters are not making runs in Shield cricket. "Who gives a s**t? It's been two Shield rounds on wickets that are seaming — who cares? It can't just be about making runs in the two Shield games." Clarke feels that Cameron Bancroft should also be given a 'go-ahead' in the team, having fared relatively well in Shield cricket for the last three seasons despite a sloppy start this season. "I would probably go with Cameron Bancroft because he's been the leading run scorer for the last two years in Shield cricket. "I care about Shield cricket. I think he's earned the right to be selected based on runs," he added.

South Africa wins first Test in Asia in a decade after beating Bangladesh

AP ■ MIRPUR (BANGLADESH)
Fast bowler Kagiso Rabada's 6-39 helped South Africa finish off Bangladesh by seven wickets on Thursday and win their first cricket Test in Asia in 10 years. Bangladesh was all out for 307 in its second innings in the morning, with Rabada grabbing his six-for, and left South Africa needing 106 for victory. It completed the inevitable by reaching 106-3 in 22 overs just before lunch on day four. Bangladesh was always

chasing after being dismissed for 106 in the first innings. South Africa replied with 308 propped up by Kyle Verreynne's 114, which earned him player of the match. "It's a really good performance. Incredibly tough for the team to put four days of good cricket together," South Africa stand-in captain Aiden Markram said. "Bowlers were great there and then the batters helped us get a great lead. When you get a lead like that, it's tough for opposition to come back." South Africa's last win in Asia



was in 2014 against Sri Lanka in Galle. Resuming the day at 283-7 and 81 runs ahead, Bangladesh failed to make any impact as Rabada and Wiaan Mulder sliced through the hosts with the second new ball. "Rabada is a special bowler for us," Markram said. "For Kyle to step in and play that sort of innings (114), that's really special. (The emphasis is on whoever's playing should make it count)." Rabada struck in the first over of the day, trapping Nayeem

Hasan leg before for his overnight 16 to complete his 15th five-wicket haul in test cricket. Rabada finished the match with nine wickets. Left-arm spinner Taijul Islam took eight wickets overall, after picking up all three South Africa wickets on Thursday. "As a batting group we need to take responsibility against the new ball, and as a bowling group we need to show improvement," Bangladesh captain Najmul Hossain Shanto said. "We need to put in a collective performance in the next test match.

Indian hockey team beats world champions Germany 5-3 in second Test, but loses series in shoot-out



PTI ■ NEW DELHI
Skipper Harmanpreet Singh and Sand Sukhjeet Singh scored a brace each to hand India a 5-3 win over world champions Germany in the second hockey Test but the hosts lost the two-match series via shoot-out at the Major Dhyan Chand Stadium here on Thursday. Elian Mazkour (7th, 57th minutes) scored twice for Germany, who took the early lead, while Henrik Mertgens (60th) was the other goal getter for the visitors. But India turned the table in the second half, with goals from Sukhjeet Singh (34th and 48th), skipper Harmanpreet Singh (42nd and 43rd) and Abhishek (45th) to level the two-match series. Germany had won the first Test 2-0 on Wednesday. In the shoot-out, which India lost 1-3, Harmanpreet, Abhishek and Mohammed Raheel missed while Aditya was the lone scorer. India custodian Krishan Bahadur Pathak made two fine saves, but couldn't save his side from losing in the shoot-out. The Indians started on the front foot and created early chances but failed to breach the German defence. It was Germany who took the

lead in the seventh minute through Elian Mazkour, who scored with a fierce reverse shot from the right corner. Two minutes later, debutant Aditya Arjun Lalage came close to scoring his first goal for India but his shot from a Jarmanpreet Singh pass was saved by German goalkeeper Joshua Nnaji Onyekwue. India kept up the pressure and secured their first penalty corner in the next minute but the variation didn't work out well. The Indians secured another penalty corner in the next minute but Manpreet Singh couldn't stop the push. The Germans secured a penalty corner in the 12th minute but Lukas Windfeder shot wide. Minutes later, it was India's turn to earn a penalty corner and the hosts went for a beautiful variation with Amit Rohidas laying it up for Harmanpreet, whose ground hit was saved by the German keeper. Soon, Germany too secured a penalty corner but the Indians defended well. It was raining in the shoot-out as India got two more in quick time but wasted both the chances. Two minutes from half-time, Germany got another penalty corner but failed to capitalise

on that. Trailing by a goal, the Indians came out with more purpose and vigour after the change of ends, and four minutes into the third quarter secured three back-to-back penalty corners but wasted all. The Indians finally found the net from penalty corners as Harmanpreet converted two in succession with a minute's gap. He first found the top right corner of the German goal and then scored a minute later with a powerful grounded flick. It was raining goals for a pumped-up India, thereafter, with Abhishek finding the back of the net minutes later with a fierce shot from the right corner to hand the home team a 4-1 lead. The Indians continued with the same intensity in the fourth and final quarter and extended their lead in the 48th minute through an unmarked Sukhjeet. Sukhjeet received a long pass from the deep and sped away with only the onrushing German goalkeeper to beat and he did that perfectly with a diving reverse hit. The fighting Germans didn't give up and secured another penalty corner in the 54th minute but failed to threaten the Indian goal. Germany, however, pulled one back three minutes from the final hooter when Mazkour received a ball inside the 'D', brilliantly turned to dodge an Indian defender and slotted home the ball past Indian goalkeeper Suraj Karkera. The Germans continued the high press and got another goal back just at the stroke of the final hooter through Henrik Mertgens. With both the sides winning a match each, the series winner was decided via shoot-out.

"Freak" Haaland scores outrageous goal for Man City in the Champions League

AP ■ MANCHESTER
Erling Haaland scored an outrageous backheel volley in the Champions League to issue a timely reminder of his own credentials as a potential Ballon d'Or winner. A day after Vinicius Junior hit a hat trick for Real Madrid, Haaland scored an early contender for goal of the season with his acrobatic effort in Manchester City's 5-0 win against Sparta Prague on Wednesday. Vinicius Junior is the favorite to win soccer's most prestigious individual prize when it is presented at a gala ceremony in Paris on Monday. But Haaland, who came runner-up to Lionel Messi for last year's award, once again

showcased his scoring prowess with two goals as City set a new Champions League record of 26 games unbeaten. Haaland's volley in the 58th minute at the Etihad Stadium was a moment of individual brilliance. From around six meters (20 feet) and with his back to goal, the Norway striker leaped in the air and flicked the back of his foot to meet Savinho's cross from the right. Connecting powerfully with his heel, the ball shot down into the turf and bounced high into the top corner beyond Prague goalkeeper Peter Vindahl. "If I tried to do that I'd pull my groin. I don't know how he did it, I just think it's just his long legs. He's a freak isn't he?" Haaland's City teammate Phil



Foden said. "It shows he has this talent that no one else can do." City manager Pep Guardiola said the goal was not normal "for a human" and likened the forward to Sweden great Zlatan Ibrahimovic. "It's unbelievable this talent

that this guy has," he said. Haaland scored his second in the 68th to take his season's total to 13 goals in 12 games in all competitions. His record in the Champions League is now 44 goals in 42 games. Cristiano Ronaldo is the all-time leading scorer in European club soccer's elite competition with 141 goals. Messi is second on 129. Haaland is 17th and rising quickly. But he is expected to miss out on this year's Ballon d'Or with Vinicius Junior seen as the man to beat, ahead of Haaland's City teammate Rodri. Haaland, however, is likely to contend for years to come if he continues his goal scoring exploits, with Vinicius Junior and Kylian Mbappe leading a new generation after Messi and Ronaldo dominated the award for more than a decade. Neither of those soccer greats, who won 13 titles between them, were nominated this year, appearing to usher in a new era.

Raphinha steals the show with a hat trick in Barcelona's statement win over Bayern

AP ■ BARCELONA
Barcelona's game against Bayern Munich was billed as a duel between Harry Kane and Robert Lewandowski. Then Raphinha stole the show and left to a standing ovation. Kane and Lewandowski both scored, but the Brazilian winger's hat trick for Barcelona outshone both of the strikers in Barcelona's 4-1 statement win in the Champions League on Wednesday. "I have a fantastic team, and the players are unbelievable. But I've never had a player like Raphinha, because he's

incredibly dynamic both with and without the ball," Barcelona coach Hansi Flick said. "Every single team needs him, but we have him." Raphinha joined a select group

of players who've scored hat tricks against Bayern in the Champions League - only Cristiano Ronaldo, Sergio Aguero and Roy Makaay had done it before. "He always gives 100% in good and bad times. He's working just as hard and giving everything for all his teammates. I'm so happy for him tonight," defender Jules Kounde said of Raphinha. Each of his three goals stood out in its own way. First, Raphinha darted in behind Bayern's defense to score in the very first minute, then he shot the ball between defender



Dayot Upamecano's legs to score his second just before halftime. The third goal saw Raphinha display his technique to control Lamine Yamal's cross-field pass on his chest and exploit the gap between two defenders before completing the hat trick. Barcelona's fans were again on their feet to applaud when Raphinha, who had also captained the team because of Marc-Andre ter Stegen's injury, was substituted in the 75th, leaving him a little fresher for Saturday's "Clasico" against Real Madrid.