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INDIA, EU TO HAVE NEW ROUND OF FTA TALKS

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COMEBACK WIN
OVER ESPANYOL
12 SPORTS

INDIA LIFTS MAIDEN GOLD AT CHESS OLYMPIAD

RISHABH MALIK ■ NEW DELHI

In the battle of black and white India rose to the crown, the country's men's and women's contingent both have made the country proud by creating history, clinching the gold medal at the Chess Olympiad 2024 on Sunday. This is the triumph of India's first ever gold medal for the nation in the highly regarded chess tournament. India's chess grandmaster D Gukesh beats Vladimir Fedoseev from Slovenia and Arjun Erigaisi, who has also had a outstanding feat in Budapest picked up a win over Serbian Jan Subelj on the final

day of the event. The Indian team for the open category included Gukesh, Erigaisi, Praggnanandhaa R, Vidit Gujrathi, Pentala Harikrishna and Srinath Narayanan (Captain). The team who had a unbeaten streak in the tournament with incredible performances against Fabiano Caruana of United States (2.5-1.5) on Saturday day before the final round of the event which gave confirmation of gold medal. India despite having 19 points on the tally (table topper) only China is right after the India in points tally with 17 points which gave the medal confirmation, if somehow



Gukesh D of India, during the final round of the 45th Chess Olympiad in Budapest, Hungary, Sunday

AP/PTI

china takes 2 points in the final 11 round both teams going to share the gold medal. 18-year old Gukesh Dommaraju hails from Chennai marks his presence on the world stage after the historic India's maiden gold medal in the 45th Chess Olympiad, along with women's success with Harika Dronavalli, R Vaishali, Divya Deshmukh, Vantika Agarwal and Tania Sachdev is leading against Azerbaijan in the final by 1-0 gave India double joy with another gold medal in their category. Gukesh personify a character who knows how to control his nerves in the tense situation in

the crucial moments which helps him during the tournaments. International Chess Federation Congratulated the team's success on platform X Congratulations to Gukesh D, Praggnanandhaa R, Arjun Erigaisi, Vidit Gujrathi, Pentala Harikrishna and Srinath Narayanan (Captain), anand Mahindra gave his wishes on X Indian Women and Men.. Both WORLD CHAMPIONS An extraordinary feat May this inspire future generations of Indians to always keep the crown in the place where Chess Began. Welcome home, Chess. Swagatam.

The legendary Viswanathan Anand, held the FIDE (The International Chess Federation) title from 2000 to 2002, and the unified title from 2007 to 2013. Gukesh D (challenger) and Ding will face each other again in the FIDE World Championship Match 2024, which is going to happen between November 20 and December 15 this year in Singapore. This victorious moment has opened the doors for young minds for increased participation all across the nation and will work as the baton for the future generation.

Kejriwal returns, attacks PM, RSS



AAP National Convener Arvind Kejriwal addresses as Delhi CM Atishi party leader Manish Sisodia and others at Janta Ki Adalat at Jantar Mantar in New Delhi, Sunday

RAJESH KUMAR ■ NEW DELHI

Days after stepping down from his chief ministerial post, Aam Aadmi Party (AAP) chief Arvind Kejriwal on Sunday launched a scathing attack on Prime Minister Narendra Modi saying that he had entered politics to change it and he resigned because he was hurt by the corruption allegations levelled against him by the Central Bureau of Investigation (CBI) and Enforcement Directorate (ED) to intimidate or lure leaders. In his first 'Janta ki Adalat' public meeting at Jantar Mantar following his resignation as Delhi chief minister, Kejriwal adopted a new political strategy to counter PM Modi, poising

five questions to Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS) chief Mohan Bhagwat, including if the BJP's rule on age of retirement also applied to Modi as it did for LK Advani. He asked whether the rule under which several BJP veteran leaders such as Lal Krishna Advani and Murli Manohar Joshi retired from active politics when they turned 75, would apply to Prime Minister Narendra Modi, who is turning 75 in September 2025. He questioned Bhagwat if he agreed with the BJP's politics of calling politicians "corrupt" and then inducting them into its fold. He demanded answers from the RSS for Prime Minister Modi's actions, in an apparent bid to diminish his

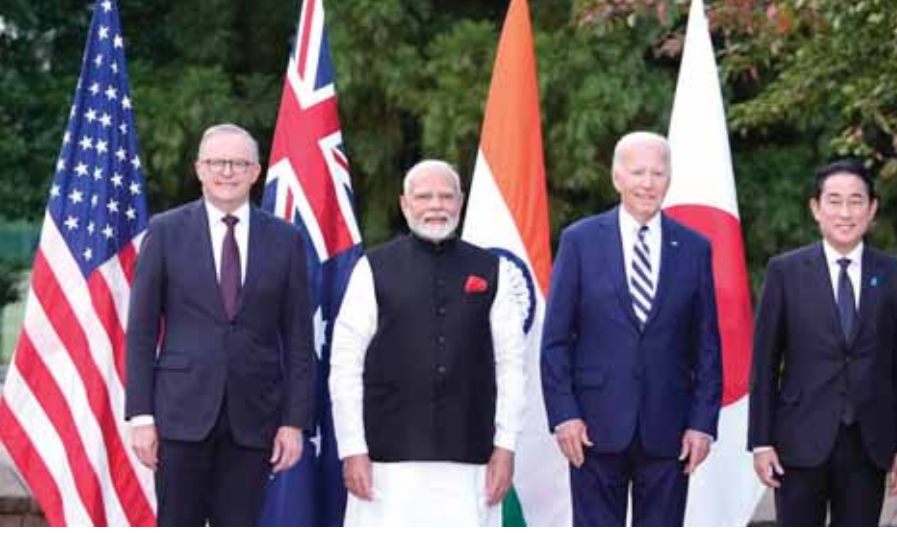
stature by implying that the parent Hindutva organisation was the master which should keep its child in control. "Has the son become so big now that it is showing attitude to his mother?" Kejriwal said at a rally where he demanded five answers from the RSS chief. The questions he asked were political softballs but the implication of bringing Bhagwat into his new political narrative is new and unusual. Kejriwal desired to know if the RSS agreed with the BJP's politics of using central agencies to break up parties and topple opposition governments, and inducting "corrupt" leaders into its fold. While Kejriwal was addressing the gathering, the

BJP held a protest against him and AAP on issues of corruption at Connaught Place, barely a kilometre away from Jantar Mantar. The BJP held another protest against Kejriwal at Rajghat on the same issue. On Jantar Mantar, on the other hand, was awash with AAP's signature blue and yellow colours as hundreds of supporters filled the site with banners that declared Kejriwal as "one of us", affirming their unwavering belief in his innocence. As Kejriwal took the stage, the site echoed with slogans of "Na rukega, na jhukega..." while some AAP supporters held up posters bearing messages such as "Hamare Kejriwal imaanदार hai". "I resigned because I did not come to do corruption or to earn money. I came to change the politics of the country..." Kejriwal said. The AAP convener said whether it was ethical for Modi to topple governments across the country by using investigating agencies like CBI and ED. He said he would leave the CM's bungalow in a few days. "I will leave my house soon and give up all the facilities. When I leave the CM house, I won't even have a place to live. I'm getting a lot of calls from people saying, 'Come to my house, live at my house for free,'" said Kejriwal at the Janta Adalat. Several AAP leaders attended the party event at Jantar Mantar. AAP leader Manish Sisodia, Delhi Chief Minister Atishi also joined the event named the 'Janta Ki Adalat'.

US, India agree on theatre of war

PTI ■ WILMINGTON (US)

US President Joe Biden commended Prime Minister Narendra Modi's historic visit to Ukraine last month and his message of peace, as the two leaders held wide-ranging talks that figured pressing global challenges including the situation in the war-ravaged country. The US President hosted Modi at his personal home in Wilmington, Delaware on Saturday afternoon hours after the prime minister arrived in the US on a three-day visit. Modi's bilateral meeting with President Joe Biden in Wilmington was an emotional one, marking their final meeting in an official capacity as the American leader is not seeking reelection. The US President hosted Modi at his personal residence in Wilmington, Delaware on Saturday and the two leaders held wide-ranging talks covering various key aspects of India-US ties. At a media briefing, Foreign Secretary Vikram Misri, while answering a question on defusing the Ukraine crisis, said "very important" conversations are underway with multiple people on all sides of the conflict. In the talks, Biden conveyed to the Indian prime minister that the US supports initiatives to reform global institutions to reflect India's important voice, including permanent membership for New Delhi in a reformed UN Security Council, according to a joint fact-sheet on the meeting. Though the Modi-Biden talks primarily focused on bilateral ties, the two leaders also touched upon key global challenges including the Russia-Ukraine conflict and the situation in the Indo-Pacific that has witnessed increasing Chinese muscle-flexing.



President Joe Biden, joined by Australia's Prime Minister Anthony Albanese, Japan's Prime Minister Fumio Kishida, and India's Prime Minister Narendra Modi, stand for a group photo before speaking about a Quadrilateral Cancer Moonshot initiative on the sidelines of the Quad leaders summit at Archmere Academy in Claymont, Del., Saturday

The fact-sheet said President Biden expressed his "immense appreciation" for India's leading role on the world stage, particularly Modi's leadership in the G-20 and in the Global South and his commitment to strengthen the Quad to ensure a free, open, and prosperous Indo-Pacific. It said India is at the forefront of efforts to seek solutions to the most pressing challenges, from supporting the global response to the COVID-19 pandemic to addressing the devastating consequences of conflicts around the world. "President Biden commended Prime Minister Modi for his historic visits to Poland and Ukraine, the first by an Indian prime minister in decades, and for his message of peace and ongoing humanitarian support for Ukraine, including its energy sector, and on the importance of international law, including the UN charter," it said. It is understood that Modi briefed Biden on his visits to Moscow in July and to Kyiv last month.

Foreign Secretary Vikram Misri, when asked at a media briefing on the extent of discussion on the Russia-Ukraine conflict between the two leaders and whether the Indian side mentioned any kind of peace proposal, only said New Delhi is involved in a set of negotiations. In their meeting, Modi and Biden reaffirmed their support for the freedom of navigation and the protection of commerce, including critical maritime routes in the Middle East where India will assume co-lead in 2025 of the Combined Task Force 150 to work with Combined Maritime Forces to secure sea lanes in the Arabian Sea, the document said. The leaders voiced their view that a closer US-India partnership is vital to the success of efforts to build a cleaner, inclusive, more secure, and more prosperous future for the planet, it added. Modi and Biden also deliberated on ways to further bolster India-US cooperation

in areas of semiconductors, clean energy and defence. In his meeting with Quad leaders both in multilateral and bilateral settings, Modi put forward India's views and commitments for global growth, development, peace and security. Foreign Secretary Vikram Misri made these remarks at a special briefing in New York on Sunday. Modi on Saturday had three separate bilateral meetings with Australian Prime Minister Anthony Albanese, Japanese Prime Minister Fumio Kishida and US President Joe Biden along with the Quad Leadership Summit in Wilmington, Delaware. Prime Minister Modi reached New York on Sunday after wrapping up the Quad Leaders' meeting in Wilmington, hosted by President Biden. In a rare gesture, Biden hosted Modi for a bilateral meeting in his home, and the Quad summit was held at the Archmere Academy in Wilmington.

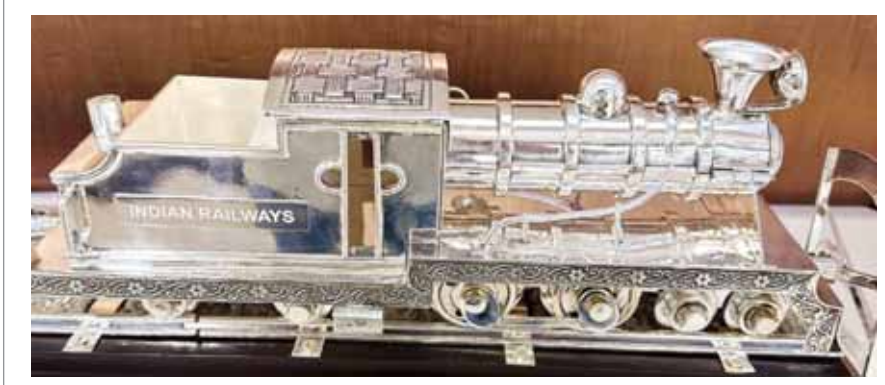
Antiquities of yore come back home

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

From standing Lord Buddha in sandstone from North India belonging 15-16th century CE, Lord Vishnu in Bronze from Eastern India belonging to 17-18th century CE, Anthropomorphic figure in copper from North India belonging to 2000-1800 BCE, Lord Krishna in bronze from South India belonging to 17-18th century CE and Lord Karthikeya in granite from South India belonging to 13-14th century CE are some of the stolen antiquities from India which was handed over to Prime Minister Narendra Modi during his ensuing visit to the United States. The majority of the antiquities are terracotta artefacts from Eastern India, while others are made of stone, metal, wood and ivory and belong to different parts of the country. These belong to a period of almost 4000 years, from 2000 BCE - 1900 CE and have origins in different parts of India.



According to MEA, the Apsara in sandstone from Central India belonging to the 10-11th century CE, Jain Tirthankar in bronze from Central India belonging to the 15-16th century CE, Terracotta vase from Eastern India belonging to the 3-4th century CE, Stone Sculpture from South India belonging to 1st-century BCE-1st century CE, Lord Ganesh in Bronze from South India belonging to 17-18th century CE were handed over. In previous years, PM Modi's trips to the US have also facilitated the return of numerous artifacts. In 2021, 157 antiquities were handed over, including a bronze Nataraja statue from the 12th century. Following the PM's 2023 US visit another 105 antiquities were returned. India has also successfully recovered artifacts from other countries, including 16 from the UK and 40 from Australia. Taking to social media platform Modi said "Deepening cultural connect and strengthening the fight against illicit trafficking of cultural properties. I am extremely grateful to President Biden and the US Government for ensuring the return of 297 invaluable antiquities to India."



Modi gifts antique train model to Joe Biden, pashmina shawl to Jill

PM Narendra Modi gifted an antique silver hand-engraved train model which is a stunning tribute to the steam locomotive era, to President Biden and a pashmina shawl to First Lady Jill Biden on the third day of his US visit for the Quad summit. This silver hand-engraved train model - a rare and extraordinary piece,

masterfully crafted by artisans from Maharashtra - is made of 92.5% silver and the model has been customised by inscribing "Delhi-Delaware" on the sides of the main carriage and "Indian Railways" on the sides of the engine in English and Hindi based on the standard format used on passenger trains in India, officials said.

MEA said that the artefacts were returned "in keeping with close bilateral ties and to foster greater cultural understanding". The statement said the pieces will be "shortly repatriated to India." It added that a select few pieces were showcased to Modi and Biden during their bilateral meeting in Wilmington, Delaware. The US State Department's Bureau of Educational and Cultural Affairs and the Archaeological Survey of India, under the Ministry of Culture, Union Government, signed a Cultural Property Agreement in July 2024 to strengthen cultural ties. The agreement aims to fulfil the commitments made by President Biden and Prime Minister Modi to enhance cooperation in protecting cultural heritage, as stated in the Joint Statement issued after their meeting in June 2023, according to the Ministry of External Affairs.

the total number of stolen Indian antiquities recovered from the US since 2016 went up to 578, the maximum antiquities returned by any country to India.

Bangladeshi infiltrators vote bank for Jharkhand's JMM-led alliance: UP DCM

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ RANCHI

Uttar Pradesh Deputy Chief Minister Keshav Prasad Maurya on Sunday alleged that Bangladeshi infiltrators were a "vote bank" of JMM-led alliance in Jharkhand, and the ruling party would not chase them out of the state. Addressing a public rally in Koderma as part of the BJP's 'Parivartan Yatra', Maurya accused the Hemant Soren government of "failing" to fulfil election promises on all fronts and making Jharkhand famous for "corruption". "The Bangladeshi infiltrators, who were earlier restricted to West Bengal only, spread across Jharkhand in large numbers, which is a big challenge. The JMM-led government cannot chase them out of the state. The ruling coalition considers infiltrators as their vote bank," Maurya said. The BJP considers illegal immigrants a "blot on Jharkhand's dignity" and is the "only party which can



chase them out of the state", he claimed. Maurya said, "The Hemant Soren-led government has failed on all fronts and made Jharkhand famous for corruption. I appeal to the people to vote for the BJP in the upcoming assembly polls for the welfare of the poor, farmers, bright future of youths and making women lakhpati didi." India is progressing fast under the leadership of Prime Minister Narendra Modi, he claimed. "Our borders are safe now and India is moving towards becoming the world's third-largest economy soon," he said. With an eye on the assembly elections due later this year, the opposition BJP in Jharkhand would carry out six 'Parivartan' processions to reach out to the people and "expose the failures" of the JMM-led government in the state. These marches will cover 5,400 km across 81 assembly segments in 24 districts before concluding on October 2. Around 50 national and state-level leaders of the BJP, including chief ministers of several states, are expected to participate in such rallies.

Kharge reaffirms Congress commitment to protecting rights of J and K people

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ JAMMU

Congress president Mallikarjun Kharge on Sunday reaffirmed the party's commitment to protecting the constitutional rights of the people of Jammu and Kashmir. Kharge said that the Congress' seven guarantees for Jammu and Kashmir aim to usher in a brighter future for the region. "The Indian National Congress pledges to safeguard the constitutional rights of the people of Jammu and Kashmir. Our progressive development agenda is for everyone," Kharge said on social media platform. Kharge's highlighted a presentation detailing the Congress' seven guarantees for the people of Jammu and Kashmir, and said "these guarantees will bring about a brighter future by focusing on social justice and economic empowerment". The presentation emphasised party's first guarantee, which starts from the restoration of full statehood to the Union Territory. The party promised free med-



ical treatment of up to Rs 25 lakh for every family and the establishment of a super-specialty hospital in every district. The guarantees also include the implementation of former prime minister Dr Manmohan Singh's plan for the rehabilitation of Kashmiri Pandits and securing constitution-based rights for the OBC community. Other guarantees include financial protection of Rs 3,000 per month for women heads of families and food security, ensuring 11 kg of grain for every family mem-

CJI to lay foundation stone for Bombay HC's new complex on Monday

PNS ■ MUMBAI

Chief Justice of India DY Chandrachud will lay the foundation stone of the Bombay High Court's new complex in Mumbai's Bandra East on Monday, an official said. A Maharashtra government release on Sunday said possession of 30.16 acre of land will be handed over the High Court in a phased manner, adding the first tranche measuring 4.39 acres has already been given. It will have world class infrastructure, including well-designed and spacious court rooms, chambers for judges and registry personnel, an arbitration and mediation centre, an auditorium, library, as well as a host of features and amenities for staff, lawyers and litigants, the release informed. The plan is to enable stakeholders to have access to support services such as banking and telecom, medical facilities, digitisation centre, creche, cafeteria, waiting areas, multi-storey car park, museum and lawyers' chambers, with the design keeping in mind accessibility features for differently-abled stakeholders, the release added. The land on which the new premises will come up is well located, with proximity to the island city as well as the metropolis' suburbs, the arterial Western Express Highway and the Bandra Kurla Complex, among the country's leading commercial hubs. The Bombay High Court, founded on August 16, 1862, is currently located in a majestic building near Flora Fountain (Hutatma Chowk) that the court has occupied since November 1878, the state government release added. The Bombay High Court exercises jurisdiction over Maharashtra through the Principal Seat in Mumbai and benches at Nagpur and Aurangabad as well as Goa. It also exercises jurisdiction over the Union Territories of Dadra and Nagar Haveli and Daman and Diu. The High Court has a sanctioned strength of 94 judges, while the current strength being 66 sitting judges, the release said.

97 per cent cases of atrocities against SCs in 2022 reported from 13 states: Report

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

About 97.7 per cent of all cases of atrocities against SCs in 2022 were reported from 13 states, with Uttar Pradesh, Rajasthan and Madhya Pradesh recording the highest number of such crimes, according to a new government report. According to the latest government report under the Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes (Prevention of Atrocities) Act, the majority of atrocities against Scheduled Tribes (STs) were also concentrated in 13 states, which reported 98.91 per cent of all cases in 2022. Of 51,656 cases registered under the law for Scheduled Castes (SCs) in 2022, Uttar Pradesh accounted for 23.78 per cent of the total cases with 12,287, followed by Rajasthan at 8,651 (16.75 per cent) and Madhya Pradesh at 7,732 (14.97 per cent). Other states with a significant number of cases of atrocities against SCs were Bihar with 6,799 (13.16 per cent), Odisha with 3,576 (6.93 per cent), and Maharashtra with 2,706 (5.24



per cent). These six states accounted for nearly 81 per cent of the total cases. "Thirteen states, cumulatively accounting for 97.7 per cent (51,656) of the total cases (52,866) relating to offences of atrocities against members of SCs, registered under the Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes (Prevention of Atrocities) Act, in conjunction with the Indian Penal Code, during the year 2022," the report said. Similarly, the majority of cases of atrocities against STs were concentrated in 13 states. Of the 9,735 cases registered under the law for STs, Madhya

Pradesh reported the highest number at 2,979 (30.61 per cent), the report said. Rajasthan had the second highest number of cases at 2,498 (25.66 per cent) while Odisha recorded 773 (7.94 per cent). Other states with a significant number of cases included Maharashtra with 691 (7.10 per cent) and Andhra Pradesh with 499 (5.13 per cent). The data also provided insight into the status of investigations and charge-sheeting under the Act. Among the SC-related cases, 60.38 per cent led to charge sheets being filed while 14.78 per cent were concluded with final reports due to rea-

sons such as false claims or lack of evidence. By the end of 2022, investigation was pending in 17,166 cases. For ST-related cases, 63.32 per cent resulted in charge sheets being filed while 14.71 per cent ended with final reports. At the end of the period under review, 2,702 cases involving atrocities against STs were still under investigation. One of the most concerning trends highlighted in the report is the declining conviction rate for cases under the Act. In 2022, the conviction rate dropped to 32.4 per cent from 39.2 per cent in 2020. Moreover, the report pointed out the inadequate number of special courts set up to handle cases under the law. Of 498 districts in 14 states, only 194 had established special courts to expedite trials in these cases. The report also identified specific districts particularly prone to atrocities with only 10 states and Union Territories declaring such districts. The rest said there was no district prone to such cases of atrocities. Uttar Pradesh, which reported

Himachal Government takes loans, gives it to Sonia, alleges BJP MP Kangana Ranaut

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ SHIMLA/CHANDIGARH

BJP MP Kangana Ranaut on Sunday alleged that the Himachal Pradesh government takes loans and gives it to former Congress president Sonia Gandhi which has made the state's coffers "hollow". Addressing people after launching a BJP membership drive at a village here, the actress-turned-politician said, "Everyone is aware that corruption is prevalent and the Congress-ruling state governments have hollowed their respective states." She wondered how the party spends "so much" on elections. Attacking the Congress government headed by Chief Minister Sukhvinder Singh Sukhu, she said, "They take loans and give it to Sonia Gandhi which has made the state hollow." "Disasters and Congress government have taken the state decades back and I would appeal to people to root out the present government," Ranaut said. "If we give disaster funds, it



should go to the CM Relief Fund but everyone knows that it goes to the Sonia relief fund," she alleged. "Disasters and Congress government have taken the state decades back and I would appeal to people to root out the present government," Ranaut said. "If we give disaster funds, it should go to the CM Relief Fund but everyone knows that it goes to the Sonia relief fund," she alleged. "Disasters and Congress government have taken the state decades back and I would appeal to people to root out the present government," Ranaut said. "If we give disaster funds, it

"I would do more than possible for my area but the PWD minister should also do something as well," she said. "Desh ko bachana hai to BJP ko Lana hai", she said and urged the people to take part in the BJP drive in large numbers and become party members. She said that Prime Minister Narendra Modi is 'Yug Purush' and deals with situations at a micro level. The bad situation of Himachal where the salaries and pensions are delayed and facilities of free electricity and water to consumers have been snatched, is not hidden from the rest of the country, she said. Claiming that sports facilities are being stopped at primary schools, she said, "The base of athletes and sports persons is made at a younger age and it seems there is a conspiracy to destroy Himachal." "The state government is trying to axe the future of the children but it would be my goal to get a big sports centre in Mandi constituency and preference would be given to children who start young in this sports complex", she said.

Health Ministries jointly issue advisory to Chief Secretaries of States for implementation of ToFEI manual



PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

Aiming to address the alarming rise of tobacco consumption among youth in the country, the Secretaries of the Union Education and Health Ministries have jointly issued an advisory to Chief Secretaries of states, calling for rigorous implementation of the Tobacco-Free Educational Institutions (ToFEI) manual. Aligning with the provisions of the Cigarettes and Other Tobacco Products Act (COTPA), 2003, the advisory highlights the concerning impact of tobacco use, particularly among children and adolescents. According to the 2019 Global Youth Tobacco Survey (GYTS), approximately 8.5 percent of school students aged 13 to 15 in India engage in various forms of tobacco consumption. Alarmingly, more than 5,500 children begin using tobacco every day, and 55 percent of lifelong users start the habit before turning 20. This early exposure often leads adolescents to explore other addictive substances, said an official from the Health Ministry. To combat these trends, the advisory has called for a united effort from all stakeholders

to protect young people from the dangers of tobacco addiction. It aims to safeguard future generations by raising awareness of the harmful effects of tobacco use. As part of the National Tobacco Control Programme (NTCP), the Health Ministry has released guidelines for Tobacco-Free Educational Institutions (ToFEI) to shield minors and youth from tobacco and electronic cigarette use. Furthermore, the Department of School Education and Literacy launched the ToFEI Implementation Manual on World No Tobacco Day, in collaboration with the Socio Economic and Educational Development Society, said the official. This manual, disseminated to all states and Union Territories on May 31, serves as a crucial resource for educational institutions to effectively implement anti-tobacco measures, he added. The ToFEI manual focuses on raising awareness about the health risks associated with tobacco use and provides information on cessation resources. It also advocates for a healthy, tobacco-free environment within educational institutions, encouraging all schools to become tobacco-free spaces.

Lok Sabha LoP Rahul Gandhi urges people to visit Wayanad

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

Leader of Opposition in the Lok Sabha Rahul Gandhi on Sunday urged people to visit Wayanad and experience its beauty, help to revive tourism, rebuild livelihoods and restore its vibrancy. He stressed that while the recent landslide tragedy affected only the Mundakkai area, it has led to a misconception that all of Wayanad has been impacted, causing a

sharp drop in tourism. "Wayanad's beauty is undisputed, but it is the compassion and kindness of its people that has always drawn me to it. Today, so many of those people who rely on tourism for their livelihood are looking to you all for help," the former Congress chief said in a Facebook post. "Let me assure you, Wayanad is still vibrant and welcoming, with its spirit unbroken. I urge you to visit and experience its



beauty, helping to revive tourism, rebuild livelihoods, and restore its vibrancy," he said. Earlier this month, Rahul Gandhi said it is imperative to make a concerted effort to revitalise tourism in Wayanad and encourage people to visit the area by dispelling the notion that it is a "dangerous" place in the aftermath of the recent landslides. Rahul had made the assertion during a virtual meeting with

some Kerala Congress leaders and Congress general secretary Priyanka Gandhi Vadra. More than 200 people lost their lives in the aftermath of the worst disaster ever faced by Kerala, which has a fragile ecology along its coasts and hilly areas. Rahul won from two constituencies in the 2024 Lok Sabha polls but resigned from the Wayanad seat in Kerala, from where his sister Priyanka Gandhi will contest a bypoll.

ABVP, NSUI engage in extensive campaigning ahead of DUSU polls

STAFF REPORTER ■ NEW DELHI

Ahead of the highly anticipated Delhi University Student Union's (DUSU) polls, slated to be held on September 27, Congress' National Students' Union of India (NSUI) and RSS affiliated Akhil Bharatiya Vidyarthi Parishad (ABVP) on Sunday engaged in extensive campaigning including interactions with DU students. ABVP candidates for the elections, including the presidential candidate Rishabh Chaudhary, the vice-presidential candidate Bhanu Pratap Singh, the secretary candidate Mitravinda Karnwal, and the joint secretary candidate Aman Kapasia, engaged in extensive campaign activities in various hostels including Rajiv Gandhi Women's Hostel, Gwyer Hall, Mansarovar Hostel, PG Men's Hostel, Meghdoot, and other accommodations, where they interacted with the students, discussed key issues, and sought their support for the upcoming elections. During the interactions, the ABVP panel discussed various issues including improving



campus infrastructure, enhancing hostel facilities, ensuring a more efficient and transparent examination process, need for skill-oriented courses, streamlined grievance redressal systems, and increased scholarships for marginalized students, especially in SC, ST, and OBC categories. Women's safety and hostel allocation for postgraduates were other critical points of discussion. Meanwhile, NSUI hosted a special interaction with Telugu students of DU, under the leadership of its National President Varun Choudhary where Telugu students had an opportunity to share their issues and suggestions regarding campus life to the candidates.

NSUI DUSU candidates also actively campaigned across several PGs and hostels, further engaging with students and highlighting the organization's commitment to creating a safe, inclusive, and progressive campus for everyone at the university. During his address, Varun Choudhary expressed confidence in NSUI's upcoming electoral campaign and stated, "We are confident that we will secure a 4-0 victory in the elections. Our manifesto reflects the real needs of students, and we will ensure every promise is fulfilled. NSUI remains committed to protecting the campus from divisive forces and fostering unity, progress, and welfare for all students."

Delhi resident lodges zero FIR alleging harassment by cab driver

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ SHIMLA/NEW DELHI

A Delhi resident has lodged a zero FIR alleging that a cab driver harassed and tried to rob him and his friend along with their families in Himachal Pradesh's Kangra district, according to the police complaint. The accused also allegedly misbehaved with the women of the two families, it added. In his complaint to the police on September 20, Mohammad Raahim Rafi, said he and his friend along with their families had come to Himachal Pradesh for a four-day visit and their trip was planned by a travel agency. The bookings were made for Rs 36,600 and 50 per cent of the payment was made in advance while the rest had to be deposited after checking in into the hotel, the complaint letter said. Both Rafi and his friend are journalists and working in leading media organisations in Delhi. "The driver who picked us up from Delhi demanded Rs 10,000 to fill petrol at a pump,



about an hour before reaching Dharamshala, and when we refused saying the required payment was already done, he removed our luggage from the vehicle," the complainant said. Upon complaining to the travel agency, the driver was changed and their journey was resumed, he added in the complaint. However, when the group was returning from Chamba on September 17 night, the driver who had brought them from Delhi allegedly stopped their vehicle near Gaggal airport in Kangra, shut all doors using central locking and took them into a nearby forest area, the

complaint letter said. The accused then allegedly misbehaved with some women in the group, manhandled Rafi and demanded Rs 4,000. However, the tourists overpowered the driver and got out of the car. They booked another cab and resumed their journey. The complainant said that when the travel agency was apprised of the incident, they took no action. When contacted regarding the incident, Kangra SP Shalini Agnihotri told PTI on Sunday that the incident would be looked into and appropriate legal action would be taken.

TMC alleges no Parliamentary Committees formed after 100 days of 18th Lok Sabha

Warns Parliament being turned into a deep, dark chamber

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■
NEW DELHI

TMC leader Derek O'Brien on Sunday alleged Parliamentary Standing Committees had not been formed despite the 18th Lok Sabha completing 100 days since its constitution and said Parliament was being turned into a "deep, dark chamber". In a social media post, the Trinamool Congress (TMC) leader in the Rajya Sabha said seven out of 10 Bills were sent to department-related standing committees of Parliament in the 15th Lok Sabha while only two out of 10 Bills were sent to the panels in the last Lok Sabha. "Parliamentary standing committees have not yet been formed. In the 15th Lok Sabha, seven out of 10 Bills were sent to committees for scrutiny. In the last Lok Sabha, only two out of 10



Bills got scrutinised," O'Brien said. "Parliament is being turned into a deep, dark chamber," he added. Parliamentary Affairs Minister Kiren Rijiju said on September 11 that

cent of Bills were referred to standing committees in the 17th Lok Sabha. About 50 per cent of reports on the Bills were presented within 115 days. On an average, standing committees held nine meetings to finalise reports on the Bills. Apart from the Data Protection Bill, only the Biological Diversity (Amendment) Bill, 2021, was discussed for at least 15 meetings. The three Bills to reform the country's criminal laws were examined together over 12 meetings. In the 16th Lok Sabha, 28 per cent of Bills were sent to parliamentary committees while 71 per cent of Bills were sent to the panels in the 15th Lok Sabha. While a majority of the standing committees come under the Lok Sabha Secretariat, some are serviced by the Rajya Sabha.

department-related standing committees and consultative committees of Parliament would be constituted shortly. According to data compiled by think-tank PRS Legislative Research, 16 per

Environment Ministry approves 111 urban forests in first 100 days of new Government



PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■
NEW DELHI

In the first 100 days of the Modi 3.0 Government, the Union Environment Ministry has sanctioned 111 urban forests in six states and one Union Territory against the target of 100 urban forests during the period. The initiative is part of the Ministry's revised Nagar Van Yojana in 2020 which was

launched to enhance urban greenery, improve the quality of life, and increase social cohesion in cities. The scheme provides financial assistance of Rs 4 lakh per hectare for the creation and maintenance of urban forests, encouraging the involvement of citizens, students and other stakeholders in managing these green spaces. The size of the urban forests ranges between 10 and 50

hectares. Each urban forest must have at least two-thirds of its area under tree cover and include components such as biodiversity parks, Smriti Vans, butterfly conservatories, and herbal gardens and Matri Vans created under the Ek Ped Ma Ke Naam campaign. Under this mass tree plantation special campaign, it is targeted to plant 80 crore trees this year by September

end and 140 crores by next year March end. Provision has been made on MeriLiFE portal for uploading details of plantation done by any individual or institution or organization private or government and tracking plantation efforts. More than 75 crore saplings have been planted by now under this campaign and detailed information has been uploaded on MeriLiFE portal, said the Ministry. The Nagar Van Yojana aims to develop 1,000 urban forests by 2027 with financial support from the National Fund of the National Compensatory Afforestation Management and Planning Authority. This initiative will help protect forest land within and around urban centres from degradation and also address environmental concerns such as air pollution, urban heat islands, loss of biodiversity, and habitat degradation, said the Ministry.



SC to deliver verdict on watching child porn not POCSO offence

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

The Supreme Court is scheduled to deliver on Monday its judgment on a plea challenging a Madras High Court ruling that has said mere downloading and watching child pornography is not an offence under the POCSO Act and the information technology law. A bench of Chief Justice D Y Chandrachud and Justices J B Pardiwala and Manoj Misra is likely to pronounce the verdict. Terming atrocious, the apex court had earlier agreed to hear the plea challenging the high court ruling that has said mere downloading and watching child pornography is not an offence under the Protection of Children from Sexual Offences (POCSO) Act and Information Technology (IT) Act. On January 11, the Madras High Court quashed the criminal proceedings against a 28-year-old man charged with downloading pornographic content involving children on his mobile phone. The high court had also said that children these days are grappling with the serious issue of watching pornography and instead of punishing them, the society must be "mature enough" to educate them. The Supreme Court had taken note of the submissions made in the matter by senior advocate H S Phoolka, who represented two petitioner organisations, that the high court verdict was contrary to the laws in this regard. The senior lawyer appeared in the court on behalf of NGOs

Just Rights for Children Alliance, based in Faridabad, and the New Delhi-based Bachpan Bachao Andolan. The organisations work for the welfare of children. The high court had quashed the criminal case against S Harish under the POCSO Act, 2012 and IT Act, 2000. In order to constitute an offence under section 67B of the IT Act, an accused must have published, transmitted or created material depicting children in a sexually-explicit act or conduct, it had said. "A careful reading of this provision does not make watching child pornography, per se, an offence under section 67B of the Information Technology Act, 2000," the high court had added. Even though the said section of the IT Act has been widely worded, it does not cover a case where a person has merely downloaded child pornography in an electronic gadget and watched the same, without doing anything more, it had said. Admittedly, two videos involving boys were downloaded and were available on the petitioner's mobile phone, and those were neither published nor transmitted to others and were within the petitioner's private domain, it had said. The Madras High Court had, however, expressed concern over children watching pornography. Viewing pornography can have negative consequences on teenagers down the line, affecting both their psychological and physical well-being, it had said.

Parliamentary Panel examines Waqf Bill amid 1.2 crore email responses

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■
NEW DELHI

A parliamentary panel examining the Waqf (Amendment) Bill has received a staggering 1.2 crore email responses amid campaigns launched by rival groups to ratchet up support for their respective viewpoints regarding the draft law. Parliamentary sources said the Joint Committee on the Waqf Amendment Bill, chaired by Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) leader Jagadambika Pal, has also received 75,000 responses with documents to support the respective views, prompting the panel to seek additional staff from the Lok Sabha Secretariat. "We have deployed 15



additional personnel to go through the email responses and categorise and document those," one of the sources said. Radical Islamic preacher Zakir Naik has appealed to his supporters to oppose the Waqf (Amendment) Bill by sending responses to the parliamentary panel examining the draft law. The appeal from Naik has triggered a counter-reaction

and several Hindu groups too have urged their supporters to write emails to the committee in support of the Bill. Last month, the committee sought written suggestions from the general public, NGOs, experts, stakeholders and institutions on the Bill. In a statement, the committee asked people to send their comments to the joint secretary, Lok Sabha Secretariat, Room No. 440, Parliament House Annexe, New Delhi-110001 or mail those to jpcwaqf-iss@sansad.Nic.In. The committee is also embarking on a five-city tour to seek feedback from government officials, legal experts, Waqf Board members and community representatives.

Railway Ministry launches ticket-checking drive around festive season

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■
NEW DELHI

The Railway Ministry has decided to launch a special ticket-checking drive around the festive seasons to keep a check on ticketless travellers, including policemen as they are among the top violators, officials said. The Ministry, on September 20, wrote a letter to the General Managers of 17 Zones asking them to start a special drive against ticketless and unauthorised travellers "for the period October 1 to 15 and October 25 to November 10" and take suitable action as per the provisions of the Railway Act of 1989. Railway commercial officers, who are part of the ongoing regular drive in various rail



divisions, say that along with common people, policemen will also be on their radar during the festive rush as they are among the top violators. "In our recent surprise check between Ghaziabad and Kanpur, we found hundreds of policemen travelling in AC coaches of various Express and Mail trains without any ticket. When we imposed a

fine on them, initially they refused to pay and threatened us with dire consequences. We remained undaunted and made them pay. The response of the passengers was very encouraging as they were happy and surprised to see action being taken against police personnel," railway official said.

First tri-services Future Warfare course to be conducted in New Delhi



PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■
NEW DELHI

First of its kind, a tri services "Future Warfare" course is scheduled to be conducted in New Delhi from September 23 - 27 here under the aegis of Headquarters Integrated Defence Staff, defence ministry said here on Sunday. A pioneering initiative by Chief of Defence Staff (CDS) General Anil Chauhan, this will be a rank agnostic course for Major Generals to Majors and their equivalent level officers from other services. The course intends to acquaint the

officers with the operational and technological aspects of modern warfare. The course will focus on key areas related to future warfare to develop an understanding on the manner in which future wars will manifest in terms of being contact, non-contact, kinetic, non-kinetic, psychological or informational as also the domains where they will be fought, be it cyber, space or electromagnetic spectrum. It will also throw light on how emerging and disruptive technologies like Artificial Intelligence, Machine Learning, robotics and

hypersonics will impact the conduct of warfare. The need for a Future Warfare Course for Tri Services officers arises from the rapidly evolving nature of modern warfare, driven by technological advancements, changing global dynamics, and emerging threats. Officers must be equipped to navigate this complex landscape, leveraging new technologies, and adapting to innovative tactics. The course will foster jointness, and facilitate the development of a cohesive, futuristic, and tech-savvy force, capable of securing national interests in an increasingly uncertain and competitive environment. The course has been curated by Headquarters Integrated Defence Staff with the help of veteran and serving subject matter experts. Subsequent courses will build upon the curriculum of this course and be of longer duration with the larger objective of making the Indian Armed Forces "FUTURE READY".

Indian Navy to host fifth edition of Goa Maritime Symposium



PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■
NEW DELHI

Indian Navy will host the fifth edition of Goa Maritime Symposium (GMS-24) at Naval War College, Goa for two days starting Monday, navy said here on Sunday. Giving details, officials said conceptualised and instituted by the Indian Navy in 2016, the GMS is a forum for fostering collaborative thinking, cooperation and

mutual understanding between India and key maritime nations of the Indian Ocean Region (IOR). The theme for the event is "Common Maritime Security Challenges in the Indian Ocean Region - Progressing Lines of Efforts to Mitigate Dynamic Threats such as Illegal, Unreported and Unregulated Fishing and other Illegal Maritime Activities". The discussions will dwell on collaborative efforts towards enhancing maritime security in the region. The symposium will see participation of Naval representatives from 12 Indian Ocean Littoral countries - Bangladesh, Comoros, Indonesia, Madagascar, Malaysia, Maldives, Mauritius, Myanmar, Seychelles, Singapore, Sri Lanka and Thailand. Observers from Kenya and Tanzania will also attend the event.



Congress appoints Uday Bhanu Chib as President of Indian Youth Congress

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

Congress on Sunday appointed Uday Bhanu Chib as the president of the Indian Youth Congress (IYC), replacing Srinivas B V. Chib was currently serving as the general secretary of IYC and is a former president of the Jammu and Kashmir Pradesh Youth Congress. Congress President Mallikarjun Kharge has appointed Uday Bhanu Chib as the president of the Indian Youth Congress with immediate effect, a party statement said. The party appreciates the contributions of the outgoing president Srinivas BV, it added. Congress also appointed M K Bhardwaj and Bhanu Mahajan as acting working presidents of its Jammu and Kashmir unit. The appointments come amid the ongoing assembly polls in Jammu and Kashmir. The party in August appointed Tariq Hameed Karra as president of its Jammu and Kashmir unit. He had replaced Vikar Rasool Wani. Kharge had also appointed two working presidents for Jammu and Kashmir — Tara Chand and Raman Bhalla. Elections in Jammu and Kashmir are being held in three phases. Voting for 24 seats was held in the first phase on September 18. The next phase of polling for 26 seats will be held on September 25. Voting for the third phase would be held on October 1 while results would be declared on October 8.

Rhino numbers surge in India amidst climate threats: Report

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

On World Rhino Day on Sunday, as Prime Minister Narendra Modi urged citizens to visit Assam's Kaziranga National Park, home to one-horned rhinos, a government report has flagged climate change threats, including prolonged monsoons that flood critical grasslands and the spread of invasive plant species eating away the native flora essential for rhinos' survival. The report 'Assam's Role in Protecting the Greater One-Horned Rhino' indicated that while the increase in rhino numbers is encouraging, it necessitates the urgent expansion of habitats to ensure their long-term survival and prevent overcrowding.



"With over 70% of its population residing in Assam's Kaziranga, this species stands as a testament to India's commitment to wildlife preservation," it said while enlisting several measures

taken to protect this iconic species whose number stood at 3,262 at the end of 2021. The majestic animal remains classified as Vulnerable by the IUCN. Yet, the greater one-horned

rhino in India has made a remarkable comeback, thanks to India's proactive conservation policies and the dedicated efforts of Assam's authorities. The report prepared by the

research unit of the PIB said that besides climate change threats exacerbating flooding in the region and the proliferation of invasive species, human-wildlife conflict is a pressing concern, especially as rhino habitats are increasingly adjacent to densely populated agricultural areas. As rhinos venture into these regions seeking food or territory, they can damage crops and create risks for local communities. Effective management strategies that incorporate community engagement and education are essential to mitigate these conflicts and foster coexistence. According to the report, the conservation efforts must prioritize habitat

restoration, the creation of wildlife corridors, and the involvement of local communities in protection initiatives. "Combining traditional knowledge with modern conservation techniques will be crucial for ensuring that both rhinos and humans can thrive together," it said about the conservation measures for these animals that usually weigh around 2,800 kg and live for 45-50 years. The Prime Minister posted on X: "Today, on World Rhino Day, let us reiterate our commitment to protect one of our planet's most iconic species—rhinos. Compliments to all those involved in rhino conservation efforts over the last many years.

"It is a matter of immense pride that India is home to a large number of one horned rhinos. I also fondly recall my visit to Kaziranga in Assam and urge you all to visit there as well." The Indian rhino is the largest of the three Asian species and shares its single horn characteristic with the Javan rhino. The Sumatran rhino, in contrast, has two horns, a trait linking Asian and African rhinos. Rhinos play a crucial role in maintaining ecosystems. As mega-herbivores, they shape grasslands by grazing, creating open spaces that benefit other wildlife. Their wallowing behavior also creates waterholes, supporting various species.



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PAPER WITH PASSION

Quad is here to stay

PM Modi highlights Quad's role in promoting peace, stability and inclusive growth in Indo-Pacific

The latest Quad Summit in Wilmington, USA, highlights the growing importance of cooperation between the four member nations – India, the United States, Japan, and Australia, especially in a politically volatile Indo-Pacific region. It also underscores the importance of India in attaining peace in the region. Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi, during his opening remarks, reaffirmed the group's commitment to ensuring a free, open, and inclusive Indo-Pacific region, emphasising that this priority is shared by all Quad members. Addressing fellow leaders— US President Joe Biden, Australian Prime Minister Anthony Albanese, and Japanese Prime Minister Fumio Kishida, PM Modi noted that the summit was taking place at a time of heightened tensions and conflicts globally. His message was clear: the Quad's strength lies in its shared democratic values, its support for a rules-based international order, and its commitment to peaceful dispute resolution. PM Modi's address reflected India's delicate balancing act in maintaining strategic autonomy while engaging in critical international collaborations. The Indo-Pacific region has become a key area of focus, particularly due to the shifting power dynamics in Asia.



India, with its strategic location and economic influence, sees itself as a natural leader in advocating for an inclusive, prosperous Indo-Pacific. PM Modi emphasised that the Quad is not an exclusive group but one committed to advancing collective interests, particularly in areas of health security, climate change, emerging technologies, and capacity building. India's role in the Quad has grown significantly over the past few years, positioning itself as a key player in advancing shared objectives in the Indo-Pacific. PM Modi's proposal to host the next Quad Summit in India in 2025 is a further testament to the country's increasing involvement and influence within the group. The Wilmington summit comes at a time when global challenges such as supply chain disruptions and geopolitical conflicts have increased the urgency for international collaboration. India's contribution to health security initiatives and capacity-building efforts within the Quad has bolstered its standing as a critical partner. As the Quad moves forward, India remains committed to working with its allies to ensure that the Indo-Pacific remains a region where the rule of law is respected, and prosperity can be shared by all nations. The Prime Minister's visit to the US was part of a broader diplomatic engagement, which also includes bilateral talks with President Biden and an address at the UN General Assembly's Summit of the Future. This diplomatic push underlines India's active role in shaping global conversations on peace, stability and inclusive growth. In the evolving international landscape, India's leadership within the Quad reflects its commitment to fostering cooperation in the Indo-Pacific, ensuring that it remains a region of stability and shared prosperity.

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PICTALK



A one-horn Rhino at the Assam State Zoo on the World Rhino Day, in Guwahati

Key reforms needed for unified electoral system

While many proposals offer a streamlined approach, significant reforms are still needed to address gaps, such as mid-term election disruptions



SUBHASH CHANDRA AGRAWAL

Recently, the Union Cabinet approved the recommendations of the high-level committee led by former President Ram Nath Kovind. While many of these proposals are commendable, there are still gaps that need to be addressed. Notably, the plan should encompass not just Lok Sabha and State Assembly elections but also local body elections. The current recommendation to hold local body elections 100 days after the simultaneous Lok Sabha and State Assembly elections falls short of a truly unified electoral system. As a one-time reform, it is necessary to hold all elections, including to local bodies, concurrently.



Another issue that remains unresolved by the Kovind Committee is the problem of mid-term elections, which arise when a State government or the Lok Sabha falls due to a hung house or the collapse of a coalition. This challenge can be addressed by electing Prime Ministers and Chief Ministers simultaneously with Speakers and Deputy Speakers through a secret ballot, utilising Electronic Voting Machines (EVMs) equipped with Voter Verifiable Paper Audit Trails (VVPATs).

Such elections should require nominations signed by at least 34 per cent of members. This system ensures stability, as a Prime Minister or Chief Minister could only be removed through a similar process, but with the mandatory nomination of an alternative leader in the same motion. Failure to vote in this process would result in the loss of voting rights in the House, though membership would remain intact. Implementing this system is crucial for the success of the "One Nation, One Election" initiative, as it would prevent the frequent dissolution of assemblies and the Lok Sabha. Current officeholders could also be re-elected using this method.

In terms of candidacy rules, a person should not be allowed to contest elections from more than one constituency or hold both Parliament and State Assembly memberships simultaneously.

Additionally, any sitting MP or MLA who seeks to contest for a different seat should first resign from their current position. This would prevent situations like the one that arose during Atal Bihari Vajpayee's government, which fell due to a single controversial vote cast by Odisha Chief Minister Giridhar Gomango, who remained an MP after assuming office as Chief Minister. Another important reform is the need to restore secret voting for Rajya Sabha elections, again using EVMs equipped with VVPATs. Additionally, the constitution should be amended to abolish legislative councils, which are often seen as redundant. Only those who have never contested any election should be nominated to the Rajya Sabha, ensuring that this house remains a body of experienced statespersons rather than active politicians. MPs and MLAs should also be barred from holding any party or social positions to avoid conflicts of interest.

Ministerial positions should be limited to 10 per cent of the strength of the lower house, and the post of Parliamentary Secretary should be abolished. Candidates who lose their security deposits in elections should be barred from contesting for the next six years. The "None of the Above" (NOTA) option, introduced to allow voters to reject all candidates, should be made more effective. Candidates who receive fewer



MINISTERIAL POSITIONS SHOULD BE LIMITED TO 10 PER CENT OF THE STRENGTH OF THE LOWER HOUSE, AND THE POST OF PARLIAMENTARY SECRETARY SHOULD BE ABOLISHED. CANDIDATES WHO LOSE THEIR SECURITY DEPOSITS IN ELECTIONS SHOULD BE BARRED FROM CONTESTING FOR THE NEXT SIX YEARS

votes than NOTA should be barred from contesting future elections, even though the candidate with the next highest vote tally could be declared the winner for that particular term.

Furthermore, immunity for MPs and MLAs from legislative proceedings should be reconsidered. In the infamous JMM bribery case, the Supreme Court was unable to act against guilty individuals due to parliamentary immunity. Parliament's rules should be rewritten to introduce fixed penalties for members who violate norms, removing the discretionary powers of the Speaker. This would prevent lenient punishments like the one imposed on MP Rajesh Manjhi, who faced only a brief suspension for taking his lady friend, pretending she was his wife, on a foreign trip at government expense.

Abandoning parliamentarians, if present in the House during sessions, should not be allowed to leave until legal authorities execute pending warrants against them. Additionally, MPs and MLAs with less than 75 per cent attendance should be barred from contesting elections for the next six years. Cases like that of George Fernandes, who was elected to the Rajya Sabha despite losing his memory, highlight the need for a minimum medical fitness certificate for candidates. Parliamentarians should also

be required to disclose all details of their assets, including the names of their spouses, to avoid cases of undisclosed multiple marriages, as occurred with actor-turned-MP Dharmendra. All dues, including those for utilities, rent, and government accommodations, should be deducted from their salaries or pensions. Pensions should be withheld until former MPs and ministers vacate government accommodations. Additionally, political parties that fail to contest elections for five consecutive years should be de-recognised. Finally, electoral reforms should be accelerated by empowering the Election Commission to implement reforms with a one-year notice to Parliament. If Parliament does not disapprove the proposed reforms within this timeframe, they should be deemed approved. To reduce the influence of black money, sections of the Income Tax Act that allow for contributions to political parties should be abolished. Moreover, the controversial MPLADS scheme, which allocates funds to MPs for local area development, should be scrapped. It is time to bring sweeping reforms to India's electoral system to ensure a more transparent, accountable, and stable political process.

(The writer is Guinness record holder and an RTI consultant, views expressed are personal)

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

RAHUL'S IRRESPONSIBLE REMARKS

Madam — Your newspaper (September 22) carries several news relating to statements of Congress leader Rahul Gandhi, counter allegations by BJP and Congress party's explanations on Rahul Gandhi's asseverations on certain crucial issues in his foreign visits and election campaigns. His assertions on reservations, Sikh community's freedom, abrogation of Article 370 and its standing as alliance partner of National Conference in J&K are drawing flak in the political spectrum and in public. Weakening the country and painting gloomy pictures while abroad, will not go well for Congress and Rahul Gandhi. Selected foreign media has vested interest in maligning India. Desperation of Rahul Gandhi and his lack of conviction is writ large while his narratives against BJP and PM Modiji are failing in absence of report cards of Congress and allies' ruled states. His statements are also silently eroding the INDI alliance base. The country is facing tough times and the country needs a committed voice from all political parties against the deep state forces conspiring unrest and anarchy in our country. Our neighbourhood is troubled and no peace and normalcy is predictable in the near future. Apparently, these are the most challenging times since independence and PM Modiji and the bulk of non-BJP political parties have identified, analysed and diagnosed the threats. We need to fight unitedly.

Vinod Johri | Delhi

ADULTERATION IN LADDOOS

Madam — After Karnataka's nandi milk, it's now the turn of ex Chief Minister of Andhra Pradesh Jagan Mohan Reddy government, who has been solely blamed for the adulteration of south famous Sri Venkateswara Swami Tirupati prasadam laddus by the ruling Chief Minister N.Chandrababu Naidu. It came as a shock to devotees that sub-

High voter turnout in J and K



This refers to the editorial, "India wins in J and K" (September 20). Polling for 24 Assembly seats in the first phase of Jammu and Kashmir Assembly elections held on September 18. Polling was not only peacefully but it witnessed impressive turnout of voters also. People's enthusiasm for polling in the first phase assumes more significance as this is the first Assembly polls after abrogation of Article 370 in the state. People's record participation in the election has

given a befitting reply to the nefarious forces attempting to disrupt the electoral process. People of the state have shown the entire world, their deep trust and confidence in the democratic exercise. It is good that people have realised that no stone and bullet but power of voting is more effective tool to serve their purposes. Demise of Hurriyat Conference, a conglomerate of separatist parties also have contributed to bring peace in the state particularly Kashmir valley. It is evident that separatist groups have been politically marginalised. However, growing support to Sheikh Abdul Rashid's AIP after his shocking win in Lok Sabha polls has made the political pundits to watch final result of Assembly polls closely and keenly.

Manoj Parashar | Ghaziabad

EXPLODING PAGERS

Madam — Israel has been blamed for a recent explosive attack in Lebanon that targeted Hezbollah's communication devices but injured over 3,000 civilians, raising questions about its indiscriminate nature. The operation's extremist-like methods blur the line between state action and terrorism, risking wider conflict. A ceasefire through negotiation is urgently needed. Israel is facing widespread criticism for its alleged role in a recent explosive attack in Lebanon, which targeted Hezbollah's communication systems but left over 3,000 civilians injured. The attack's broad, indiscriminate impact has sparked concern about blurred boundaries between state action and terrorism, resembling extremist tactics more than a conventional military operation. With tensions rising, the conflict risks spreading to a broader regional theatre. Diplomacy is urgently needed to de-escalate the situation.

Anshu Bharti | Begusarai

Send your feedback to: letterstopioneer@gmail.com

Social media age limit: Will banning children be enough?

While setting an age limit may seem like a straightforward solution, enforcing it is a much more complex challenge



ASHA IYER KUMAR

Australia's recent proposal to introduce a minimum age for children to use social media has sparked a global debate about how best to protect young people from its negative effects. With the government suggesting an age limit between 14 and 16, the intention is clear: shield children from the social harms linked to excessive screen time, mental health issues, and unrealistic social comparisons. But is an outright ban the answer? Can we expect this move to be effective, or are we merely sweeping the problem under the carpet?



It's a loophole too easy to exploit, and without a robust verification system, raising the age limit can't be a solution.

In theory, setting an age limit seems like a straightforward solution to mitigate the risks associated with social media. However, the reality is far more complex. One of the most significant challenges in enforcing an age limit on social media is the sheer difficulty of verifying users' ages reliably. Most platforms already have minimum age requirements. Yet, we all know that younger children are active on these platforms, often bypassing age restrictions by simply entering a false birth date during registration.

It's a loophole too easy to exploit, and without a robust verification system, raising the age limit can't be a solution. Some platforms have attempted to introduce measures such as ID verification or even facial recognition, but these solutions come with their own set of concerns. For instance, YouTube Kids requires credit card information to verify the parent's identity. While well-intentioned, this method raises privacy concerns and is far from foolproof. Moreover, tech-savvy children often outsmart such measures using VPNs. Banning social media for children without a watertight system to monitor and regulate their access is like locking the front door while leaving the back door wide

open. When discussing social media and its impact on children, parental oversight inevitably comes into play. Parents are expected to monitor and control their children's access to these platforms, but can they realistically do so in this hyper-connected world? The answer, unfortunately, is no. Even the most diligent parents cannot be expected to oversee every minute of their children's online activity. A well-meaning ban on social media might give parents a false sense of security, but it doesn't change the reality that children will find ways to access these platforms.

If we push them off regulated, mainstream platforms, they may seek refuge in the darker, unregulated corners of the internet—spaces where risks of cyberbullying, exposure to harmful content, and even predatory behaviour are even greater. Social media is, undeniably, a double-edged sword. On the one hand, it exposes children to unrealistic portrayals of life, leading to anxiety, depression, and a constant need to measure up to others. On the other hand, it

provides a space for young people to connect, express themselves, and access educational resources. Banning it outright may remove the toxic aspects but also deny them these valuable opportunities.

As parents and educators, our challenge is to strike a balance. Instead of rushing towards a ban, it might be more prudent to focus on equipping children with the skills they need to navigate the online world responsibly. Digital literacy, mental health education, and open conversations between parents and children can go a long way in protecting young minds from the pitfalls of social media. Rather than looking at social media as an enemy to be vanquished, we should view it as a tool that requires careful handling. Age restrictions, when implemented properly, can help shield younger users, but without holistic solutions—ranging from better parental support to more reliable age verification methods—their efficacy will be limited.

(The author is a columnist and writing coach based in Dubai. Views are personal)



FIRST COLUMN

HEALTHY SPINE AND WELLBEING

A healthy spine forms the cornerstone of overall wellbeing, enabling us to restore vitality to our bodies



RAVI VALLURI

How many of us get up in the morning and virtually struggle to get out of bed as the body feels sore, the neck remains stiff, knees wobble, and shoulders and feet pain? The entire day is a torturous nightmare. Such individuals run to doctors, seeking a magical cure for the pestilence. Unless the problem is genetic or hereditary, humans get afflicted with such disorders because of a deficient lifestyle, stress accumulated over a period and poor dietary habits. The vertebra and our skeletal frame are an extremely important part of the human body, which we ignore at our peril.

Therefore, a healthy spine leads to a healthy life. Do we recall when a child begins to walk, the preliminary baby steps are raising his/her thumbs; this is called the 'Merudanda Mudra'. The vertebra consists of a series of small bones that form the backbone of the spine, having several projections for articulation and muscle attachment, and a hole through which the spinal cord passes. Office goers who for making a living are programmed to undertake a typical quotidian 9 to 5 routine, and several among them use computers for prolonged hours, or those professionals who are compelled to drive long distances to their places of work from their dwelling paces ought to necessarily know how to protect their backs, necks, and hand muscles.

These days people have become addicted to the usage of smartphones and are constantly fixated on texting messages on WhatsApp, watching various features ending up with stiff necks and sore fingers. Not only do these muscles need to be protected and fortified but the tissues should be sufficiently strengthened. Working men and women should be educated on how to deploy the correct activity posture while executing their professional tasks. Many homemakers at times develop severe middle



or lower back medical problems for a variety of reasons. Continuously undertaking repeated chores and even activities involving the handling of small or no weights, performed with an incorrect posture, damages tissues and muscles, which causes irreparable damage to the back and neck.

The afflicted suffer from infirmity for years together with pain and anguish. Awareness about the structure of the spine and adopting the right postures along with simple strengthening stretches significantly helps to avoid these misadventures in one's life. In the cases these problems assume the shape of chronic disorders the patient suffering can be guided through simple stretching exercises under the supervision of a physiotherapist or an orthopaedic. A special programme has been developed by the Art of Living to ameliorate the condition of those suffering from these debilitating health issues. Those suffering from spondylitis, frozen shoulder, middle and lower back problems, knee problems, and inter disc problems will immensely benefit upon undergoing the rehabilitation process and will certainly see visible dramatic changes in their lifestyle patterns and their daily routine. The programme encompasses the techniques mentioned below:

- Walk: For the alignment of vertebrae to open energy channels
- Posture Awareness and its correction
- Ergonomics
- Simple but powerful Stretches and Yoga – For inner surgical alignment of the spine to release the nerves that were being continually pressed
- Gait Training helps immensely
- Guided Meditation techniques to release accumulated stress
- In-depth knowledge of the spine
- Ancient wisdom and knowledge about acupressure points for overall well being "Total relaxation is the secret to enjoying sitting meditation. I sit with my spine upright, but not rigid; and I relax all the muscles in my body," writes Thich Nhat Hanh.

(The writer is the CEO of Chhattisgarh East Railway and is a faculty of the Art of Living. Views are personal)

GST cess extension: Is it Justified Beyond 2026?



UTTAM GUPTA

With loans likely to be repaid by January 2026, the question arises—can the continued levy of the cess be logically justified in light of buoyant tax collections



In its meeting held early this month, the GST Council had decided to set up a Group of Ministers (GoM) to suggest 'how to go about the GST compensation cess, which is levied on luxury, sin and demerit goods such as automobiles, aerated drinks and tobacco, after the loans taken to meet the shortfall in revenue of states during Covid-affected years are repaid. The GoM will be headed by Union Minister of State for Finance Pankaj Chaudhary and include members from states. The statement 'how to go together with reports suggesting that the GoM will be reworking the nomenclature for GST compensation cess points towards the intent of the GST Council to continue its levy even after the deadline of March 2026 when it is to be withdrawn as per the subsisting arrangement. The matter requires deeper examination. The key question is: Why should GST Cess be continued? In the follow-up to The Constitution (One Hundred and First Amendment) Act, 2016, which introduced the GST, the Union Government also introduced The GST Compensation Act, 2017. It provided for compensation to the States for five years (2017-18 to 2021-22) for the loss of revenue to be calculated as the difference between their actual collection (including transfer of their share in indirect tax collected by the Centre) and the amount they would have got with annual growth at 14 per cent over the 2015-16 level under the erstwhile dispensation (Central Excise Duty (CED)/service tax/sales tax/Value Added Tax (VAT) plus other local taxes).

To discharge this obligation, the Centre also passed an amendment to the GST Compensation Act (2018) to levy a cess on the so-called demerit goods (those which fall in the highest tax slab of 28 per cent – other slabs being five per cent, 12 per cent and 18 per cent besides the exempt category) such as automobiles, tobacco, drinks and so on with a proviso to use the proceeds for compensating States. The cess was to remain in force for five years in sync with the commitment to compensate States for that period.

The rationale behind keeping these arrangements in place for five years was that at the

end of this transition, i.e., June 30, 2022, the GST dispensation would have acquired the much-needed "vitality" and "resilience" to yield sufficient resources for the States to meet their budgetary requirements within a prudential limit set under the Fiscal Responsibility and Budget Management Act (FRBM) thereby obviating the need for any extra support beyond this deadline. However, even before the June 30, 2022 deadline arrived, the States had been clamouring for continuing the compensation beyond it. So, first, they requested the 15th Finance Commission to extend it for five years not realising that the mandate for this is with the GST Council. Thereafter, they started pestering the Central Government.

The States gave two reasons for their demand (i) they continued to face a shortfall in tax revenue and (ii) The - pandemic had severely impacted their revenue - both their tax collection as well as transfer from the Centre - pushing them behind the curve. We need to look at the factual position on the quantum of shortfall in tax revenue experienced by the States during those five years and the extent to which collections from the cess plugged it. From the time GST was introduced on July 1, 2017, till March 31, 2019, collections from the Cess exceeded the shortfall resulting in a surplus of about Rs 47,500 crore in the pool. However, the equation changed in the subsequent years. During 2019-20, the cess proceeds were Rs 95,000 crore against a shortfall in tax collection of Rs 165,000 crore resulting in a deficit of Rs 70,000 crore. Even after using the surplus from the previous two years, the unmet deficit carried forward to the next year was Rs 22,500 crore. During FY 2020-21, the shortfall in tax revenue zoomed to over Rs 300,000

crore; courtesy, of the devastating effect of Covid pandemic.

Against this, cess proceeds were only Rs 65,000 crore, leading to an unmet deficit of Rs 235,000 crore. During FY 2021-22 also, the collections in the Cesspool couldn't fully meet the shortfall in tax collection though the deficit was much less. To make up for the deficit, the Centre, in consultation with the Reserve Bank of India (RBI) set up a special window for borrowings at a "low" rate of interest and transferred the funds to states as back-to-back loans. Under this window, it borrowed a total of Rs 270,000 crore including Rs 110,000 crore during 2020-21 and Rs 160,000 crore during 2021-22. To generate the required money to repay the loan and interest, the GST Council decided to extend the cess till March 2026.

The necessary amendment was made to the GST Compensation Act (2018) to give effect to this decision. According to the Union Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman, the entire loan of Rs 270,000 crore would be fully serviced by January 2026, two months ahead of the March 31, 2026 deadline.

As per estimates, the collections from GST compensation cess in February and March 2026 are expected to be about Rs 40,000 crore. How this surplus money would be apportioned between the Centre and States is a task the GoM will have to carry out. The States want the GST compensation cess to continue even beyond March 31, 2026.

Naturally, its continuation can't be justified in terms of the need to service loan liabilities from the past; those would have already been extinguished before that. Do they have any logical argument? To say that they require more revenue to meet the development needs, as

reported, is plain rhetoric. Tax collection is far from being a constraint.

Only a couple of years ago, top officials in the Department of Revenue used to gloat over a collection of GST Rs 150,000 crore if achieved in any given month. Since, the beginning of FY 2022-23, monthly GST collections have been more than Rs 150,000 crore.

In fact, during FY 2023-24, the average monthly GST collection was even higher at Rs 168,000 crore. Therefore, Cess's continuation on the basis that there could be a shortfall in tax collection is untenable. The raison d'être behind giving the States a buffer (read: compensation) over a fairly long period of 5 years (2017 - 2022) was to ensure that they get adjusted to the new dispensation and are in a position to garner enough revenue thereby obviating the need for any further support.

At the end of this transition, it is only apt that the buffer should go. The buoyancy in GST collection since 2022-23 reinforces the case for withdrawal of compensation cess. Meanwhile, taxing petroleum products under GST has been pending for long. Currently, these are taxed under the pre-GST regime entailing a much higher level of levy. For instance, in Delhi, the taxes (central excise duty or CED plus VAT) account for about 80 per cent of the ex-refinery price of petrol. Taxing it under GST will result in lowering this to 28 per cent (even if it is put in the highest slab). This will end up reducing tax collection in the States by over one-third. To help them make up for this loss, the GST Council may consider extending the Compensation Cess with a sun-set rider of say five years.

(The writer is a policy analyst; views are personal)



THE BUOYANCY IN GST COLLECTION SINCE 2022-23 REINFORCES THE CASE FOR WITHDRAWAL OF COMPENSATION CESS. MEANWHILE, TAXING PETROLEUM PRODUCTS UNDER GST HAS BEEN PENDING FOR LONG

to meet the development needs, as

Nostalgia meets new age storytelling in India's diverse cinematic landscape

Beyond merely providing convenient access, OTT platforms have revived iconic shows and introduced regional cinema to the global audience

In recent years, the rise of over-the-top (OTT) platforms has dramatically transformed the way we consume entertainment. These platforms have revived classic content and introduced regional gems into mainstream media, offering a broad spectrum of India's diverse cinematic landscape to a global audience. Moreover, OTT has changed the way we socialize, becoming a central part of conversations, from casual chats to virtual gatherings.

Where once people exchanged pleasantries with questions like "Aur Batao" (What's up?), today, the perfect response is often about the latest series or film one is watching. Virtual watch parties have emerged as popular avenues for friends and families, separated by dis-



CHAITANYA K PRASAD

tance, to connect and share viewing experiences in real time. OTT platforms cater to diverse tastes, ensuring there's something for everyone. But what makes people subscribe to one OTT platform after another? The simple answer is content. OTT platforms have built vast libraries of classic shows and films, making iconic series easily accessible. Shows like "Malgudi Days", celebrated for its story-

telling and memorable music, and "Fauji", featuring Shah Rukh Khan's debut, are just a click away. This accessibility allows viewers to journey back in time, relive cherished moments, and introduce younger generations to timeless narratives that shaped Indian television during the Doordarshan era.

Contemporary creators are also blending nostalgia with new storytelling. Content like "Laapata Ladies", "Heeramandi", "Guns and Gulaabs", "Jubilee", "Bambai Meri Jaan", and "Rocket Boys" weave retro elements into engaging plots. These narratives are often set in simpler times, free of modern technology, offering viewers a respite from the chaos of the modern world. They transport audi-

ences to the past, making the stories richer and more captivating.

Take "Laapata Ladies", for instance. Set in the early 2000s, its storyline is centered around a lost bride, but what captivates viewers is its charming simplicity. Scenes featuring a tea stall on a forgotten railway station or a sketch of the bride being shared in the absence of digital photos transport viewers to a different era. Such moments invite the audience to reminisce about their own memories, perhaps recalling special moments from railway journeys or simpler times in their lives.

The use of cultural symbols—retro fashion, old advertisements, vintage phones, cars, and even homes—evokes a sense of nostalgia. Everyday



objects like tape recorders, old computers, and the way people socialized in the past contribute to the surreal experience of OTT content. It's a reminder of how far society has come, while also showcasing the beauty of the past. This emotional connection enriches the overall viewing experience and keeps viewers coming back for more.

OTT's appeal to nostalgia has also fueled the popularity of the "OTT and Chill" culture. A recent example is Manoj

Tiwari's rendition of the famous Bhojpuri Sohar "Hind Ke Sitare" for an OTT show, which became an internet sensation. The track went viral, with people of all ages singing along, demonstrating how content that resonates with simpler times can bring generations together.

In addition to revisiting the past, OTT platforms continuously release new content, often with extensive promotional efforts that make certain shows highly popular. Red carpet events for premieres, media coverage, and articles listing the "10 best OTT shows to watch" have all become part of the cultural zeitgeist. Even major events like the Indian Premier League (IPL) stream on OTT platforms, drawing massive audiences.

OTT also champions diverse talent. Independent filmmakers and regional storytellers, who might have been overlooked in traditional media, now have a platform to showcase their work to a global audience. This has led to the discovery of fresh voices and unique stories, breaking down geographical barriers. OTT's ability to feature content in multiple Indian languages has helped regional films and series gain national and international recognition.

According to a FICCI-EY report from 2023, regional content on OTT platforms overtook Hindi language content for the first time, with the share of regional language titles rising from 47% in 2021 to 52% in 2023. Stars like Mohanlal, Junior NTR, Vijay

Sethupathi, and Fahadh Faasil, once confined to regional industries, have now become household names across India, thanks to the reach of OTT. Films like "RRR" (Telugu), "Pushpa" (Telugu), "KGF" (Kannada), "Kantara" (Kannada), have found new audiences through OTT platforms. Actors like Vijay Sethupathi, who gained prominence in Tamil cinema, have become pan-Indian stars, appearing in films like "Jawan" and "Merry Christmas". This cross-cultural fusion, accelerated by the pandemic, reflects the growing demand for diverse content.

(The writer is former additional DG, DFF and Festival Director, IFFI. Research and Inputs by Priya Kamra, Views are personal)



THE MAGIC OF MILLETS

Millets are a super-food that can bring about a radical change in the health of the people. They can be an answer to malnutrition and an effective way to fight various ailments

BY DR AVULA LAXMAIAH

Millet is a superfood loaded with fiber, protein, essential vitamins, and minerals. One serving of this super grain can meet the daily requirements for several nutrients needed for optimum function of the brain and body. Millets also offer significant ecological benefits. Its ability to thrive in harsh, arid conditions with little maintenance makes it a viable crop option for countries with challenging climates. Furthermore, millets require less water than other crops making it an environment-friendly produce with a smaller carbon footprint. Cultivating it also decreases dependence on imported cereal grains and promotes sustainable agriculture practices, globally.

In a conference on Global Millets, Hon'ble Prime Minister Narendra Modi while referring to millets as Shree Ann, defined the super food as the core medium to address the nutritional concerns across different population segments as well as an ideal way for a nation to grow exponentially. Millets can collectively bring ample opportunity for the small farmers of the country to scale and offer benefits for a sustainable future.

The Government of India has been making tremendous efforts to revive the production and consumption of millets through Minimum Support Price (MSP) schemes that provide financial aid to farmers for cultivating millets, and the introduction of millets in the

IN A CONFERENCE ON GLOBAL MILLETS, HON'BLE PRIME MINISTER NARENDRA MODI WHILE REFERRING TO MILLETS AS SHREE ANN, DEFINED THE SUPER FOOD AS THE CORE MEDIUM TO ADDRESS THE NUTRITIONAL CONCERNS ACROSS DIFFERENT POPULATION SEGMENTS AS WELL AS AN IDEAL WAY FOR A NATION TO GROW EXPONENTIALLY

Public Distribution System (PDS) to make them accessible and affordable. This has led to India becoming the world's largest producer and second-largest exporter of millets, today. The nodal nutrition institute in India National Institute of Nutrition (NIN) and the Indian Institute of Millet Research (ICAR-IIMR), in their research studies, have established that millet consumption has a significant impact on health and nutrition.

Millet, thus, is being promoted as a means of addressing the challenges of malnourishment, which is most prevalent amongst women and children in our country. The government's initiative to add millet to the mid-day meal is a visionary approach to support the POSHAN Abhiyaan 2.0 mission and address the issue of malnutrition, particularly in children. Their food-on-table initiatives such as Take-Home Ration (THR) and Hot Cooked Meals (HCM) are gradually helping to overcome the nutritional imbalance among children, especially in ages 3-6 years.

ICMR-NIN has been actively contributing towards the government's initiatives to combat malnutrition by

providing supplementary foods, diversified diets, health check-ups, and community-based interventions. Despite significant efforts by the government and various stakeholders, the challenge of malnutrition remains complex and multifaceted, requiring innovative solutions. It is imperative that the private sector and civil society partner with the government on driving the mission to promote millets to address malnutrition concerns comprehensively.

The recent launch of multi-millet Nutri-bars for pre-school children by Anil Agarwal Foundation & Vedanta is one of the first such a unique nutrition program seen after the Union Budget. The organization has piloted a project to provide multi-millet bars to 50,000 children every day in anganwadis in Varanasi district for 6 months, thus aiming to improve the daily nutrient intake of children, boost

cognitive development, and reduce absenteeism while increasing enrolment in pre-schools.

To advance sustainable health with the power of millets, we need to continue taking a holistic approach that involves multiple stakeholders, including government, policymakers, farmers, food manufacturers, corporations, and consumers. Consumers need to be educated about the nutritional and ecological benefits of millet and encouraged to incorporate them into their diets thus creating a healthier and nourished India.

Quantified efforts are being observed by corporate to add millet-based products into their portfolio and introduce nutritious food products with millet as the core ingredient, to the community. This paradigm shift by corporate signifies a positive trend in nutrition delivery, reflecting their responsibility to contribute to the welfare of society.

We have an opportunity to transform the way we approach food, health, and nutrition. Growing and consuming ancient millets will be a key to addressing this transformation, enhancing human health, protecting the environment, and preserving cultural traditions, in times to come!

The writer is Former Scientist G & Head of Public Health Nutrition Division, ICMR-NIN



Training on the Well-being of Individuals with IDD (Intellectual and Developmental Disabilities)

TEAM VIVA

The Manbhavan Mitra Mandali, a Self-Advocacy Group of Manovikas Charitable Society on Saturday organised a training program to augment the well-being of individuals with intellectual and developmental disabilities (IDD).

The training included the individuals with conditions such as autism, intellectual disability, learning disability, and cerebral palsy. The training was mostly determined on promoting better well-being and empowering individuals with IDD to take charge of their health and happiness. Kaka, a South Asian football player and a 16-year-old with an intellectual disability, shared that the workshop helped him make a decision to improve his well-being. Kaka said, "This program helped me understand how important my well-being is." He further added that he learned about what makes him feel good and how to take care of himself better. Another attendee Deepika



who is currently undergoing Domestic Data Entry Skill Training at the Aryaman Center of Excellence (ACE Lab) in Delhi and a Governing Board Member of Manovikas shared how the program helped her open her eyes to discovering the new ways to well-being. She stated, "I learned simple things that I can do daily to feel better. These small steps make a big difference in my feelings, and I can do them independently." Harsh Bharadwaj, another boy who attended the training, also a talented arts and crafts artist from the Love Arts Training Lab, spoke about choosing well-being activities. He said, "Our activities made me

feel happy and calm." He further added that he knows what to do when he feels stressed or sad, and it helps him stay positive. The event saw the active participation of more than 25 adults with intellectual and developmental disabilities and their families. The training was also attended by the parents and family members of the participants where they were taught about the valuable strategies which will help them to support their loved ones in their well-being and encourage independence. The session also emphasised practical ways to enhance the mental, emotional, and physical well-being of people with IDD.

STUDY REVEALS WHY AGING IMPAIRS IMMUNE RESPONSE

Researchers discover metabolic changes that hinder disease treatment in the elderly says KUMAR CHELLAPPAN

There is hope for old-age people suffering from certain ailments from which they had no route to escape hitherto. All treatments had failed to resuscitate them from the octopus-like shackles of the disease. A team of medical and bio-engineering researchers in the University Of Miami Miller School Of Medicine Immunology in the US have found out the reasons behind old men failing to respond to any treatments for a series of diseases. Nay, they have not invented any medicine for such diseases but have made a landmark invention about the reason behind the failure of drugs to cure the medical problems faced by the veterans. A research paper published in Nature Communications, a widely followed scientific publication after peer review lists the reasons for the failure of medicines among old people. What makes the findings distinct is the part played by Dhananjay Suresh, a 20-year-old bio-medical engineer, and a key team member.

Dhananjay is waiting for admission to a leading medical school in the US for his MBBS course after the four-and-a-half-year-long B Tech course when he joined the team. Suresh is the son of India-born medical microbiologist couple Dr. Suresh Pallikuthu and Dr Ranjini Valiathan. The researchers led by Dr. Daniela Frasca, principal investigator and associate professor of microbiology and immunology, have successfully proved for the first time in medical history that the aged fails to respond to medicines because of the "inability of immune cells to generate protective immunity". The metabolic abnormalities in immune cells lead to a reduced ability to generate protective immunity, according to Dr Frasca. Her team identified metabolic changes that decrease the body's



immunity as people age. Dr Frasca explained that aging is associated with elevated levels of inflammation and metabolic changes. "We have identified and characterized age-associated metabolic changes that may accelerate and exacerbate deficiencies in immune cells from older adults, particularly those responsible for diminished secretion of protective antibodies against infections and vaccines. The research team also pinpointed the role a metabolic compound - long thought to be inessential - plays in immunity. Contrary to accepted wisdom, lactate can induce pathogenic B lymphocyte behavior and increase bodily inflammation. "The metabolite lactate, the end product of anaerobic glycolysis, which has long been considered a discarded metabolic compound, plays a crucial role in age-associated defects in dysfunctional humoral responses," Dr. Frasca



DHANANJAY SURESH

said. "The effects of lactate, as described in the paper, recapitulate key features of B lymphocytes that infiltrate inflammatory tissues, where lactate-induced signaling may contribute to various pathological features." Lactate can induce pathogenic B lymphocyte behavior and increase bodily inflammation. With the script ready, medical doctors can step in and start a new

therapy that will spur helpful immune responses in the elderly and keep the diseases at bay. Now, it is for medical doctors to shape new therapies that selectively target metabolic products involved in the generation of inflammatory pathogenic immune cells to improve antibody responses in elderly individuals who are susceptible to infections and/or do not respond adequately to vaccination. If the initial response from the world of medicine is any indication, this landmark research will go a long way in helping the aged to remain healthy and guarded against any kind of immune deficiency. In Ayurveda, the Indian system of medicine, there is a treatment that reverses the effects of time and regenerates the entire body, mind, and spirit. It is known as Kaya Kalpa. Is Kaya Kalpa getting Americanized and reappearing as a Metabolic Regeneration Study? Let's wait.

INDIA TRUMPS BANGLADESH WITH ASHWIN'S SIX WICKETS

PTI ■ CHENNAI

Veteran off-spinner Ravichandran Ashwin's mastery over his craft, underlined by a six-wicket haul, proved too immense for Bangladesh as India cantered to a massive 280-run victory in the first Test with five sessions to spare, here on Sunday. Maintaining a clean slate against the Asian neighbours, India now lead the two-match series 1-0. Starting from their overnight 158 for four, Bangladesh were bundled out for 234 in their second innings as Ashwin scythed through their line-up (6/88). Ravindra Jadeja supported him with a three-wicket haul (3/58). Skipper Najmul Hossain Shanto waged a lone battle for

the visitors with a sparkling 82 (127b, 8x4, 3x6), but there was hardly any meaningful support for him from his colleagues. The day, however, began on a bright note for the Bangladeshis with Shanto and Shakib Al-Hasan (25) extending their fifth-wicket stand to 48 runs, resisting the Indian bowlers in the first hour. Mohammed Siraj was the standout bowler for India during this phase as he worked up good pace and hit fine lines, but luck was not in his favour as edges eluded him or fell short of fielders. It left the pacer a frustrated man, evidenced in his constant tirade against Shanto, who remained unruffled. Shakib, who played a lovely front foot pull off Siraj for a



Jadeja when the batter was on a boundary, also received a reprieve as Rishabh Pant missed a stumping chance off Jadeja when the batter was on 17. At the first drinks break of the day, Bangladesh were 194 for four and they might have hoped to further stretch the

wicket haul, equalling Australian legend Shane Warne, nipping te stay of Mehidy Hasan Miraz (8), who lobbed a catch to Jadeja at the long-on. In the process, Ashwin also went past New Zealand legend Richard Hadlee's five-wicket haul tally - 36. It was also the fourth time the veteran all-rounder took five-wicket or more in a Test match alongside a hundred. Jadeja, the long-time second fiddle to Ashwin, too had his own moments as he scalped the wickets of Shanto and Litton Das, who edged the left-arm spinner to Rohit Sharma at first slip. However, Shanto's batting will give a speck of hope for Bangladesh ahead of the next match for the visitors. While the wickets were on a constant tumble at the other

end, Shanto batted calmly and with purpose. The left-hander swept, reverse swept and cut spinners and pacers to collect his runs from all corners of Chappauk. But the task was way beyond such a one-man show on this day. Given his cavalier methods at the crease, the dismissal was inevitable and it came in the 59th over. Shanto tried to hoist Jadeja out of the park, but the shot lacked power and timing, and Jasprit Bumrah comfortably settled under the ball near mid-wicket. The dismissal also ended Bangladesh's hopes to last at least beyond the first session, and now they will have to think of ways to regroup ahead of the second Test at Kanpur, beginning September 27.

Bumrah, Pant's fitness and form crucial for India's chances in Australia says Chappell

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

Pace spearhead Jasprit Bumrah and flamboyant wicketkeeper-batter Rishabh Pant must remain injury-free and in top form if India are to achieve a historic hat-trick of series wins Down Under, said former Australia captain Ian Chappell. One of the most respected voices in world cricket, Chappell feels that five Test matches, including three against New Zealand, is just the ideal build up that Indian team needed before the most high-profile bilateral series in this cycle of the World Test Championship.



"India's priority will be to get as many players as possible into form without suffering major injuries. However, the most pressing matters are to achieve those aims with Jasprit Bumrah and Rishabh Pant," Chappell wrote in his column for ESPN Cricinfo. "Pant's ability to bounce back onto the Test scene is quite remarkable given his horrific car accident. He is a crucial wicketkeeper-batter in the Indian line-up and he'd give the team a major boost if he's at the peak of his powers for the Australian tour." Pant was the hero of India's last series win in 2020-21 when he scored 97 at Sydney

in a match-saving effort, while his 89 not out at the Gabba in the decider is now part of Indian cricketing folklore. One of the most astute readers of the game, Chappell explained why Pant's keeping will also be key to India's fortunes on bouncy tracks. "If Pant can perform at his best, he's the ideal keeper for Australian conditions. If he's able to continue with his agile performance standing back, that is what is required in Australia. You need a keeper who capably covers a lot of territory to both sides of the wicket. Any keeper who fulfils those requirements not only

improves the team's fielding but also allows the slip fielders to spread wider to cover extra territory," he elaborated. Chappell believes that a stern warning from erstwhile head coach Ravi Shastri during his time at the helm might have helped Pant in raising the level of his glove work. "Pant's keeping standing up to the stumps drastically improved before his serious injury, following an ultimatum from coach Ravi Shastri. The fact that Pant progressed from being a dubious keeper against spinners to a very good gloveman standing up to the stumps, admirably displayed

Bumrah is the attack leader. "A critical part of India's build-up to the Australian tour will be ensuring Bumrah is in form but remains fit to play the bulk of the five Tests." He also cited how during his captaincy years, his lethal weapon Dennis Lillee would always want to play as many games when he was in form rather than being wrapped in "cotton wool". Chappell also hoped that Mohammed Shami can get fit by the time series starts. "It would be ideal if the mercurial Mohammed Shami is fit for Australia but the presence of a good left-arm paceman would also improve India's variety in attack. The spin bowling is in good hands with Jadeja and Ashwin. Nevertheless I wouldn't discount the importance of Kuldeep Yadav on some Australian surfaces." For Chappell, Yashasvi Jaiswal has had a good start to his Test career but Australian tracks will demand different temperament from the Mumbai left-hander. "Of the young batters Yashasvi Jaiswal looks very talented but he needs to show good form in Australia. Both Rohit Sharma and Virat Kohli should act as guiding lights for the younger batters on tour," Chappell wrote.



Indonesia Para-Badminton: Umesh clinches gold; Sukant, Sivarajan, Mandeep claim silver

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

Umesh Vikram secured gold in the SL3 event, while the trio of Sukant Kadam, Sivarajan Solaimalai, and Mandeep Kaur claimed silver medals in their respective categories at the Indonesia Para-Badminton International on Sunday. Sukant bagged the silver in the men's singles SL4 event, while Sivarajan won the silver in men's singles SH6 category. Mandeep clinched the silver in women's singles SL3 category. India delivered a stellar performance in Sarakarta, Indonesia, winning as many as 34 medals in the International Level 2 tournament. In men's singles SL3, Umesh triumphed over compatriot and top seed Nehal Gupta, winning 12-21 21-8 21-19 in the final. Sukant, who had missed out on a bronze medal in Paris after losing to Indonesia's Fredy Setiawan in the play-off, fell short again in the SL4 final, losing 14-21 14-21 to the Indonesian. "I gave my best in the final, but Fredy played an exceptional game," Sukant said. "It was a great learning experience, and I'll keep pushing to aim for gold in future competitions." Sivarajan, who had lost to Great Britain's Krysten Coombs in Paris, faced a tough challenge from top-seeded Indonesian Subhan in the SH6 final, ultimately losing 19-21 15-21.

Mandeep, who had suffered a defeat to Nigeria's Mariam Eniola Bolaji in Paris, also finished with silver after losing 10-21 5-21 to Indonesia's top seed Qonitah Ikhtiar Syakuroh in the SL3 final. Despite the silver medal finishes, the Indian contingent's overall performance was strong, with Umesh claiming the lone gold in singles. Jagadeh Dilli added to India's success by securing bronze in the same category, making it a sweep for India with seven players reaching the quarterfinals. In women's singles SL3, Mandeep's silver was complemented by Neeraj's bronze. In the men's singles SH6 category, Sudarsan Saravanakumar Muthusamy also earned bronze, while Sivarajan secured silver. Naveen Sivakumar won bronze in men's singles SL4 category, while Ruthick Ragupathi claimed silver in the men's singles SU5. Koshika Devda secured bronze in the women's singles SU5. In the mixed doubles SL3-SL4 category, Nehal and Naveen Sivakumar earned silver, while Umesh and Surya, along with Harshit and Kartik, claimed bronze. The men's doubles SU5 saw Hardik Makkar and Ruthick Ragupathi claim gold. In the women's wheelchair WH1 category, Pallavi Kuluvehalli secured gold, with Prema Vishwas and Anusha Chidananda taking bronze. Alpha James

clinched gold in the women's singles WH2 category, and Shabana took home bronze. The mixed doubles WH1-WH2 category saw Poorna Rao and Munna Khalid win bronze. In the men's WH1 category, Prem Kumar Ale secured bronze, while Neeraj and Arati Patil, along with Vaishali Nilesh and Germany's Irina Whalers, claimed bronze in the women's doubles SL3-SU5 category. Additionally, Alpha James and Pallavi Kuluvehalli, along with Anusha Chidananda and Shabana won bronze in the women's doubles WH1-WH2 category. Mohun Bagan Super Giant seeks first win of season in match against NorthEast United Kolkata, Sep 22 (PTI) Mohun Bagan Super Giant will aim to grab their first win of the season when they clash against NorthEast United in their second home game of the Indian Super League 2024-25 season here on Monday. The Mariners had shared the spoils with Mumbai City FC in their opening match. NorthEast United, meanwhile, earned a win in their first game, courtesy a late goal by Alaeddine Ajaraie against debutants Mohammedan Sporting. They will now take on the Mariners whom they defeated a few weeks back in the Durand Cup 2024 final and will be upbeat to land their third successive win in Kolkata.

Super sub Vinicius leads to Real Madrid comeback win over Espanyol

AP ■ BARCELONA

Joan Garcia showed why he is an up-and-coming goalkeeper - until Vinicius Junior got the Real Madrid scoring machine going. Vinicius went off the bench to assist Rodrygo and score one of his own and Kylian Mbappé added a late penalty as Madrid topped a tenacious Espanyol 4-1 in the Spanish league on Saturday. Garcia made several saves for the visitors before the Olympic gold medalist started an attack with a long pass from his box that ended with an own goal by counterpart Thibaut Courtois in the 54th minute. But Garcia's only slip of the match let Dani Carvajal equalize four minutes later when Jude Bellingham's low pass squirmed under the goalie. The Madrid right back had to only push it over the line for 1-1. Vinicius rested in the first half as Carlo Ancelotti rotated his attacking bunch. But the coach sent the Brazil forward on immediately after Espanyol went ahead. Vinicius then took control, curling in a perfect cross with the outer tip of his left boot for Rodrygo to score in the 75th. Vinicius beat Garcia in the 78th for his goal after



Espanyol lost the ball and Mbappé played his attack partner clear on the break. Mbappé converted a 90th-minute spot kick after Endrick went on late and earned a penalty from Carlos Romero. "We made mistakes that maybe you can get away with in other games, but not here," Espanyol coach Manolo González said. Madrid pulled to one point behind leader Barcelona behind it plays at Villarreal on Sunday.

Bellingham had a scare when he fell awkwardly on his right shoulder in the first half, but after briefly being seen by a doctor on the sideline he went back on. Ancelotti said it did not look like the England midfielder was fine. Unsurprisingly, Ancelotti said he was satisfied with the "well-rounded" performance. Garcia in goal After helping Spain win Olympic gold this summer, Garcia was rumored to have been close to a move to Arsenal before finally staying put at the club

he helped return to Spain's top flight last season. And he showed his quality at the Santiago Bernabeu. Garcia made at least eight saves before he turned playmaker with a booming kick from his box that launched Jofre Carreras down the left flank. Jofre won the end line before his low pass hit Courtois' leg and turned into the net. But once Madrid started clicking, even an inspired Garcia couldn't keep them out.

Double deflection Two similar goals within three minutes of one another lifted Valencia to a 2-0 win over Girona at home. A pair of shots by Luis Rioja and Dani Gómez in the 56th and 58th both took deflections off Girona defender Juanpe Ramirez before skirting past goalkeeper Paulo Gazzaniga. Gazzaniga was to blame for Girona's loss at Paris Saint-Germain midweek in the Catalan club's Champions League debut. The goalie let a cross slip through his hands in stoppage time in a 1-0 loss in France. Can't get going Real Sociedad's surprising struggles continued after a scoreless draw at promoted Valladolid. The team from San Sebastian, which has consistently finished near the top of the table in recent years, has only one victory in seven rounds. Sociedad visits Nice when the Europa League group stage opens next week. Also, Ante Budimir earned and converted a penalty and Aimar Oroz took the winner as Osasuna beat Las Palmas 2-1 at home. The team from the Canary Islands remained in last place and without a win.

Arshdeep takes six in India D's consolation win

PTI ■ ANANTAPUR

Arshdeep Singh saved his best for the last game and returned career-best figures of 6 for 40 as India D thrashed India B by 257 runs to end their Duleep Trophy campaign with a consolation victory here on Sunday. Earlier, India D, who started the final day's play at 244 for 5, ended their second innings at 305, leaving India B with a target of 373 in little over 70 overs. Arshdeep and Aditya Thakare (4/59) then bowled unchanged for 22.2 overs to bundle out Abhimanyu Easwaran's team for a lowly 115. Arshdeep also recorded his best match figures of 9 for 90, with the distinction of getting out India's T20 skipper Suryakumar Yadav (16) twice in the same game. India B skipper Easwaran once again failed to deliver when it mattered in the larger context as Arshdeep had him caught by Akash Gupta for 19. Thanks to Nitish Reddy, who swung his bat around for a quickfire 40 off 43 balls, India B managed to cross 100. Eight India B batters failed to log double digit score. India B thus ended the campaign with seven points from three games, having won

their opening match and then getting a point after conceding the first-innings lead. India D, who had lost the first two games outright, will finish last despite logging full six points. Arshdeep, who got pipped by Yash Dayal into the Test squad as the first-choice left-arm pacer, certainly made an impression as he got to move the ball away from the right-handers and bowled the ideal length to trouble the top-order. At the start of the day, Ricky Bhui (119) duly completed his second ton of the tournament and remained not out, having faced only 125 balls. He hit 15 fours and three maximums in the process. In the morning, India D batted for 14.3 overs to add another 61 runs to their total as Bhui scored his second successive hundred. With scores of 56 and 119, the former India U-19 skipper was named Player of the Match. Brief Scores: India D 349 and 305 in 58.3 overs (Ricky Bhui 119, Shreyas Iyer 50, Mukesh Kumar 4/98, Navdeep Saini 3/58). India B 282 and (target 373) 115 in 22.2 overs (Arshdeep Singh 6/40). India D won by 257 runs. Points: India D 6 India B.