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ANRF: A CATALYST FOR INDIA'S R&D

WORLD 8

DISSANAYAKE SWORN IN AS LANKA'S NEW PRESIDENT

MONEY 10

MASSIVE MONEY LOSSES FOR 75 LAKH INDIVIDUAL F&O TRADERS SAYS SEBI

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11 SPORTS



Delhi CM places empty chair next to hers to honour Kejriwal

STAFF REPORTER ■ NEW DELHI

Am Aadmi Party (AAP) leader Atishi on Monday assumed the role of Delhi's eighth Chief Minister and placed an empty chair next to her own in honour of party convener Arvind Kejriwal. Atishi chose to sit on a different chair than the one used by Kejriwal. Drawing a parallel with Bharat's role during Lord Rama's exile, she pledged to lead the Government for the next four months saying "this is the Chief Minister's seat and it will remain empty till Kejriwal becomes Chief Minister again."

Atishi also posted on 'X' handle (erstwhile Twitter): "Today I have taken over as the Chief Minister of Delhi. Today I have the same pain in my heart as Lord Bharat had when his elder brother Lord Shri Ram went on a 14-year exile, and Bharat had to take over the governance of Ayodhya. Just

like Bharat ruled Ayodhya by keeping Lord Shri Ram's sandals for 14 years, I will run the Government of Delhi for four months." The newly appointed Chief Minister said that just as Bharat placed Lord Rama's 'khadaun' (sandals) on the throne, she would lead the Delhi Government for the next four months. Meanwhile, the BJP objected the AAP leaders who are associating themselves with Lord Shri Ram, Laxman and Bharat. BJP IT Cell head Amit Malviya took aim at Delhi Chief Minister Atishi, accusing her of political theatrics. South Delhi MP Ramvir Singh Bidhuri said this is an insult to the sentiments of crores of Hindus and AAP leaders should refrain from such acts and should apologise to the public for this sin.

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SC URGES PARLIAMENT FOR AMENDMENT

WATCHING, DOWNLOADING CHILD PORNOGRAPHY OFFENCE UNDER POCSO

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

Quashing the Madras High Court order, the Supreme Court on Monday held that watching and downloading child pornography are offences under the POCSO Act and the information technology law. SC suggested Parliament to consider amending the term 'child pornography' with "child sexually abusive and exploitative material" by bringing changes in law, and asked the courts not to use the term 'child pornography'. The bench comprising Chief Justice DY Chandrachud, Justices JB Pardiwala and Manoj Misra set aside the Madras High Court ruling that had said mere downloading and watching child pornography was not an offence under the Protection of Children from Sexual Offences (POCSO) Act and Information Technology (IT) Act. The bench also laid down certain guidelines on child pornography and its legal consequences.



child pornography can be referred to as 'child sexually abusive and exploitative material'. We have suggested an Ordinance can be brought in," it said. Justice Pardiwala, who penned a 200-page verdict for the bench, said laws must be robust and strictly enforced to ensure that perpetrators are brought to justice and that children are protected from further harm. "It is important to recognise that each case of what is traditionally termed 'child pornography' involves the actual abuse of a child. The use of the term 'child pornography' can lead to a trivialisation of the crime, as pornography is often seen as a consensual act between adults," the bench said.

On January 11, the High Court had quashed the criminal proceedings against a 28-year-old man charged with downloading pornographic content involving children on his mobile phone. While pronouncing the verdict, the Supreme Court restored the criminal proceedings in the case saying the High Court had erred in quashing it. The bench said the Sessions Court will now deal with the case afresh. Terming the High Court ruling atrocious, the Supreme Court had earlier agreed to hear the plea challenging the High Court ruling that had said mere downloading and watching child pornography was not an offence under the Protection of Children from

Sexual Offences (POCSO) Act and Information Technology (IT) Act. The High Court had also said that children these days were grappling with the serious issue of watching pornography and instead of punishing them, the society must be "mature enough" to educate them. "We direct the Registry to send one copy each of this judgment to the Principal Secretary, Ministry of Law & Justice, Union of India and to the Principal Secretary, Ministry of Women and Child Development, Union of India, for undertaking appropriate course of action," said the judgment. The Supreme Court had taken note of the arguments made in the matter by senior advocate

HS 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. Madras High Court had said 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. 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, said the High Court, by quashing the criminal case. The High Court had advised the petitioner to attend counselling if he was still afflicted with the addiction of watching pornography.

PM Modi meets global leaders in New York

PTI ■ NEW YORK

Prime Minister Narendra Modi held separate talks with world leaders, including his Nepalese counterpart KP Sharma Oli and Palestinian President Mahmoud Abbas, discussing various facets of bilateral ties and reaffirming India's support for the Palestinian people. Modi is in New York on the second leg of his three-day US visit and met the leaders on the sidelines of the UN General Assembly session. "Had a very good meeting with Prime Minister KP Oli in New York. The India-Nepal friendship is very robust and we look forward to adding even more momentum to our ties. Our talks focused on issues such as energy, technology and trade," Modi said in a post on X. "Deepening the warm and close friendship. PM @narendramodi met PM @kpharmaoli of Nepal, on the sidelines of the UNGA today," the official account of the Ministry of External Affairs said in a post on X. "The two leaders discussed matters of mutual interest to strengthen cooperation in all areas of age-old, multi-faceted and expanding partnership," it added. Oli is in the US on his maiden foreign visit to attend the 79th Session of the UNGA, breaking the tradition of visiting a neighbouring country first.



"Had a fruitful meeting with the Prime Minister of India Shri @narendramodi ji on the sidelines of #UNGA79. During the meeting, various matters of bilateral relations were discussed," Oli said in a post on X. Modi also accepted Nepal PM Oli's invitation to visit the Himalayan nation. Nepal Foreign Minister Arzu Rana Deuba's press advisor also confirmed that PM Modi accepted Nepal's invitation. Modi met with Palestine's President Abbas and reiterated India's support for the Palestinian people. "PM @narendramodi met H.E. Mahmoud Abbas, President of Palestine, on the sidelines of UNGA today," the MEA said in an X post. "PM expressed deep concern at the humanitarian situation

in Gaza and reaffirmed India's continued support to the people of Palestine," it said. Modi also met Kuwait's Crown Prince Sheikh Sabah Khalid Al Sabah and discussed ways to deepen "historical linkages" and "people-to-people contacts". "Taking new strides in India-Kuwait ties. PM @narendramodi met HH Sheikh Sabah Khaled Al-Hamad Al-Mubarak Al-Sabah, Crown Prince of the State of Kuwait today, on the sidelines of UNGA. The leaders reviewed - bilateral relations and discussed ways to further strengthen our historical linkages and strong people to people contacts," the MEA said in a separate post on X.

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Tirupati sanctified by Temple priests

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI/ TIRUPATI

A four-hour Shanti Homam (ritualistic sanitisation) to undo the alleged desecrations that occurred during the YSRCP regime at Tirumala temple is underway now, temple sources said on Monday. A Tirumala Tirupati Devasthanams (TTD) source confirmed that the ritual began at 6 am and will last till about 10 am, aimed at propitiating Lord Venkateswara Swamy from the alleged sacrilegious practices such as mixing animal fats in making Tirupati laddus (consecrated sweet) and others. TTD executive officer J Shyamala Rao on Sunday said these rituals will ward off the ill effects and restore the



A priest performs the purification ritual at Tirupati Temple, Monday

sanctity of laddu prasadam (consecrated food) along with the well-being of Srivari devotees. Meanwhile Union Health Ministry has issued a show cause notice to the Tamil Nadu-based AR Dairy Food

Private Limited, one of the suppliers of ghee to the famous Tirupati temple in Andhra Pradesh, following allegations of substandard ingredients in the famous laddus.

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Parties set for second phase polls in J and K



Leader of Opposition in Lok Sabha and Congress leader Rahul Gandhi with J and K National Conference President Farooq Abdullah during an election meeting at Surankote, in Poonch district, Monday

MOHIT KANDHARI ■ JAMMU

The stage is set for the second round of polling in 26 Assembly segments spread across six district headquarters of Jammu and Kashmir amid tight security

arrangements on Wednesday. The fate of 239 candidates including former Chief Minister Omar Abdullah, J and K BJP Chief Ravinder Raina, and JKPC Chief Tariq Hamid Karra will be decided by over 25.78 lakh voters.

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Anura Kumara Disسانayake takes oath as Sri Lanka's new president during a ceremony, in Colombo, Monday

Lebanon says Israeli strikes kill 100 people

AP ■ JERUSALEM

The Israeli military said it struck 300 targets Monday in Lebanon in one of the most intense barrages of airstrikes in nearly a year of fighting against the Hezbollah militant group. The Lebanese Health Ministry said 100 people were killed and more than 400 wounded in what would be the deadliest day in Lebanon since the conflict started in October. Before the escalation beginning with the wave of pager explosions last Tuesday, around 600 people had been killed in Lebanon since October, mostly fighters, but also more than 100 civilians. The Israeli army announced the action on social media, posting a photo of what is said was the military chief, Lt Gen Herzl Halevi, approving additional attacks from military headquarters in Tel Aviv. Halevi and other Israeli leaders have promised tougher action against Hezbollah in the coming days. Hezbollah said in a statement that it fired dozens of rockets at an Israeli military post in Galilee. It also targeted for a second day the facilities of the Rafael defence firm, headquartered in Haifa. As Israel carried out the attacks, Israeli authorities reported a series of air-raid sirens in northern Israel warning of incoming rocket fire from Lebanon.

India's Laapataa Ladies en route to Oscars

SAKSHI PRIYA ■ NEW DELHI

From the dusty streets of Madhya Pradesh to the glitzy red carpet of the Dolby Theatre in Hollywood, 'Laapataa Ladies' is on an incredible journey. The Kiran Rao film is making waves worldwide and is now vying for an Oscar in the 'Best Foreign Film' category. This light-hearted satire on patriarchy combines humour with poignant social commentary, showcasing the resilience and empowerment of women in a male-dominated society. Chosen from a competitive list of 29 films, 'Laapataa Ladies' reflects

the depth and variety of contemporary Indian storytelling. The selection was unanimously made by a 13-member committee, led by esteemed Assamese director Jeeenu Barua. 'Laapataa Ladies' captures the essence of small-town India with humour, heart and a unique lens on gender dynamics. Set against a rural backdrop, the film's appeal lies in its honest portrayal of women caught in a web of societal expectations and their search for identity amidst chaos. Its characters, while quirky and flawed, resonate deeply with the audience as they navigate the limitations

imposed on them by tradition and patriarchy. With relatable performances and a narrative that balances light heartedness with poignant moments, 'Laapataa Ladies' offers a fresh take on the complexities of womanhood in modern India. Rao's film stands out not only for its engaging storyline but also for its ability to spark meaningful conversations about identity and gender. Set in rural India, 'Laapataa Ladies' follows two brides, Phool Kumari and Jaya, who accidentally swap places during a train journey due to their 'ghoonghat' or veil. The film explores women's



identity crises and societal apathy towards them. Premiering at the Toronto International Film Festival in 2023, it garnered positive reviews from critics and audiences alike. This international exposure has

laid a solid foundation for its Oscar campaign, positioning it as a compelling contender for global recognition. Backed by Jio Studios, Aamir Khan Productions and Kindling Pictures, the film is currently streaming on Netflix, further

broadening its reach. Featuring a talented cast, including Pratibha Ranta (Jaya), Nitanshi Goel (Phool Kumari), Sparsh Shrivastava (Deepak Kumar), Satendra Soni (Chhotu), Chhaya Kadam (Manju Maa) and the charismatic Ravi Kishan (Shyam Manohar) as a police officer, each actor delivers stellar performances that bring their characters to life with authenticity. Rao, returning to direction after a 13-year hiatus, has crafted a narrative that resonates deeply with viewers. Her role as a female director is particularly significant in an industry often dominated by

men and highlights the significance of diverse voices in storytelling. By depicting the female characters' journey toward empowerment; she highlights the ongoing struggle of women in a patriarchal society. Each step they take represents a test, where only their determination can propel them forward on the path to emancipation. Expressing her gratitude, Rao stated, "This honour is a testament to the tireless work of my entire team, whose dedication brought this story to life." The film's selection for the Oscars is particularly significant, marking a

potential return to prominence for Indian films on the international stage. Since Lagaan's nomination in 2002, Indian entries have struggled to make an impact at the Academy Awards. After 22 years, 'Laapataa Ladies' aims to break this trend, symbolising the evolving landscape of Indian storytelling and the growing recognition of films that balance social messages with entertainment. At a time when cinema can inspire change, 'Laapataa Ladies' stands as a beacon of hope, showcasing the resilience and strength of women.

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Our disunity led to destruction of Ram temple by invaders: Yogi

PNS ■ MIRZAPUR/LUCKNOW

Uttar Pradesh Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath on Monday said that it was disunity which led to the "invaders destroying the Ram temple" in Ayodhya. On Monday, Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath inaugurated and laid the foundation for 127 development projects worth Rs 765 crore in Gopalpur, Vikashkhanda Pahadi, Mirzapur. Speaking on the occasion, the chief minister said, "Ayodhya Dham is now flourishing. The grand temple of Lord Ram Lalla has been built, but we must ask why we had to wait 500 years for this moment. Why did invaders destroy the magnificent temple of Lord Ram Lalla and impose a structure symbolising slavery?" The answer lies in our disunity, he said. "Hum bate the, toh kate the" (when divided, we get cut up)," he said, referring to the Ram Janmabhoomi dispute and urging people to stay united and move forward together

in an atmosphere of development and security. The double-engine government is committed to standing by the common people through every joy and sorrow, working diligently to improve the present and create a brighter future, the chief minister stressed. During the event, more than 1,500 youths were given smartphones and tablets under the Swami Vivekananda Yuva Sashaktikaran Yojana. The chief minister also presented a cheque of approximately Rs 4 crore as the first instalment for the establishment of a fish feed plant. He also honoured the beneficiaries of various schemes and launched the Vidya Shakti portal with the press of a button. Yogi Adityanath said, "Before 2017, the mafia operated (in UP) like a parallel government, dominating mining, cattle trade, organised crime, and land-grabbing. When their convoys passed, public representatives were filled with fear,



and the administration yielded to them. Nobody dared to confront the mafia." He noted that today, those same criminals were pleading for mercy and were willing to make an honest living by setting up small stalls. "They no

longer instill fear in anyone. Now, no one dares to threaten the safety of our daughters, exploit traders, or seize farmers' land or demolish the homes of the poor," the chief minister asserted. Hitting out at the opposition,

the chief minister said, "Those who shamelessly played the caste card used to grovel before the mafia, dangerous criminals, and rioters. Now, as the state makes rapid strides in development, these same people seek to act as obstacles

again. By doing so, they are not only endangering the present but also jeopardising the future of coming generations. We must not allow the mafia to rise again." The chief minister further said that 10 years ago, Mirzapur district suffered from poor connectivity, and the underprivileged were deprived of government schemes but the district had witnessed huge transformation, especially in the last seven-and-a-half years. He said Mirzapur now had a medical college, unlike previous times when people had to rely on the facilities in Banaras Hindu university and Prayagraj for quality healthcare. "A university in the name of Maa Vindhyavasini is also set to be established, with courses starting in the upcoming academic session. The district is now well-connected with four-lane roads," he added. Speaking about the Barh Sagar project, Chief Minister Yogi recalled Prime Minister

Narendra Modi's announcement during its inauguration, that two-and-a-half lakh hectares of land would receive irrigation facilities. Addressing the drinking water crisis in the Vindhya region was another challenge which was addressed, he added. He said the 'Har Ghar Jal' scheme under the Jal Jeevan Mission was a testament to the prime minister's vision and once fully implemented, it would not only resolve the issue of clean drinking water, but also help cure many water-borne diseases. He added that admissions had already started at the Sonbhadra medical college, and nursing courses would soon begin at Mirzapur medical college, ensuring that daughters from the region would no longer need to go elsewhere for education, with a guarantee of 100 per cent placement. CM Yogi said many people in Mirzapur were previously excluded from government

schemes, but the current administration had made efforts to include tribes like the Kol, Chero, Gaur, and Tharu living in the Nepal border areas in various welfare programs, he further pointed out. The chief minister said two crore youths in UP were being provided with smartphones and tablets and by leveraging these technical skills, they could contribute to the nation's growth and help India on its path to becoming a five-trillion dollar economy. He also highlighted an upcoming exhibition at the Expo Mart in Greater Noida from September 25 to 29, in which artisans and craftsmen will have the opportunity to showcase their work and secure new orders. He said the event would also feature carpets from Mirzapur and Bhadohi, and added, "Exporting these goods could bring substantial profits, and as capital flows into the region, it will drive development in Mirzapur, Bhadohi, and Sonbhadra."

Karnataka HC to pronounce verdict on Tuesday on CM's plea

PTI ■ BENGALURU

The Karnataka High Court on Tuesday will pronounce its order on Chief Minister Siddaramaiah's petition challenging the legality of Governor Thaaarachand Gehlot's approval for investigation against him in the Mysuru Urban Development Authority (MUDA) site allotment case. The High Court on September 12 completed its hearing in the case, and reserved its orders, while extending its August 19 interim order directing the special court for people's representatives that was slated to hear complaints against him in the case, to defer its proceedings till the disposal of the petition. The case is listed for pronouncement of order before the single judge bench of Justice M Nagaprasanna on Tuesday. The Governor on August 16 accorded sanction under Section 17A of the Prevention of Corruption Act, 1988 and Section 218 of the Bharatiya Nagarik Suraksha Sanhita, 2023 for the commission of the alleged offences as mentioned in the petitions submitted to him by complainants Pradeep Kumar S P, T J Abraham and Snehamayi Krishna. On August 19, Siddaramaiah moved the High Court challenging the legality of the Governor's order. In the petition, the Chief



Minister submitted that the sanction order was issued without due application of mind, in violation of statutory mandates, and contrary to constitutional principles, including the advice of the Council of Ministers, which is binding under Article 163 of the Constitution of India. Siddaramaiah sought quashing of the Governor's order contending that his decision is legally unsustainable, procedurally flawed, and motivated by extraneous considerations. While noted lawyer Abhishek Manu Singhvi and Prof. Ravivarma Kumar had appeared for Siddaramaiah, Solicitor-General of India Tushar Mehta represented the office of the Governor. Advocate General Shashi Kiran Shetty also made his submissions. Senior Advocates Maninder Singh, Prabhuling K Navadgi, Lakshmi Iyengar, Ranganath Reddy, K G Raghavan, among

others made submissions on behalf of the complainants (respondents) who had sought the sanction for investigation against Siddaramaiah. In the MUDA site allotment case, it is alleged that compensatory sites were allotted to Siddaramaiah's wife B M Parvathi in an upmarket area in Mysuru, which had higher property value as compared to the location of her land which had been "acquired" by the MUDA. The MUDA had allotted plots to Parvathi under a 50:50 ratio scheme in lieu of 3.16 acres of her land, where MUDA developed a residential layout. Under the controversial scheme, MUDA allotted 50 per cent of developed land to the land losers in lieu of undeveloped land acquired from them for forming residential layouts. Some Opposition leaders and activists have also claimed that Parvathi had no legal title over this 3.16 acres of land.

Dry Bihar reported 156 hooch deaths in last eight years: Official

PTI ■ PATNA

More than 150 people have died in Bihar because of consuming illicit liquor in the state ever since it went dry in April 2016, a senior official of the Prohibition and Excise department said on Monday. However, 'suspected hooch deaths' reported from different parts of the state in the last eight years is 266, the official said. The sale and consumption of alcohol was banned in Bihar by the Nitish Kumar government in April 2016. "The state has witnessed a total of 156 'confirmed hooch deaths' from different districts since 2016. Total number of 'suspected hooch deaths' reported in the state in the last eight years is 266, out of which 156 are confirmed," Prohibition and Excise department secretary Vinod Singh Gunjyal told reporters at a press conference here. The districts which reported the maximum confirmed hooch deaths are Saran, Gaya, Bhojpur, Buxar and Gopalganj, he added. The secretary said, "Till August 2024, a total of 8.43 lakh cases pertaining to violation of prohibition laws have been registered by the department in which a total of 12.7 lakh people, including 234 from outside the state, have been arrested so far.



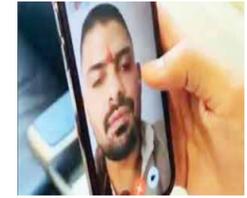
"Officials concerned have so far seized 3.46 crore bulk litre liquor which includes country made liquor as well. Till August 2024, the department has destroyed 98 per cent of the seized liquor which is around 3.38 crore bulk litre liquor." The department also seized 1.24 lakh vehicles used in the transportation of liquor from different cities in the state. "The department collected Rs 327.13 crore from the auction of 71,727 vehicles seized by the officials. The department and police officers are also using drones in certain districts in the state to nab those who violate prohibition laws," said Gunjyal. Bihar Prohibition and Excise

Minister, Ratnesh Sada, who was also present at the press conference, debunked questions on Union Minister Jitan Ram Manjhi's recent comment that "only Dalits are being targeted in the Prohibition related violations." "What can I say in his (Manjhi) comments? Jitan Ram Manjhi is a senior leader...he should refrain from making such comments and should consult higher ups," said Sada. Manjhi had recently told reporters, "The prohibition regime has mainly targeted the poor, vulnerable sections of the people, especially Dalits, whereas liquor is being home-delivered across the state."

Delhi cops investigating video showing jailed gangster making video call

STAFF REPORTER ■ NEW DELHI

Delhi Police are investigating a mobile phone video that allegedly shows jailed gangster Lawrence Bishnoi making a video call to a city-based businessman to demand protection money. According to police sources, the clip surfaced on social media on Monday. A police official said, "The call took place in May 2023 while the businessman, who owns restaurants and a travel company, was on a trip to Dubai with his family. The businessman filed a complaint with the Delhi Police's Special Cell following the incident." In the three-minute video, Bishnoi is reportedly heard asking the businessman, "Chamatkar dekha hai?" (Do you want to see a miracle?). The businessman responds, "I don't want to see any miracle." Police are currently verifying the authenticity of the video. According to the FIR, the businessman first received a call on May 22, 2023, from someone claiming to be Lawrence Bishnoi. When the businessman questioned the caller's identity, the gangster cut the call and initiated a video call. During the call, Bishnoi allegedly threatened him and demanded Rs 2.5 crore in protection money.



"After returning to India on May 30, the businessman continued to receive threatening calls, not only from Bishnoi but also from his associate Goldy Brar, who is reportedly based in the U.S.," the FIR states. Bishnoi's name has also recently emerged in connection with the September 12 murder of 35-year-old gym owner Nadir Shah in Greater Kailash, South Delhi. Police sources believe Shah was killed because he tried to intervene in Bishnoi's extortion activities involving the businessman. Bishnoi, currently held in a Gujarat jail, is allegedly linked to several high-profile crimes, including the conspiracy behind the murder of Punjabi singer Sidhu Moosewala. He is facing more than two dozen cases of extortion, murder, and attempted murder. "In connection with Nadir Shah's murder, seven people have been arrested so far, but the two shooters responsible for the attack outside Shah's gym remain at large," police said.

Delhi CM places empty chair...

From page 1
"How can she call herself Bharat when she has no equal in lying. Even after taking oath on the Constitution, lowering the dignity of the post of Chief Minister in this way is not appropriate in any way," Bidhuri said. Delhi BJP President Virendra Sachdeva has strongly condemned Atishi's gesture of placing an empty chair beside her, reserved for Arvind Kejriwal. Sachdeva termed the act as a violation of constitutional norms and an insult to the Chief Minister's office. Sachdeva reacted to Atishi taking charge, saying: "placing two chairs on the table of the Chief Minister is an insult to the Constitution, rules and the post of the Chief

Minister. Atishi ji, this is not following any ideals, in simple words, it is sycophancy. By doing this, Atishi has hurt the dignity of the post of Chief Minister of Delhi as well as the sentiments of the people of Delhi. Arvind Kejriwal you should answer - will you run the Delhi Government with this kind of remote control?" Atishi further said that Kejriwal has set an example of dignity in politics by stepping down. The BJP left no stone unturned to tarnish his image. "Fake cases were filed against Arvind Kejriwal and he was lodged in jail for six months," claimed Atishi. The Delhi Chief Minister further added that when Arvind Kejriwal was

granted bail by the Supreme Court, the court said that his arrest was made with malicious intent. She has retained the 13 portfolios she held in the Kejrival Government, which include education, revenue, finance, power, and public works department (PWD). Environment Minister Gopal Rai also took charge and first time minister Mukesh Ahlawat, who was allotted the portfolios of labour, SC and ST, employment and land and building departments also took charge at the Delhi Secretariat. Meanwhile, another minister Saurabh Bharadwaj has eight departments under him, the highest after Atishi, including those of health, tourism, art and culture.

Tirupati sanctified by Temple priests

From page 1
In response to the controversy, the Tirumala Tirupati Devasthanams (TTD), which manages the famous Sri Venkateswara Swamy Temple, has already blacklisted the company under the scanner and initiated legal proceedings against it for allegedly supplying adulterated ghee. The company has denied the allegations. The notice, sent by the Food Safety and Standards Authority of India (FSSAI), top food standards body under the Union Health Ministry, comes in the wake of a report from NDDB CALF, a private laboratory, which claimed that ghee samples contained foreign fats, including palm oil, fish oil, beef tallow, and 'lard' (pig fat).

BJP spokesperson slams Sanjay Singh over remarks on Bhagwat

STAFF REPORTER ■ NEW DELHI

Delhi BJP Spokesperson Praveen Shankar Kapoor on Monday hit back at AAP Rajya Sabha MP Sanjay Singh over his remarks in connection with Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS) Chief Mohan Bhagwat, stating that former Chief Minister Arvind Kejriwal was yet to respond to the five questions they asked asked him.

The Delhi BJP President Virendra Sachdeva on Sunday asked Kejriwal five questions including why did he betray Anna Hazare and his children by allying with Congress despite swearing at them in past, why did he betray his senior colleagues like Kiran Bedi & Kumar Vishwas, why did he betray on Lokpal and why did he break alternate politics hopes. "After Arvind Kejriwal responds to the

five questions BJP asked him, we will also respond," said Kapoor. Earlier in the day, senior AAP leader asked, "When will Mohan Bhagwat respond? Since Arvind Kejriwal's inquiry, a deafening silence has settled over the RSS and BJP, raising suspicions that the questions hit too close to the truth." "AAP supreme has asked only five questions to Mohan Bhagwat, the head of RSS, an

organization which calls itself a 'patriot' and nationalist, and these questions are related to principles, integrity, and truth," he claimed. He alleged that Modi will not relinquish his chair even after turning 75 and said, "This is the difference between Kejriwal and Prime Minister Narendra Modi. Mohan Bhagwat and the BJP must answer Arvind Kejriwal's five questions."

India's Laapataa Ladies en route...

From page 1
As *Laapataa Ladies* embarks on its journey to the Oscars, excitement and optimism surround the cast and crew. With its unique perspective and engaging narrative, the film has the potential to resonate with global audiences, paving the way for future Indian films that address similar themes. *Laapataa Ladies* exemplifies the creative possibilities within Indian cinema, highlighting its capacity to tell thought-provoking stories. The recognition of this film, particularly directed by a woman, serves as a powerful statement about the importance of female voices in cinema. Though set in rural India, its appeal is universal, as women face discrimination across the globe, even in different forms.

Parties set for second phase polls in J and K

From page 1
The second phase also saw high-voltage electioneering. The BJP remained at the forefront as it deployed top brass of the party including Prime Minister Narendra Modi, Home Minister Amit Shah, Defence Minister Rajnath Singh, Union Minister Nitin Gadkari, and BJP Chief JP Nadda to seek votes for the party candidates. The party has set itself the target of winning majority seats in the Pir Panjal region and retaining its bastion across the hilly Reasi district.

In the 2014 Assembly polls, BJP had won two seats from the frontier districts of Rajouri and Poonch. The BJP is banking heavily on the support of the Gujjar/Bakerwal and Pahari tribes to romp home victoriously. If the party fails to improve its tally in the region it may find it difficult to fill the gap in the third phase. From the Congress party, Congress Chief Mallikarjun Kharge, Rahul Gandhi, Sachin Pilot, General Secretary GA Mir, AICC Incharge J and K, Bharat Singh Solanki, JKPC Chief Tariq

Hamid Karra and Pramod Tiwari campaigned for the party candidates. NC leaders also campaigned alongside Congress party leaders to ensure 100 per cent vote transfer in support of the alliance partner. Among regional players, Omar Abdullah led the party's campaign along with his father Dr Farooq Abdullah while Mehbooba Mufti and her daughter Iltija Mufti continue to lead the PDP's campaign bandwagon. Omar himself is contesting from the two seats of Ganderbal and Budgam.

According to the statement issued by the Department of Information and Public Relations, J and K, 25,78,099 lakh voters (13,12,730 lakh male, 12,65,316 lakh female, and 53 third-gender voters) are eligible to cast their vote in this phase. Around 1.20 lakh voters aged 18 to 19 are also eligible in the second phase of polling. Among these, 11,294 are male and 10,065 are female first-time voters. This phase will also see participation from 19,201 Persons with Disabilities (PwDs) voters and 20,880 voters above the

age of 85. The highest number of 93 candidates are in the fray in Srinagar district, followed by 46 in Budgam district, 34 in Rajouri district, 25 in Poonch district, 21 in Ganderbal district, and 20 candidates are contesting in Reasi district. A total of 157 Special polling stations have been established in the second phase including 26 polling booths managed by women as Pink Polling Stations, 26 polling stations manned by specially-abled persons, 26 polling stations manned by youth, 31 Border polling

stations, 26 green polling stations and 22 Unique Polling stations. The Srinagar district has a total of 7,76,674 registered voters, including 3,87,722 male, 3,88,922 female, and 30 transgender voters across eight Assembly constituencies. The Rajouri has 4,92,008 electorates, including 2,56,215 male, 2,35,786 female, and seven transgender voters. The Budgam District has a total of 5,11,864 voters across its five Assembly constituencies (2,59,688

male, 2,52,163 female and 13 transgender voters. Poonch District is divided into three Assembly constituencies, with a total of 3,52,330 registered voters; 1,80,584 male and 1,71,746 female. The Reasi district has registered a total of 2,37,205 voters, including 1,24,359 male, 1,12,843 female, and three transgender across its three Assembly constituencies. The Ganderbal district has 2,08,018 registered voters, including 1,04,162 male and 1,03,856 female voters.

PM Modi meets...

From page 1
Earlier in the day, Modi interacted with the top tech leaders and CEOs of the US in a roundtable conference. He addressed the Indian diaspora at the packed Nassau Veterans Coliseum on Long Island in New York before it. Modi reached New York on Sunday after attending the Quad Leaders' Summit hosted by President Joe Biden in Wilmington, Delaware on Saturday. In Wilmington, he also held bilateral talks with Biden, Japan's Prime Minister Fumio Kishida and Australian Prime Minister Anthony Albanese.

DUSU polls 2024: Different student outfits campaign in various DU colleges ahead of elections

STAFF REPORTER ■ NEW DELHI

A head of Delhi University Students' Union (DUSU) polls slated to be held on September 27, different student outfits including RSS, Akhil Bharatiya Vidyarthi Parishad (ABVP) and Congress' National Students Union of India (NSUI) on Monday engaged in campaigning in various colleges of the university. Meanwhile, the Office of the Chief Election Officer (CEO) for the DUSU polls issued a notice directing all candidates to remove banners and posters bearing their names and ballot numbers from university premises within 24 hours. CEO Satyapal Singh stated the election office is closely monitoring

campaigning activities, including the use of banners, posters, and vehicles during rallies and emphasised that all campaigning must adhere to the rules set by the Lyngdoh Committee, which provides guidelines for fair elections. The notice, sent via email, warned that failure to remove the banners and posters within the given time would result in strict action. In the notification, candidates were also reminded to strictly follow the Code of Conduct, the Lyngdoh Committee guidelines, the National Green Tribunal (NGT) orders, and the Delhi Prevention of Defacement of Property Act, 2007. It added that any violations of these guidelines and acts could lead to disqualification and criminal penalties.



Additionally, that notification noted that candidates are only permitted to use the designated "Walls of Democracy" within the campus for pasting handmade posters. ABVP carried out their campaigning in various colleges in North Campus, including Shri Ram College of Commerce, Ramjas College, Khalsa College, Kirorimal college, and colleges in off campus including Dyal Singh College, College of Vocational Studies. More than 5000 students affiliated with ABVP are campaigning in all 52 colleges for the DUSU election and spreading awareness by distributing the ABVP manifesto to the students talking about the holistic development of Delhi University.

ABVP Delhi Secretary Harsh Attri stated, "DUSU election is a celebration of democracy at the students' level. All students should participate in the voting process. If ABVP wins the DUSU election this year, we will work on the infrastructural development of Delhi University by building new hostels, new libraries, etc and other Post Covid issues faced by the students." Further, NSUI organized a special program for Purvanchal students at Delhi University which witnessed the participation of hundreds of enthusiastic students from Purvanchal. Addressing the gathering, NSUI National President Varun Choudhary highlighted his deep connection with the Purvanchal region.

"I have a personal bond with Purvanchal as I was once the in-charge of NSUI Purvanchal. In the recent Lok Sabha elections, the people of Purvanchal voted for jobs and change. Similarly, I believe students from Purvanchal have a huge role to play in the upcoming DUSU elections and will vote for NSUI on the same lines - for jobs, better education, and to reject ABVP," Varun said, adding that he is sure that they will secure a decisive victory in the DUSU elections, winning all four seats by 4-0. NSUI National Incharge Kanhaiya Kumar, Congress' Social Media Chairperson Supriya Shrinete, and Former NSUI President Nadeem Javed also participated in the event.

BJP, Congress attack Atishi for not using Kejriwal chair

STAFF REPORTER ■ NEW DELHI

The BJP and the Congress on Monday attacked Delhi's new chief minister Atishi, over her decision not to sit on the chair used by her predecessor Arvind Kejriwal, saying her gesture was a "grave insult" to the constitutional rules and the post of chief minister. Atishi, who took charge as the eighth chief minister of Delhi on Monday, said she would serve as Delhi's chief minister for four months like Ramayana's Bharat who ruled Ayodhya in the absence of his elder brother Lord Ram by placing his 'khadaun' (wooden slippers) on the throne. She sat on a white chair, which was placed next to Kejriwal's chair. Hitting out at Atishi, Delhi BJP president Virendra Sachdeva said her gesture was an "insult" to the constitutional rules and the post of chief minister. "What she did was not ideal. Through her gesture, she has not only



insulted the post of chief minister but also hurt the feelings of the people of Delhi. Arvind Kejriwal needs to answer whether he will run the government through a remote control," he said. In a statement, Sachdeva said, "Placing two chairs at the Chief Minister's desk is disrespect to the Constitution, the rules, and the office of the Chief Minister. This is not an act of idealism, as Atishi claims, but blatant sycophancy in clear terms."

South Delhi MP Ramvir Singh Bidhuri said that this is a nautanki, nothing else. "AAPians are playing with people's sentiments," he said. Lambasting the AAP leaders, BJP leader Kapil Mishra said Khar, Dushan, Taraka are distributing certificates of being Ram, Laxman and Bharat. It is time to bring the curtain down on the drama of this mohini drama company," he added.

Delhi Congress chief Devender Yadav said with her gesture of keeping Kejriwal's chair vacant, Atishi has proved herself to be a "dummy" chief minister. "I have a strong objection to this that a person who was in jail for a corruption case is being compared to Lord Ram. Atishi has crossed all limits and presented herself as a dummy chief minister," Yadav said. The Congress leader said the gesture has proved that people should not keep any hope from the Atishi government, he added. After taking charge, Atishi said, "I will work for four months as the chief minister of Delhi as Bharat did by keeping Lord Ram's khadaun on the throne. Arvind Kejriwal has set an example of dignity in politics by stepping down. The BJP left no stone unturned to tarnish his image." "I hope people will bring back Kejriwal in the February polls; his chair will remain in the CM office till then."

Environment department all set to host e-vehicle parade in October

STAFF REPORTER ■ NEW DELHI

Delhi's environment department is set to host an "e-vehicle parade" at Rajghat in early October to promote the adoption of electric vehicles (EVs) in the city with officials expecting more than 500 EVs to participate, with a registration link for interested owners to be released soon. A senior environment department official shared that a tender for the event, with an estimated budget of Rs 5.76 lakh, has already been issued. Bids will be accepted until September 30, and the parade will take place within five days of awarding the contract. "The primary goal is to encourage the use of EVs in Delhi and raise awareness about their advantages. We urge as many EV owners as possible to join the parade," the official said. He added that switching to EVs will play a significant role in reducing vehicular pollution in the capital.



Environment Minister Gopal Rai, who recently resumed his duties after the cabinet reshuffle, highlighted that the government's focus in the coming months will be on curbing air pollution. "The major challenge during winter is controlling pollution levels. We have already held meetings with 33 departments to devise strategies," Rai stated. He further noted that the Winter Action Plan, originally scheduled for release on September 27, will now be launched on September 25 due

to the Assembly session. "I will meet the chief secretary today to discuss additional measures," he added. Rai expressed optimism that with coordinated efforts, Delhi's pollution levels could be significantly reduced year-round, including during the winter months. The Delhi government launched its EV Policy in August 2020, offering subsidies to EV buyers and setting a goal for 25 per cent of all new vehicle registrations in the capital to be electric by 2024.

BJP launches three day Janta ka mudda Assembly mein campaign

STAFF REPORTER ■ NEW DELHI

Delhi BJP on Monday launched a three day 'Janta ka mudda assembly mein' campaign to know the problems and issues that the people of Delhi are facing and assured them that they will raise them in the state assembly. Delhi BJP President Virendra Sachdeva stated that he talked to a lady and her daughter from Ashok Nagar as they came out of Metro Station for shopping and got filled complaint form from them in which they listed dirty water supply, water logging, dirty unmaintained colony parks and e-rickshaw jamming traffic as major issues. "Most people who filled forms at Connaught Place wanted BJP MLAs to raise in the Assembly the issues of excessive electricity bills getting heavier due to surcharges like PPRC, dirty water, irregular social welfare pension, encroachments, unre-



stricted e-rickshaw, lack of civic amenities like sanitation services and parks apart from lack of health & education facilities," he said. He added that the party workers who are going door to door especially during 'Maha Sadasyata Abhiyan' on September 25 will get complaint forms filled by Delhiites and submit to the Leader of Opposition Vjender Gupta who will then shortlist issues to be

raised in the Delhi Assembly. "Delhi Assembly is the forum to raise citizens issue during Question Hour, unfortunately Arvind Kejriwal government has denied this constitutional opportunity to BJP MLAs but we will now not let it to continue so," Gupta said, adding that on the strength of citizens complaint forms they will raise the issues and stall the Assembly till Chief Minister Atishi responds to them.

LG orders year long campaign for dust free Delhi

STAFF REPORTER ■ NEW DELHI

Delhi Lt Governor V K Saxena has ordered a year long campaign to ensure dust free Delhi and his secretariat will regularly monitor the progress. In a review meeting to tackle pollution last week, Saxena had then asked the concerned agencies to launch the drive over the next one week to ten days, Raj Niwas said here on Monday. Pollution caused by road dust is one of the two major contributors to air pollution in Delhi, and with the rains have been stopped for the past three-four days, dried up mud/silt accumulated on roads is flying high in the environment causing major air pollution. The agencies involved in the exercise include MCD, PWD, NDMC, I&FCD and DJB, officials said. Dilapidated unrepared roads, back-flowing sewer lines and un-silted drains have resulted



in huge amount of mud / silt getting deposited on roads and footpaths. This mud / silt, wet till now due to continuous rains, is drying up and flying higher due to moving traffic. The LG has advised the road-owning agencies - primarily MCD and PWD to clean the roads of the dust, not leave it accumulated on the road and transport it to designated dumping sites. Similarly, agencies responsible for cleaning of drains and sewer lines, viz MCD, I&FCD and DJB have been asked to coordinate and get the silt / mud picked up and disposed. Rains are likely during

October first week and this exercise of clearing the dust will serve many purposes. While on one hand, it would mitigate air pollution in the city immediately, on the other hand it would ensure that when rains return, there is less water logging and mud / silt on the roads. Saxena has emphasized that even if it rains, the exercise of removing the wet mud / silt from the roads should be continued so as to ensure that they do not flow into drains and sewer lines, in the process choking them. The Departments / agencies have been asked to immediately deploy teams and record the works been undertaken through "before and after" pictures and videos. The status of ongoing works will be regularly provided to the LG Secretariat and Saxena will review the status after completion of the first phase of the Dust-free Delhi exercise.

soon. The owners of the building have already been released on interim bail, the judge noted, saying that the case set up by the prosecution would be tested during the trial on appreciation of evidence. "The bail is the rule and jail is the exception as per the law of land established by various judgments of Supreme Court of India. The refusal of bail at this stage (when investigation is substantially done) would amount to inflicting punishment before the trial. At this stage, when the applicant / accused has already been in custody for more than 54 days, no purpose would be served by further keeping the accused in custody," the judge said. Three civil service aspirants -- Shreya Yadav (25) from Uttar Pradesh, Tanya Soni (25) from Telangana and Nevin Delvin (24) from Kerala -- died after the basement of the building housing Rau's IAS Study Circle was flooded following heavy rain in central Delhi's Old Rajinder Nagar on July 27.

Scuffle breaks out at DU: Student thrashed, turban forcibly removed

STAFF REPORTER ■ NEW DELHI

A 19 years old student on Saturday was thrashed and his turban forcibly removed by some students during a clash with another group at Delhi University's Sri Tegh Bahadur Khalsa College, days ahead of the Delhi University Students' Union (DUSU) elections scheduled for September 27. The video has gone viral on social media triggering criticism across social media as it shows a red-turbaned student being dragged, kicked and assaulted until his turban fell to the ground during the scuffle. An FIR has been registered under sections 299 (Deliberate and malicious acts, intended to outrage religious feelings of any class by insulting its religion or religious beliefs), 115 (2) (Voluntarily causing hurt), 351 (Criminal intimidation) and 3 (5) (When a criminal act is done by several persons in furtherance of the common intention of all, each of such persons is liable for that act in the same manner as if it were done by him alone) of the Bharatiya Nyaya Sanhita (BNS) at Maurice Nagar police



station in the matter. According to police, Pavit Singh Gujral, a second-year student said that he was attacked during the nomination process for DUSU elections. "I want to bring it to your notice about a criminal incident which happened on Saturday at around 1:57 pm. Nomination process was going on in our college during the said process one Sajan Tomar and his accomplices attacked

me forcibly, removed my turban, beat me, my kesh (hairs) were pulled and I was also abused by Sajan Tomar," he said in an FIR. He stated, "My T-shirt was torn and I was attacked by his group. I am not feeling safe in college and I feel that I have a risk to my life. I request you to provide me security." A senior police officer said that teams have been formed to nab the accused. Meanwhile,

the college is yet to issue a statement regarding the matter. Meanwhile, the National Students' Union of India (NSUI) expressed its deep concern over the unfortunate incident and said that it has been consistently raising issues of lack of security and increasing violence inside the campus. NSUI National President Varun Choudhary stated, "Incident at Khalsa College is

depiction of increasing violence inside Delhi University today. Students are not safe on campus, and it is high time that the university administration takes responsibility for the safety and security of its students." He added that they demand strict and immediate action against the individuals involved in this shameful incident. The Akhil Bharatiya Vidyarthi Parishad (ABVP) also condemned the incident and said that it is of the clear opinion that violence has no place in educational campuses. It also raised suspicion on the involvement of NSUI, Shiromani Akali Dal's (SAD) Student Organization of India (SOI) and Students of Delhi (SOD) in the violence that erupted. "Proper representation of students is necessary to raise the issues of students in educational institutions, the student union elections being held in Delhi University will give direction to the development of democratic values among the students. Student union elections should be fair and peaceful," it said.

City court grants interim bail to Rau's IAS Study Circle CEO, coordinator

STAFF REPORTER ■ NEW DELHI

A city court on Monday granted till December 7 interim bail to Rau's IAS Study Circle CEO Abhishek Gupta and its coordinator Deshpal Singh in a case related to the death of three civil services aspirants in the centre's flooded basement. Principal District and Sessions Judge Anju Bajaj Chandna also directed Gupta to deposit Rs 2.5 crore till November 30 with Red Cross Society, saying that as per the lease agreement of the premises, the accused being the lessee and CEO of the institute alone, would be responsible for any loss claim and damages to any person or material. The judge granted relief to the accused persons on a personal bond of Rs 1 lakh each with two sureties of the like amount. The judge noted that the observation of the Delhi High Court that stormwater drain at the place was dysfunctional and de-silting of the drain in front of the coaching centre had not been done as also encroached and covered by ramps. "The civic authorities have failed to take any action against unauthorised activities," the sessions judge said. The judge further noted that the investigation regarding the accused persons was complete and charge-sheet would be submitted very



being used in contravention to the rules and regulations, however, at the same time the failure of civic authorities cannot be ignored," the judge said. The judge further noted the observation of the Delhi High Court that stormwater drain at the place was dysfunctional and de-silting of the drain in front of the coaching centre had not been done as also encroached and covered by ramps. "The civic authorities have failed to take any action against unauthorised activities," the sessions judge said. The judge further noted that the investigation regarding the accused persons was complete and charge-sheet would be submitted very

soon. The owners of the building have already been released on interim bail, the judge noted, saying that the case set up by the prosecution would be tested during the trial on appreciation of evidence. "The bail is the rule and jail is the exception as per the law of land established by various judgments of Supreme Court of India. The refusal of bail at this stage (when investigation is substantially done) would amount to inflicting punishment before the trial. At this stage, when the applicant / accused has already been in custody for more than 54 days, no purpose would be served by further keeping the accused in custody," the judge said. Three civil service aspirants -- Shreya Yadav (25) from Uttar Pradesh, Tanya Soni (25) from Telangana and Nevin Delvin (24) from Kerala -- died after the basement of the building housing Rau's IAS Study Circle was flooded following heavy rain in central Delhi's Old Rajinder Nagar on July 27.

India reports first case of MPOX clade 1 strain

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■
NEW DELHI

India has reported the first case of the MPOX clade 1 strain, which led the WHO declaring it a public health emergency last month, in a 38-year-old Kerala man in Kerala. The patient was last week confirmed to have contracted the monkeypox virus following his return to India from the United Arab Emirates (UAE). The patient is stable, the sources said, adding "this was the first case of the current strain that led to the World Health Organization declaring Mpxo a public health emergency last month for a second time". The earliest case of Mpxo that emerged in the national capital was a 26-year-old resident of Haryana's Hisar who had tested positive for the previous West African Clade 2 strain earlier this month. He was discharged from LNJP Hospital, Delhi on September 21. The Government had said that the



case was not connected to the global public health emergency declared by WHO regarding the Mpxo outbreak. Since the 2022 declaration of Mpxo as a Public Health Emergency of International Concern by the WHO, 30 cases were reported in India. Meanwhile, Kerala Health Minister Veena George has already appealed to the public, including those returning from abroad with any symptoms, to inform the health department and seek

treatment at the earliest. In a social media post, she also released a list of state-run hospitals in various districts where treatment and isolation facilities for the affected persons have been arranged. Besides this, treatment was available in all medical colleges in the state, the minister said. Urging people to be vigilant, George said the state health department has already stepped up surveillance in airports in the state in

accordance with the Centre's guidelines in the wake of the outbreak of Mpxo in many African countries. Those arriving from the nations where the infection was reported have been instructed to report at the airport if they develop any symptoms, she said. George also cautioned people, especially health workers who handled the samples of the affected persons, to strictly follow infection control precautions. The Centre had, after the World Health Organization (WHO) declared Mpxo a Public Health Emergency of International Concern (PHEIC) issued a formal advisory to all states and union territories, urging them to enhance surveillance and testing measures. The advisory includes strategies to prevent and manage any potential cases in India. According to the health experts, Mpxo infections are generally self-limiting, lasting between two and four weeks,

and patients usually recover with supportive medical care and management. It is transmitted through prolonged and close contact with an infected patient. Mpxo typically manifests itself with fever, rash and swollen lymph nodes and may lead to a range of medical complications. Children, pregnant people and people with weak immune systems, including people living with HIV that is not well controlled, are at higher risk for serious illness and death due to complications from Mpxo. Some people with Mpxo become very sick. For example, the skin can become infected with bacteria, leading to abscesses or serious skin damage. Other complications include pneumonia; corneal infection with loss of vision; pain or difficulty swallowing; vomiting and diarrhoea causing dehydration or malnutrition, according to the WHO.

BJP slams Farooq Abdullah, calls him Pakistan government PRO

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■
NEW DELHI

The BJP on Monday took a swipe at National Conference (NC) leader Farooq Abdullah, wondering if he considered himself a "self-styled ambassador or a PRO" of the Pakistan government as he keeps calling for talks between India and the neighbouring country. In a statement, BJP general secretary Tarun Chugh, who is party's general secretary in-charge of the Union Territory, alleged that the National Conference (NC) leader advocated the cause of Pakistan more than the progress and development of Jammu and Kashmir. He asked, "Is Farooq Abdullah a self-styled ambassador or a PRO of the Pakistan government who keeps advocating the cause of Pakistan more than talking about the progress and development of J&K?"



Stressing that talks and terror could not go hand-in-hand, Chugh said it is strange that Abdullah keeps airing "anti-national" sentiments knowing very well that Pakistan is a factory of terrorism for the whole world. The Abdullahs and the Congress have been dancing to the tunes of Pakistan at the cost of peace and development in Jammu and Kashmir, Chugh claimed.

The Congress and the NC are in alliance in the ongoing polls. Chugh said under the Modi government, people of Jammu and Kashmir have realised the damage the NC and the PDP have inflicted on them over the last many years. People now want development of industry, growth in tourism and jobs for the youth. They do not want bullets and stones, he added.

Defence Minister formally inaugurates Sainik School in Jaipur

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■
JAIPUR/NEW DELHI

In line with the government's vision to establish 100 new Sainik Schools pan-India in partnership mode, Defence Minister Rajnath Singh on Monday formally inaugurated Sainik School, Jaipur. Of the 100 schools, Ministry of Defence has approved 45 in collaboration with state governments, NGOs and private schools. Forty (40) of these schools have started operations, and Sainik School, Jaipur is among them. In his address, the defence minister said the PPP-model is generally considered as 'Public-Private-Partnership', but the collaboration is now moving away from its standard definition, and is now being seen as 'Private-Public-Partnership'. "The private sector is now in the driver's seat of the country's economy, contributing significantly in agriculture, manufacturing and service sectors. Through these new Sainik schools, the private and public sectors will come together and provide the best education to our future generations," he added.



The defence minister exuded confidence that the school will prove to be a boon to the patriotic youth of the state as proper guidance and necessary infrastructure will be provided to them to join the Armed Forces and serve the nation. "Rajasthan is a land of bravehearts like Maharana Pratap, Prithviraj Chauhan, Maharaj Surajmal and Sawai Jai Singh. These heroes are a motivation to the younger generation to join the military. This new Sainik school will provide a direction to them to serve their motherland," he said. Terming education as the most fundamental element in the development of the nation, the defence minister highlighted the efforts being made by the Sainik Schools

towards ensuring the physical, mental and social development of children, thereby creating a stronger future generation. He underlined the fact that Sainik schools not only impart academic knowledge, but also inculcate the values of discipline, patriotism and courage. The all-round development of the personality of students inspires them to take the nation forward, he added. The defence minister mentioned the fact that the current Chief of the Army Staff General Upendra Dwivedi and Chief of the Naval Staff Admiral Dinesh K Tripathi are the shining products of Sainik School, Rewa. He added that not just the Armed Forces, the students of Sainik Schools can choose any other career and serve the nation in their own way. He urged the students to never give up and continue working hard to achieve their desired goals. The 100 new Sainik Schools in partnership mode are apart from the existing 33 Sainik Schools already functioning under the erstwhile pattern.

These new schools, besides their affiliation to respective education boards, will function under the aegis of Sainik Schools Society and follow its rules and regulations. In addition to their regular affiliated board curriculum, they will impart education of Academic Plus Curriculum to the students of Sainik School pattern. The curriculum includes value-based initiatives such as debates on issues like gender equality and environment protection, skill-based training, extra-curricular activities, community service, physical training, NCC, tours and excursions and motivational talks. The aim of the Academic Plus Curriculum is to ensure holistic development of students to make them a contributing member in the progress of the Nation. In September 2023, Sainik Schools Society, Ministry of Defence had signed a Memorandum of Agreement with Shri Bhawani Niketan Shiksha Samiti for the establishment of a new Sainik School at Shri Bhawani Niketan Public School, Jaipur.

Indian Navy to embark on global circumnavigation with women officers

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■
NEW DELHI

The Indian Navy is all set to embark on the extraordinary mission of circumnavigating the globe with the second edition of Navika Sagar Parikrama expedition comprising two women officers. A curtain raiser event presided by Vice Admiral Krishna Swaminathan, Vice Chief of Naval Staff was held at here on Monday. Indian Naval Sailing Vessel Tarini will sail on this challenging expedition with two courageous women officers -Lt Commander Dina K and Lt Commander Roopa A on October two. The historic voyage will be flagged off from Naval Ocean Sailing Node, Goa. Over a period of eight months, the duo will navigate more than 21,600 nautical miles (approx 40,000 km) without any external assistance, relying solely on wind power. The circumnavigation highlights the exceptional valour, courage and perseverance of the officers, who will face rigours of high



seas, extreme weather conditions, pushing the limits of human endurance. The route will take them through some of the most treacherous waters including the perilous passage around the three great Capes - Cape Leeuwin, Cape Horn and the Cape of Good Hope. The voyage is not just a testament to their personal bravery and skill, but also a celebration of the Indian Navy's commitment to Nari Shakti showcasing their indomitable spirit and determination. The expedition was conceived by the Indian Navy with the

inaugural Navika Sagar Parikrama, the first ever Indian circumnavigation of globe by an all women crew of six officers in 2017. The second edition of the expedition will be an exceptional one as they will become the first from India to accomplish such a feat in double handed mode. Earlier, Captain Dilip Dondre was the first Indian to circumnavigate the globe in 2009-10. Subsequently, Commander Abhilash Tomy was the first Asian skipper to participate in two circumnavigations and

accomplished the rare feat of completing the Golden Globe Race in 2022. Significantly, Tomy has been closely associated with the training of both the officers as the official mentor. Speaking on the occasion, the Vice Chief described Navika Sagar Parikrama II as a journey of empowerment, innovation, and commitment to India's maritime heritage while charting new paths for a brighter and empowered future. He reaffirmed Indian Navy's pledge to uphold the highest standards of professionalism and responsibility, not just on our shores but across the vast expanse of the world's oceans. During the interaction, both the officers shared their experiences and expressed extreme confidence for the forthcoming expedition embodying the spirit of resilience and indomitable spirit. Navika Sagar Parikrama II is more than a voyage; it underlines the essence of maritime prowess, self reliance and commitment to a greater cause.



Army sets world record with 5 lakh saplings planted in an hour

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■
NEW DELHI

In a remarkable display of collective action for a greener future amid climate change threat, the 128 Infantry Battalion and the Ecological Task Force of the Territorial Army recently set a World Record by planting over 5,00,000 saplings in just one hour at Jaisalmer, Rajasthan. Union Environment Minister Bhupendra Yadav congratulated the Army for the remarkable achievement, posted on the social media X, "128 Infantry Battalion (Territorial Army) Ecological Task Force of Rajputana Rifles planted over 5,19,130 saplings on 22.09.2024 from 1100hrs to 1200hrs under "Special Plantation Drive" at Jaisalmer under the Prime Minister's campaign "Ek Ped Maa ke Naam" and the TA's outreach program "Bhagidari & Zimmedari," aimed to enhance ecological restoration and promote environmental awareness among the local communities." He also congratulated the multiple stakeholders including the Indian Army, Indian Air Force, Border Security Force, District Administration of Jaisalmer, Police and Border Wing

Home Guards, Sankalp Taru NGO, and students from various educational institutions, highlighting their dedication to environmental conservation and reforestation efforts. "The plantation drive was held simultaneously at seven different locations across Jaisalmer, demonstrating a united effort towards community development and environmental conservation. "Under the banner of "Protect Trees" and the motto "Those who protect the trees are protected," the Territorial Army unit achieved several world records, provisionally recognized by the World Book of Records, London. "These include the most saplings planted by a team in one hour, the most saplings planted by a team of women in one hour, and the largest number of people planting saplings simultaneously at a single venue," said the statement from the Ministry. The Accreditation Agency i.e. World Book of Records were present in the field and verified the plantation done and certified the achievement. The Ecological Task Force also received the provisional award from the World Book of Records after the plantation, the statement added.

Om Birla urged presiding officers to use technology for efficiency

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■
NEW DELHI

Lok Sabha Speaker Om Birla Monday urged presiding officers for the use of technology to improve the efficiency and functioning of legislatures. He said that legislative bodies should discuss on various platforms and shape welfare schemes for the welfare of the last person of the society through technology.

Birla was chairing the Plenary Session of the 10th Commonwealth Parliamentary Association (CPA) India Region Conference in Parliament premises on Monday. Deputy Chairman, Rajya Sabha, Harivansh and Presiding Officers of State Legislative Bodies of India participated in the Session. Birla further added that in the current context, when



technology and means of communication have become a part of people's daily lives, public representatives should find ways and means to meet the increasing aspirations and expectations of the people from democracy through legislative institutions. The theme of the Plenary Session was, "The Role of Legislative Bodies in Attainment of Sustainable and Inclusive Development".

The Speaker urged the Presiding Officers and legislators to reflect on the extent to which they had succeeded in fulfilling the expectations and aspirations of the people as the legislative body of the country in the journey of the last 75 decades. Without this introspection, the dream of inclusive development cannot be realized, he added.

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PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■
NEW DELHI

In an effort to enhance accessibility and ensure broader reach and understanding across India's diverse linguistic landscape, the Indian Sign Language (ISL) dictionary prepared by the Indian Sign Language Research and Training Centre (ISLRTC) is now available in 10 regional languages. At the same time, on Monday on the celebration of Sign Language Day 2024 here at an event, a senior official said that at least 2,500 new terms in Indian Sign Language was also launched, in collaboration between ISLRTC and various organizations such as YUNIKEE, India Signning Hands, Bridge Connectivity Solutions, and Anuprayaas. The new terms added in the ISL cover a wide range of subjects, including mathematics, science, and higher education, as well as fields like sports and

infrastructure, Secretary of the Disability Affairs Department Rajesh Aggarwal said. On the occasion, Union Minister of Social Justice and Empowerment BL Verma on Monday emphasised the government's commitment to ensuring the linguistic human rights of the hearing impaired across the nation. Verma reiterated the need for national and local efforts to strengthen the rights of Persons with Disabilities (PwDs) through the promotion of Indian Sign Language (ISL). In addition, ISLRTC introduced 100 concept videos designed for hearing-impaired students of class 6. These videos, developed in collaboration with YUNIKEE, aim to improve concept clarity with a combination of ISL explanations, graphical imagery, and inclusive learning tools like subtitles and audio, he said. Educational animated videos



and Deaf Role Model videos were also launched to inspire and motivate hearing-impaired children. The winners of the 7th Indian Sign Language Competition 2024, a national competition for students with hearing disabilities, were recognized and awarded during the event. Sign Language Day, celebrated annually on September 23, aims to highlight the need to preserve and promote sign languages as an essential part of linguistic and cultural diversity.

Swamy, ex-TTD Chairman moves SC on court monitored probe in Tirupati laddus

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■
NEW DELHI

BJP leader Subramanian Swamy on Monday moved the Supreme Court seeking a court-monitored probe into the alleged use of animal fat in making Tirupati laddus. Separately, former Tirumala Tirupati Devasthanams (TTD) Chairman YV Subba Reddy, a Member of Rajya Sabha, also moved the apex court seeking a probe by an independent committee under a retired Supreme Court judge. Swamy requested the court to direct the Andhra Pradesh Government to file a detailed report on the source and sampling of the ghee used for making the laddus. He also urged the court to issue an interim direction to obtain a detailed forensic report from the authorities concerned. "There ought to have been checks and balances internally to supervise and verify and check the quality or the lack of it, of the suppliers supplying various ingredients



to the temple which go into the making of the Prasadams," the plea said. Andhra Pradesh Chief Minister N Chandrababu Naidu's claim that animal fat was used in preparing Tirupati laddus during the previous YS Jagan Mohan Reddy-led government in the southern state has triggered a massive political row. The YSR Congress Party has accused Naidu of indulging in "heinous allegations" for political gains and the ruling

Telugu Desam Party (TDP) in the state circulating a laboratory report to back its claim. Two days later, on September 20, Tirumala Tirupati Devasthanams (TTD) Executive Officer J Shyamala Rao told a press conference that lab tests had revealed the presence of animal fat and lard in the chosen samples and the board is in the process of blacklisting the contractor who supplied "adulterated" ghee.

ECI team to be in Maharashtra to take stock of poll preparations



T N RAGHUNATHA ■ MUMBAI

In an indication of the start of the Assembly election process in Maharashtra in the late first week or early second week of October, a team of top officials from the Election Commission of India (ECI) will be in Mumbai from September 26 to 28 to review the preparations for the polls. An ECI team led by Chief Election

Commissioner Rajiv Kumar will arrive here from New Delhi on a three-day, on Thursday evening. On Friday, the ECI team would meet representatives of various political parties. It would later confabulate with Maharashtra's Chief Electoral Officer S Chockalingam, State Nodal Officer (SPNO) and Central Paramilitary Forces (CPMF), followed by meeting with enforcement agencies.

Kumar and his team will subsequently meet Chief Secretary Sujata Saunik and Director General of Police Rashmi Shukla and top IAS and IPS officers. On Saturday, there would be a meeting of the district collectors and superintendents of police from across the state. Earlier this month, Chockalingam had held a review with District Collectors and Chief District Election Officers across the state, in which various issues like Electronic Voting Machines (EVMs), the updated voters' list, status of polling material and district-level poll management, especially the availability of staff and security arrangements for free and fair elections, had been discussed. The ECI is expected to announce the Assembly poll schedule for Maharashtra and Jharkhand in the late first week or early second week of October after the completion of the ongoing Assembly polls in J & K and Karnataka. It remains to be seen if the ECI will hold the elections to the 288-member Maharashtra Legislative Assembly in one phase - like it did in the 2019 Assembly polls - and spread out the polls in two phases.

BJP candidate from Gurgaon asks for votes as dakshina in pitrupaksha

PARVESH SHARMA ■ GURGAON

Even as Gurgaon city endures waterlogging, poor drainage system, garbage problems with basic infrastructure, the BJP candidate from Gurgaon constituency Mukesh Sharma is begging for votes as 'Dakshina' in 'pitrupaksha'. During a campaign on Sunday, the candidate who is a Brahmin by caste was wooing voters by saying he is a Brahmin and should be given votes as Dakshina in pitrupaksha. Pitru Paksha, also spelt Pitri Paksha, is a 16-lunar day period in the Hindu calendar when Hindus pay homage to their ancestors, especially through food offerings. Meanwhile, senior Congress leader Raj Babbar attacked the BJP and said the Khattar-Saini-led Haryana government has failed to address civic issues.



Babbar said that despite generating a major chunk of revenue for Haryana, Gurugram city does not have proper civic infrastructure, and its condition is exposed glaringly during the monsoon. "People do not have basic amenities. The government has been receiving a big chunk of revenue from Gurugram, but how much does it give back," Babbar had

said. "We are also eternally indebted to our ancestors but we have to make available the basic amenities and develop Gurugram city into a world class city as befitting its stature and share in the revenue generated for the Haryana state," Mohit Grover, Congress candidate, Gurgaon constituency said. "They are asking voters to look up and vote for their leader, Narendra Modi, and

now asking for Dakshina in pitrupaksha. This has been happening for 10 years now. Why is that? Are the candidates hesitant to seek votes for themselves? Are they afraid that if they do so, they will not get any votes?" said a Congress leader. "It can mean only one thing. It means that the candidates by themselves have no achievements to their credit. They do not deserve to fight the polls on their merit. They have nothing to show in terms of their achievements. That is why they are adopting this strategy," he said. "People here in Gurgaon desperately waiting for October 5 to vote in favour of Congress for the betterment of the entire state. The BJP and its candidates have no vision to meet Gurgaon's basic requirements. In the past 10 years of government, the entire state is lacking on several issues," he added.

Congress to put pressure on Centre to restore J and K statehood: Rahul Gandhi

MOHIT KANDHARI ■ JAMMU

Battling in support of the nearly restoration of 'statehood' to the Union territory of Jammu and Kashmir, Leader of the Opposition in Lok Sabha Rahul Gandhi Monday said his party would put pressure on the Centre to restore J-K's statehood after the ongoing assembly polls. Addressing a rally along with the President of the Jammu and Kashmir National Conference Dr Farooq Abdullah in the Surankote assembly segment of Poonch district, Gandhi also trained his guns toward Prime Minister Narendra Modi, claiming the INDIA bloc "broke his psychology" after the Lok Sabha elections. "He used to boast about a 56-inch chest but he is not the same person anymore".

Seeking support for Congress-National Conference alliance candidates, he said his party wanted the restoration of statehood before the ongoing polls. He said there are numerous examples of Union Territories being upgraded to states but never in the history of India a state was downgraded to a union territory. "For the first time, a full-fledged state (J&K) was turned into a UT, and your democratic rights were snatched," he told the rally. "We will put pressure on them (Government) and we will ensure that it (restoration of statehood) is done. If they don't do it we will," Gandhi said. Rahul reiterated the stand of the party in his second election meeting in Srinagar. "Whenever you need me, you just have to give me an order



and I will be present before you. I will raise your issues in Parliament. You know the special relationship I have with you. I do not have to even mention it," Gandhi told an election rally in the Zainakote

area on the city's outskirts. "I will be your voice in parliament," he told the gathering. Gandhi said the biggest issue for the people of J-K is the restoration of statehood. "We

guarantee that it will be restored. If the BJP does not give it to you (after elections), we will ensure that it is restored." The Lok Sabha MP accused the BJP and RSS of spreading

"hatred and violence" in the country and dividing people on the lines of caste, creed, religion, region, and language. Taking a dig at Prime Minister Narendra Modi's monthly radio show 'Mann ki Baat', Gandhi said Modi makes long and "meaningless" speeches but is not willing to address the issues of the country. "He only talks about his Mann Ki Baat and not Kaam ki Baat. Kaam ki baat is to give jobs and vision to the youth and reduce and restore statehood to J-K. No one is listening to your Mann ki Baat (anymore)," Gandhi said at the rally. Addressing the huge gathering in Surankote, NC chief Farooq Abdullah also made a strong appeal to the people urging them to unite and support its alliance with the Congress in the ongoing J&K polls, which he said is not about religion

but action. "Aaj yah dharm ki baat nahin hai, yeh karm ki baat hai kyunki yeh badi jung hai nafrat ke khilaf (Today, it is not about religion but it is about action, because this is a big fight against hatred). It is a fight against those hate-spreading parties who want to divide India. Can we bury those parties that are spreading hatred in India?" Abdullah said. Lashing out at the BJP-led Government for "taking away" the rights of the people, Rahul said earlier governments in J-K were run by locals and their decisions were meant for "your better future and in your interest". "Today, outsiders are making decisions for you and your voice is not there in your government. Your Government is run from Delhi, orders are coming from Delhi. We want your

Government to be run from J&K," he told the gathering. Abdullah urged the public to vote for the alliance and bring its Government to Jammu and Kashmir. "Press the button on the symbol of the hand, make this alliance successful, and bring its Government to Jammu and Kashmir. This election will relieve you of your difficulties. This is our promise to you," he assured the crowd. Abdullah referred to Choudhary Mohammad Akram, who is a rebel candidate contesting against the Congress candidate in the constituency and asked him to withdraw for the "greater good" of the alliance. "Akram Sahab, your continued stance strengthens those forces that do not want us to live peacefully. Step down and make this alliance a success," he urged.

Doctors win hearts during their visit to flood hit areas in Bengal

SAUGAR SENGUPTA ■ KOLKATA

Emon abeg akey kokhono bhalobasha pabo jantam na ... daktari pora ta safol holo (never saw such emotions never got so much love outside home we are lucky that we have read medicine). That is how a junior doctor who is part of the team of doctors that has been touring the flood hit areas of Hooghly, and East Midnapore and Howrah explained the general euphoria among the people after seeing the doctors' bus approaching their village. "They literally blocked our way and mobbed us at Mechogra we thought this could be a political aftermath of the cease work in Kolkata but it was quite opposite these poor people were receiving us with so much enthusiasm," said Dr Kinjal Nanda a junior doctor. True doctors have suddenly turned into "Gods" in flood affected regions of Bengal. "As soon as they are seeing the banner inscribed junior doctors of RG Kar Medical College they are surrounding us," he says adding how while guiding the doctors to a local club room where they have erected a makeshift health centre they express their solidarity. "We are with you sir ... we are with you dada we also want justice not only for the RG Kar didi --- read victim lady doctor who was raped and murdered on August 9 but also for the entire women community," shouts Eira a local college student from Panskura even as she brings her grandfather to be examined. "Our mohalla has turned into an island ... the water is receding very slowly my grandfather had gone to make a bamboo machaan (raised platform) as our semi pucca house has partially collapsed and it is not safe to live there for the fear of snakes he fell down and injured his chest and cannot even breathe properly for the past several days these doctor babus have come like messiah as there is hardly any help coming from anywhere," she said. A team of doctors have come



from Midnapore Medical College too to treat the patients and have set up their camp about 25 km away, said a former panchayat member adding, "we Government is sending relief but half of it is getting diverted to the houses of influential people." When asked as to whether they are not afraid of the local political toughs who were unlikely to take their "social work" very kindly, Dr Mubaiya Hussein said, "we have formed a group of doctors who are working us, he says adding how while rising above political level so the people have no problem coming to us no one can stop us we have popular support." The relief camp started on Friday and "till Monday the doctors had completed about 10 camps treating several hundred patients," a former panchayat member at Udaynaraianpur in Howrah district said. After calling off their sit-in demonstration in front of the Health Department Headquarters "Swasthya Bhawan" last week, a section of the junior doctors headed towards flood affected Panskura in East Midnapore and other areas on Friday morning for offering relief and medical services. "Common people have contributed tarpaulin and so many other items during our protests. We are coordinating with WBJDF and sending the relief items to the flood affected areas," a junior doctor said adding they had brought medicines and other medical stuff with them to treat the patients. "We are overwhelmed by the

support of the people I am not talking about Kolkata but also the districts and villages the local people are with us we found not a single slogan that accusing us whereas some people in power were telling that due to the cease work the people in the villages were getting angry and they would soon attack us nothing of that sort happened rather we are being welcomed with arms spread out," said another doctor. Dittoing the doctors silent call for justice that is evident from the black badge on their chests that reads 'we want justice' the locals are also shouting the same slogan at various places," said a shopkeeper at Chachiara whose shop is still half sunk in water. "Why should we not be with them they have not agitated for their increasing their salary they have agitated for justice for one of their sisters ... we are all with them ... we must be with our daughters and ensure justice to them," said Asfaq Hussain a tailor Purushottampur even as the doctors sailed into his locality on a boat. Meanwhile, Chief Minister once again slammed the Centre for drowning Bengal even as she visited the Borjora region of Bankura district. "During elections they come with folded hands to beg for votes and when the opportune moment comes they drown Bengal with manmade floods," Banerjee said adding how the history of her State has been a history of deprivation.

Jharkhand Elections: BJP, Congress urge single phase; JMM for early completion

PNS ■ RANCHI

The ruling Jharkhand Mukti Morcha (JMM) on Monday urged the Election Commission (EC) to complete the polling process for the assembly elections by the first week of December, allowing the current government to fulfill its full term. In contrast, the main opposition party, the BJP, called for the elections to be held in a single phase and requested that home secretary Vandana Dadel be exempt from election duties. Earlier in the day, a team from the EC, led by Chief Election Commissioner (CEC) Rajiv Kumar, visited Ranchi to assess preparations for the upcoming assembly polls and held its first meeting with various political parties. JMM representatives, including MLA Sudivya Kumar and central spokesperson Supriyo Bhattacharya, presented the party's concerns to the commission. "The fifth Jharkhand assembly

elections were completed on December 23, 2019, and the government was formed on December 29. Therefore, if the sixth assembly elections are finished by the first week of December, the current government will have the opportunity to complete its full term," the JMM added. The party also urged the EC to prevent leaders from making speeches that invoke religion or caste during the campaign, citing concerns about communal polarisation. "BJP leaders have been making such speeches since August, creating divisions in society. It is your responsibility to ensure that communal polarisation does not occur, allowing people to vote freely and without fear," the JMM representatives told the EC. Meanwhile, BJP's state vice-president Rakesh Prasad and legal cell coordinator Sudhir Shrivastava shared their party's demands with the commission.



They requested that the assembly polls be conducted in one phase, citing a decline in Maoist activity in the state. Additionally, they called for home secretary Vandana Dadel to be removed from election-related duties to ensure a free and fair election. Prasad emphasised the need to keep infiltrators away from voting in

Jharkhand's Santhal Pargana region. The Congress also echoed the call for the elections to be held in one phase and requested timely scheduling, taking into account upcoming festivals. After meeting with political parties, the Commission convened with various central and state enforcement agencies—including the income tax, excise, GST, reserve bank, forest, transport, civil aviation, and narcotics departments—to review their action plans. Jharkhand CEO K Ravi Kumar said the Election Commission team would hold meetings with the commissioners of all divisions, zonal IGs, district election officers, all DIGs and superintendents of police on Tuesday. In 2019, elections to 81 assembly seats were held in five phases between November 30 and December 20, and the results were declared on December 23.

Naveen Patnaik expresses concern over deteriorating law and order

PTI ■ BHUBANESHWAR

Former Odisha Chief Minister and BJD president Naveen Patnaik on Monday expressed concern over the alleged deterioration in the law and order situation in the state under the BJP government. Patnaik said this while meeting BJD MLAs and leaders of Nabarangpur and Kalahandi districts here. The BJD president called upon the party leaders and workers to work jointly and serve the people as the law and order situation has been "deteriorating" in the state. "During our government, many developmental activities were being done and the law and order situation was well under the control of the government," Patnaik said. He also suggested to party leaders to serve the people. "We can return to power again if we fight for the rights of the people," Patnaik said. When BJD leaders from Nabarangpur district drew the attention of Patnaik on the



recent rape and murder of a minor tribal girl in Tentulikhunti block, the Leader of Opposition in Odisha Assembly said: "This is happening not only in your district but in different places." Alleging that the police hesitate to take action against the culprits of the rape and murder of the tribal minor girl, the Nabarangpur district leaders informed Patnaik that they have given a call for a 12 hour bandh on September 26. While expressing concern over rape incidents in different parts of the state, the BJD president pointed out to the alleged gang rape of two minor girls in Rourkela. On Friday, while making a statement on the alleged

custodial torture of an army officer and his fiancée at Bharatpur police station Patnaik had stated that the way an army officer and a lady were treated in Bharatpur police station is shocking and beyond comprehension. "The manner in which police allegedly treated them has shocked the conscience of the country. This has happened to a serving army officer and a lady within Odisha," Patnaik said. Senior BJP leader and Odisha Revenue minister Suresh Pujari said: "The BJD government led by former CM Naveen Patnaik was in power for 24 years. Had it worked efficiently, the state would have become violence-free. The BJD government has set up model police stations. Our BJP government will try to create model police officers." "Many women were tortured during the BJD government. No action was taken against BJD leaders even as they were involved in several cases," Pujari said.

Badlapur child sexual assault case accused shot in skirmish with police

T N RAGHUNATHA ■ MUMBAI

In a shocking development, Akshay Shinde -- the lone accused in the much-discussed Badlapur child sexual assault case -- was alleged shot at in a return fire, in an alleged skirmish with a police team on Monday. He was rushed to a hospital in critical condition. Another policeman was also reportedly injured in the sudden firing. Both Shinde and the injured policeman have been admitted to a hospital at Kalwa for treatment. The incident took place when Shinde was being shifted by a police escort from Taloja Jail to Badlapur town in Thane district for investigation in another case in which he is an accused. En route, Shinde allegedly snatched a gun from the accompanying policeman and fired around one round at self and another at the police constable accompanying him, even as other police personnel attempted to overpower him. One of the members

accompanying Shinde returned fire at Shinde in "self-defence", injuring the latter critically. All details of the incident were not available at the time of going to the press. Meanwhile, Leader of Opposition in the State Assembly Vijay Wadettiwar of the Congress demanded to know "whether the incident was an attempt to destroy evidence" in the case. Shiv Sena (UBT) Deputy Leader Sushma Andhare rooted for a CBI investigation into the incident. It may be recalled that two nursery girls -- aged four and six years -- were sexually abused allegedly by sweeper Shinde when they were in the washroom of the kindergarten school run by Adarsh Vidya Prasarak Sanstha (AVPS) on August 13 for using the toilet there. Shinde was arrested on August 17 and his police custody was subsequently extended till August 26, after all lawyers from the Kalyan Bar Association have resolved not to defend him in the case.



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PAPER WITH PASSION

Fixing the accountability

The possibility that Tirupati laddus contain animal fat has sparked outrage and fueled bitter political battle

Whether driven by apathy or greed, the Tirupati laddus have been found to contain substandard ingredients, with reports of adulteration, including animal fat, -an act that many consider a sacrilege against faith. For decades, the Tirupati laddu has been offered as prasadam to millions of devotees at the Tirumala Venkateswara Temple in Andhra Pradesh. The mere thought of it being adulterated, let alone made with animal fat, is revolting, something no devout Hindu could have ever imagined. The Tirupati Laddus became the centre of a major controversy when Chandrababu Naidu, accused the previous Y S Jagan Mohan Reddy-led Government of using animal fat in the laddus, sparking outrage among devotees and political factions. On September 18, 2024, Chandrababu Naidu made a startling claim during an NDA legislative party meeting, alleging that under the YS Jagan Mohan Reddy Government, substandard ingredients including animal fat were used in the preparation of the laddus. To give his allegations weight his party's spokesperson, Anam Venkata Ramana Reddy, presented a lab report from the National Dairy Development Board's Gujarat laboratory. According to this report, the ghee used in the laddus contained beef tallow, lard (pig fat), and fish oil.

The report, dated July 16, 2024, confirmed the presence of these substances, which Naidu and his supporters described as a grave affront to the Hindu faith. In his defence YS Jagan Mohan Reddy, the former Chief Minister accused Naidu of engaging in political opportunism and using religion to gain mileage. Reddy emphasised that the ghee procured for the

laddus came from National Accreditation Board for Testing and Calibration Laboratories certified companies and underwent rigorous testing before being used. He accused Naidu of trying to divert attention from his own administration's failures. While nothing has been definitively proven yet, there are clear indications of possible wrongdoing. The Tirumala Tirupati Devasthanam board procures approximately five lakh kilograms of ghee annually through an e-tender system. The Karnataka Milk Federation (KMF), a former supplier of ghee to the temple, clarified that it had stopped supplying ghee four years ago due to pricing issues. This leaves open the question of where the current ghee supplies are sourced from. This must be probed and established before reaching any conclusion and fixing the responsibility. It has to be handled carefully, as this could become a serious issue as sentiments of people are involved. YS Sharmila, president of the Andhra Pradesh Congress Committee, called for a CBI probe to uncover the truth. The BJP too, has expressed concern. Right now it would be premature to fix responsibility without indepth investigations. As calls for investigations grow louder, the controversy has not only shaken faith but also placed the sanctity of religious offerings at the centre of a bitter political battle.

PICTALK



A peacock spreads its plumage at the National Zoological Park, in New Delhi

ANRF: A catalyst for India's R&D

Backed by substantial funding and strategic direction, Anusandhan National Research Foundation seeks to address societal challenges while creating a research culture



R P TIWARI

The role of research and development (R&D) in nation-building is pivotal, as it drives economic growth, boosts global competitiveness, provides solutions to societal challenges, equips learners with 21st-century skills, and enhances defense capabilities critical to national security and strategic positioning. R&D investment not only strengthens global influence but also allows for the development of tailored solutions to local needs. A strong focus on research fosters a technically empowered youth, who, in turn, fuel entrepreneurship and innovation.

India's current R&D expenditure is only 0.66 per cent of its GDP. Despite this, the country boasts a robust scientific foundation, ranking third globally in research publications and PhD graduates. In 2022, India published over 300,000 research papers, demonstrating its commitment to knowledge advancement. Furthermore, India ranks sixth in the world for patent grants. The scientific community has long called for increasing R&D spending to at least 2 per cent of GDP to scale up research that addresses societal needs. As Bill Gates once said, "I believe in innovation, and that the way you get innovation is you fund research and you learn the basic facts." Similarly, Albert Szent-Gyorgyi noted, "Research is all about four things: brains to think, eyes to see, machines to measure, and money." India's research ecosystem is set for a transformative shift with the launch of the Anusandhan National Research Foundation (ANRF), a significant initiative by the Modi government aimed at enhancing research and innovation across the nation. ANRF is poised to promote interdisciplinary research, cultivate a strong research culture, and position India as a global leader in science and innovation. ANRF will receive Rs 50,000 crore over five years, with contributions from industry, phil-



anthropists, and both domestic and international sources, including government funds. Industry participation is crucial to ensure that research outcomes align with real-world needs and are effectively implemented. ANRF's mandate covers strategic direction in research, innovation, and entrepreneurship across disciplines such as natural sciences, engineering, technology, environmental sciences, health, and agriculture. Its goal is to foster collaborative research essential to solving the pressing issues facing humanity. The transition from the Science and Engineering Research Board (SERB) to ANRF marks a significant shift in research priorities. Initiatives such as doubling private sector involvement in R&D, increasing full-time researchers, boosting women's participation, and creating a national repository of STI data are expected to spur innovation. According to Dr. Abhay Karandikar, Secretary of the Department of Science and Technology, this shift will be crucial for fostering an innovation-driven environment. At ANRF's first Governing Board meeting, chaired by PM Narendra Modi, key



INDIA'S CURRENT R&D EXPENDITURE IS ONLY 0.66 PER CENT OF ITS GDP. DESPITE THIS, THE COUNTRY BOASTS A ROBUST SCIENTIFIC FOUNDATION, RANKING THIRD GLOBALLY IN RESEARCH PUBLICATIONS AND PHD GRADUATES

decisions were made to overhaul the research ecosystem. Modi emphasised the need to remove obstacles in research, set ambitious goals, and pursue breakthrough research that addresses national needs. He stressed that while problems may be global, their solutions must be tailored to India's unique context. Several initiatives were approved, including the launch of programs to build research capacities in universities with underdeveloped research cultures, using a hub-and-spoke model with established institutions. ANRF will also focus on mission-mode research in priority areas such as Electric Vehicles, Advanced Materials, Smart Infrastructure, Solar Cells, and Health Technologies. Additionally, the decision to establish Centers of Excellence for interdisciplinary research in humanities and social sciences will promote multidisciplinary efforts. The board also highlighted the need for flexible funding mechanisms to ensure ease of conducting research and emphasized the importance of fundamental research alongside applied research. The ANRF faces the monu-

mental task of driving reforms that create tangible societal impact. It aims to shift research priorities from volume-based output to quality-driven innovation, with the ultimate goal of making India self-reliant and a global research leader. The Foundation will support translational research beyond Technology Readiness Level-3 (TRL-3), ensuring research outcomes are applied in real-world contexts. This aligns with PM Modi's vision of a 'Viksit Bharat@2047'. The operationalization of ANRF marks a decisive step in revolutionizing India's research and innovation landscape. It promises faster decision-making and reduced response times to meet the needs of the S&T system. This development positions India's scientific community to adopt global best practices in research funding and promotion. With ANRF now functional, the scientific community is eagerly anticipating the realization of long-awaited reforms, including the exemption of GST on scientific equipment. (The writer is vice chancellor of Punjab university; views are personal)

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

TIRUPATI LADDU CONTROVERSY

Madam — The contamination of animal fats in Laddu prasadam at Tirupati Balaji Temple has rocked the country with widespread criticism and calls for harsh punishment of the guilty. It has also roped in some political controversy. However, it leaves behind the substantial questions for Temple management towards management of prasadam, community feasting, langars etc. With net worth of Rs 2.5 lakh crore and annual income of Rs 5111 crore, Tirumala Tirupati Devasthanam (TTD) and similar other religious trusts managing the prestigious temples should plan for self reliance in shudh desi ghee and dairy products, vegetables, edible oils etc. by establishing gausshalas, farming and setting up quality control cells to check and stop adulteration in food products. Gausshalas will protect cows. It should be considered that dry prasad, dry fruits may be provided to the devotees. There should be strict control on food and prasad offerings in the temples as it is seen that the devotees are even offering pakoda and samosa too, the perishable within a few hours. Beyond Prasad and food, the prosperous temples and trusts should set up schools, colleges, Universities, hospitals and research institutions with Government collaborations. Further the tribal areas should be adopted by the religious trusts for education, health and skilling. It will also check conversions. It is all the more important that the Hindu temples are liberated from Government clutches and taxation of income, if any, should be restricted as per Income Tax Act 1961:

Vinod Johri| Delhi

FACT CHECK UNIT UNCONSTITUTIONAL

Madam — Except the top 10 democratic countries of the world, the governments of any other country have not provided complete freedom of expression to their citizens. By finding some fault in every kind of freedom, the gov-

India's extreme summer



According to Climate Central, a non-profit news website based in New Jersey, India lived through its second hottest summer, between June and August, 2024, in the last 54 years. There were as many as 143 heatwave deaths in the country during the period. More, there were nearly 42,000 heat stroke cases reported in the country in the above three months. Interestingly, both man made

climate change and El Nino were blamed for the scorching summer this year. In El Nino, the ocean surface warms unusually above the normal average level in the tropical Pacific Ocean. Many Indian cities bore the brunt of very high temperatures running into almost 70 days in some cases. The website has said that a mind boggling 429 million people if India experienced severe heat conditions for at least a week. Alarmingly, this may not be a one-off year and the ensuing years can witness a similar kind of intense heat months if different levels of global warming are not scientifically assessed and tackled with the utmost seriousness it deserves. In the past, experts have warned that India is going to witness more frequent heatwaves with severe intensity. The entire South Asia will experience more and more heatwaves in the future.

Ganapathi Bhat | Akola

ernments have tried to curb that expression by calling it a tampering with the security of the country. Like the Government of India has done. In 2023, by making amendments in the IT rules, the so-called Fact Check Unit was formed. Through which the comment made against the government has been allowed to be rejected by calling it fake and action has also been recommended against its account holder. The Mumbai High Court has directly declared it a threat to freedom and democracy. The Bombay High Court has abolished the Fact Check Unit which curbed freedom of expression. Justice Atul Chandurkar has considered it a violation of Articles 14, 19, 191-G and 21 of the Constitution. The court said that the interpretation of FCU is vague and does not stand the test of logic. Senior advocate Navroz Sirvai, who represented stand-up comedian Kunal Kamra, clarified before Justice Chandurkar that the purpose of FCU is to impose censorship on those discussions which the govern-

ment wants to suppress. This is a direct attack on freedom of expression. The system of Fact Check Unit was created by the central government with the aim of cracking down on fake, misleading and false news on social media forums Facebook, Twitter and YouTube.

Jang Bahadur Singh | Jamshedpur

ASHWIN ACHIEVES A LANDMARK

Madam — Scoring a hundred and taking 5 wickets in Innings in match most times. Ashwin 4 times is just behind Botham's record. Ashwin captured his 37th five wickets haul and scored 6th test century as a lower down batsman. Again he is the only all rounder to have 20 fifty plus scores and 37 five wickets haul. He is the second most wicket taker for India after Anil Kumble and joint most 10 wickets haul with him. He was the fastest to complete 250, 300 and 350 wickets in international test cricket.

C.K. Ramanathan | Ghaziabad

Send your feedback to: letterstopioneer@gmail.com

Letting go of habits that harm environment

As our modern conveniences push us closer to environmental catastrophe, it becomes crucial to reflect on the small, mindful steps that can lead to lasting change



SANJAY CHANDRA

Transitions are always difficult, more so when one is asked to break away from habits formed over an entire lifetime. We are hurtling towards a certain catastrophe if we do not change and start caring for nature.

I used to leave the tap running while brushing my teeth, shaving, or even washing my hands until a few years back. We installed water aerators in our taps to conserve water. I realised that my shave with running tap water without an aerator was resulting in an additional three-fourths of a bucket going down the drain. Even with the aerator it still resulted in some wastage.

I had forgotten that my grandfather shaved with just a mug full of water. As I narrated the results of my experiment to others, I realised that a few were aware and were already into conservation. We are now contemplating switching to ultraviolet filters, a technology-driven improvement upon the earlier devices. A few years back I was in the market with my wife. As I carried the shopping of the day in



bright-coloured polythene bags, we were approached by a couple of young women. Their tone was aggressive as they asked us the reason for the synthetic bags. I brushed them aside rather rudely at this transgression in my private space. I might have been more receptive had they politely explained the agenda of 'Say No to Plastic' or might have felt shamed enough if they had silently handed over a couple of cloth bags that they carried with them for distribution. We now carry cloth bags during trips to the market and even malls. Technology has made our lives comfortable. However, this has also resulted in an increased generation of e-waste. Electronic waste contains hazardous and toxic substances. These should not be dumped in landfills to avoid contamination of soil, water, and air. We now hand over the e-waste to designated agencies. I remember paper was expensive in our younger days. We did rough work on one-sided paper, and even on margins, till the entire blank space was filled up. Unused pages were care-

fully taken out from the previous year's notebooks, and bound at home, to be used at home. Old newspapers were used as covers to protect books. Younger siblings used the hand-me-downs from the older ones. A snip here, and a tuck there by Mother and it was a changed dress. Peels or rinds of fruits or vegetables were used to the last ounce. The cattle thrived on it. My wife prepared a tasty chutney recently grinding the gourd peels with herbs and spices. These are small steps; nonetheless, they are a move forward. American Professor of Psychology, Ellen Langer's words are appropriate, "There is always a step small enough from where we are to get us to where we want to be. If we take that small step, there's always another we can take, and eventually, a goal thought to be too far to reach becomes achievable."

(The author is an electrical engineer with the Indian Railways and conducts classes in creative writing; views are personal)



FIRST COLUMN EMBRACING CONVENIENCE

By purchasing convenience are we not risking our skills and self-reliance



RACHNA LAKHPATRI

Advanced gadgets in today's world offer convenience and enhance our daily lives. However, at some point, it appears that we have lost sight of the delicate balance between tools that improve productivity and objects that simply encourage laziness. Similar to our homes, the market is currently filled with a wide array of devices that seem to serve little purpose other than solving problems that we never really had to begin with. Consider the salad mixer or the corn stripper, for instance. At first glance, these products offer a convenient solution for busy households looking to save time. But are they truly necessary? Is it really necessary to rely on machines to mix our salad or remove kernels from a cob, when these tasks can be effortlessly accomplished using our own hands? The consumer market is saturated with a plethora of gadgets and products that claim to simplify our lives. In reality, they contribute to the mess in our homes and encourage a lifestyle focused on convenience that is quite lazy. It's not simply about the quantity of these devices; it's about their significance. In the past, advancements such as washing machines and microwaves were highly praised for their ability to liberate people from mundane household tasks, allowing them to focus on more meaningful activities.

These products had a significant impact on productivity, allowing for more efficient use of time without any negative effects on individuals. However, in this era of excessive consumerism, the notion of convenience has been taken to extreme levels. We're bombarded with a never-ending array of products that promise to make our lives easier,



allowing us to save time and avoid any sort of physical exertion. What is the outcome? We are growing more disconnected from basic, everyday tasks, relying instead on gadgets that often end up forgotten in the cupboard once their initial excitement wears off.

This crowded marketplace is a clear outcome of a society consumed by materialism. Our lives are constantly bombarded with advertising, convincing us that every small inconvenience can be solved by purchasing the latest product. Is life meant to be devoid of challenges? Or does it include striking a balance between making life simpler and limiting ourselves to doing things ourselves? We should consider whether the items we buy fulfil a genuine need or if they are making us passive participants in our own lives. Our goal is to find ways to make daily routines less burdensome.

We should be discerning consumers; the aim is to invest in products that genuinely enhance our lives, rather than filling our homes with things that pretend to be convenient but encourage laziness. Furthermore, the excessive consumption of products has significant consequences for the natural environment. Each unnecessary item contributes to the escalating issues of waste and resource depletion. In addition, the ongoing cost of constantly chasing after the latest and most desirable gadget is something that many households simply cannot afford.

As consumers, we hold the power to create change through the choices we make. We should strive for sustainable purchases that would help simplify life but not erode our self-reliance. In essence, life is about investing time and energy wisely in what matters, not buying something we don't need. So, the next time you feel tempted to purchase something new, take a moment to reflect: does this item genuinely simplify my life, or am I simply becoming more inclined towards laziness?

(The author is a motivator and freelance writer; views are personal)

Women's fight for equality expands to the digital space



PRIYANKA CHATURVEDI

In today's world, women are asserting their rights not only in public but also in digital spaces, demanding equality across all aspects of life



Women were the original "computers." Back in the day, in the late 1800s, these women computers worked in the science, technology, engineering, and mathematics (STEM) fields, manually crunching large amounts of data through tedious computations, a task often deemed too trivial for male scientists. Somewhere between then and today, not only has our role as being seen as the backbone of STEM research diminished, but we have also lost an equal stake in the development of modern technologies.

Today, women around us actively demand equality in all aspects of life, including the digital space. Innumerable women-led protests have driven change around the world and have taken over digital spaces as well. However, relics of historical marginalisation have crept into our virtual spaces and settled as obstacles for women in their paths to achieving digital equity, as a result of which they face biases, are actively silenced, and are subject to abuse. Recently, I visited Warsaw to attend the Vital Voices Global Action Summit, which focussed on women for rights and democracy, where I witnessed a convergence of voices of women across countries and spheres of work - activism, policy, and politics.

The convergence of these voices was not limited to advocating for increased women's representation and highlighting how women are fighting back for stronger democracies as their rights form the bedrock of democratic countries; but also on how women have unequal access to technology, how tech creates a skewed idea of democracy by actively invisibilising and silencing women, how social media algorithms are not addressing the challenges women face on various platforms that "promote the idea of free speech" and how that very "free speech" is used as a tool by bullies and autocrats with no definitive action against trolling. These challenges are globally acknowledged, and all countries are committed to addressing them through ideas of rights and democracy. In India, the most significant obstacle has been the lack of access to mobile phones and the Internet.



TODAY, WOMEN AROUND US ACTIVELY DEMAND EQUALITY IN ALL ASPECTS OF LIFE, INCLUDING THE DIGITAL SPACE. INNUMERABLE WOMEN-LED PROTESTS HAVE DRIVEN CHANGE AROUND THE WORLD AND HAVE TAKEN OVER DIGITAL SPACES AS WELL

According to the latest NFHS survey, only one-third of our female population between the ages of 15 and 49 have ever used the Internet, compared to more than half of the male population in the same age group. The digital divide worsens with factors like an increase in women's age, a decrease in their family incomes, and for those women belonging to marginalised communities and living in rural areas. Additionally, women often lack ownership of mobile phones, with their devices shared or monitored by other family members, further hindering their digital participation.

For those women who manage to overcome these access barriers, the next challenge emerges - an alarmingly high rate of cybercrimes comprising threats, violence, pornography, stalking, and more. This poses a double-edged sword, with Indian courts reportedly taking cases of sexual harassment and other forms of online bullying less seriously than offences committed in the physical world. Together, the two sides create a chilling effect and inhibit women from being vocal on social media platforms and taking up roles that bring them to the digital limelight, including politics. Moreover, Indian female politicians face significantly more trolling than those in the US or UK, with those from minority groups and those challenging societal norms and male political leaders facing more vicious attacks of hate campaigns. The Bulli Bai and Sulli Deals scandals should serve as reminders of the severity of threats and bullying that target women in order to silence them - a case which remained unaddressed by the central government for long. It was the Mumbai Police, under the Maha Vikas Aghadi government led by Uddhav Thackeray, which had cracked the case and brought the accused to book after the victims' relentless hopes that the central gov-

ernment would step in and take it up with the social media platforms. The third obstacle is strange and ever-evolving: the social media algorithm. Despite its perceived progressiveness, this algorithm seems to propagate long-held biases that we have been trying to eliminate from society. Artificial intelligence technologies came with promises to improve user experiences and make social media platforms safer for all its users. However, these promises seem to have been limited to certain sections of society. Human biases have translated into AI biases and reflect sexist and racist tendencies. For instance, photographs of men and women in similar contexts are judged differently by AI technologies. Images of women in sportswear or lingerie have been scored much higher in AI's 'racy' scale compared to comparable photos of men. Avatar-generating AI apps have demonstrated similar patterns, with AI seeing men as astronauts, warriors, or on music album covers and women's avatars being mostly nude and over-sexualised versions of themselves. The AI's bias becomes more evident when female faces are labelled male and the avatars turn into more assertive-looking and fully-clothed characters.

The problem with the algorithm hurdle extends beyond individual images. The technology behind these tools is clearly flawed, yet the same is being used to control what comes in our social media feeds. Depending on how 'racy' AI rates an image, it is suppressed from reaching its audiences without the creator being aware. Similar kinds of censorship have been noted on posts containing political messages. In different instances, algorithms have rapidly amplified misogynistic content, particularly to younger audiences, with increased content on anger and blame directed at women, indicating clear issues with the algorithm disparately affecting women.

It is unfortunately left up to women to find ways to beat the algorithm and find creative ways to fight these biases as they remain severely under-represented in the technology sector. Even at the 20 largest global technology companies, women comprise 33% of the workforce and only 25% hold leadership positions as of 2022. The challenges of policy and representation put India at an opportunity to pave the way to attain digital equity. With the world's highest number of STEM graduates - 40% of whom are women - a large fraction of the female population can be included in developing future technologies. Yet, despite these numbers, the representation of Indian women in the tech workforce remains disproportionately low.

As India positions itself as a global leader in STEM, harnessing its untapped pool of female talent through targeted policies could drive systematic change, advancing both digital and physical equity for women worldwide. Our policies need to reflect this and should become the facilitators to have more women in workplaces, that encourage having women techpreneurs, pushing industries to bring in more equity, dealing with online harassment with an iron fist and, more importantly, focussing on tech access, consequently making India a role model for the world to follow. By including more girls and women, particularly from diverse backgrounds, on technical and scientific teams, we can ensure that the development of new technologies addresses women's unique challenges around access, digital literacy, and online abuse. Training women not only for technical roles but also for leadership positions will allow them to shape tech-related policies and decisions, ultimately leading to safer, more inclusive digital spaces.

(The writer is a Shiv Sena -UBT, Rajya Sabha MP; views are personal)

The Decline of Malayalam literature: A tale of nepotism and fading standards

Driven by favouritism and political influence, prestigious literature awards are no longer a reflection of literary excellence they once used to be

The reasons for the downfall in the standards of Malayalam literary works have come out thanks to an octogenarian literary professional who is passionate about the high quality novels, short stories, and poems authored by the likes of G Sankara Kurup, Thakazhi Sivasankara Pillai, Kesava Dev, S K Pottekkattu, etc.



KUMAR CHELLAPPAN

Pillai, the 81-year old editor of Sahitya Vimarsham, a quarterly publication exclusively focusing on literary works. In his pursuit to find out the reasons for the fall in the standards of Malayalam literary works, what Pillai found out is shocking. "More than the quality of the works, the writers are vying with one another to get the awards instituted by Kerala Sahitya Academy,

monopolised by the CPI(M) and Left intellectuals. "The modern day Malayalam writers are ignorant about the great works of Kalidasa. They do not have any idea about Premchand, Saraswathichandra, K M Munshi or Sarat Chandra Chattopadhyaya or even Kalki of neighboring Tamil Nadu," said Dr Ravi Shankar S Nair, leading literary critic as well as a puritan of Malayalam language. Dr M Rajeev Kumar, himself a protagonist of modern literature in Malayalam said that what is being published nowadays as novels and stories are mere jugglery with words and sentences.

Kesava Dev, always considered a rebel as well as revolutionary in Malayalam literature had said in the 1970s that

unless one gets hands-on experience in life and the world in which we live, no literature would be possible.

Dev was the first Malayalam writer to write about head load workers, rickshaw pullers and subalterns in the Kerala society. His interactions with people in this category resulted in eternal classics like Odayil Ninnu (From the Gutter) which was written in 1940. Since the story had its origin from the bottom of his heart, the work remains an eternal classic more than eight decades after it was published. Anandan Pillai has shocking disclosures to make to the readers.

The works that bag the top honours from Kerala get recognised by the National Academy of Letters in New



Delhi. Standards and qualities are dumped into gutters as third-rated writers walk away with awards and cash prizes. What happens is that the truly deserving writers never make it to the victory stand. The Vilasini Award for 2024 declared by the Kerala Sahitya Academy to P K Pokker has opened a can of worms. The Award was meant for studies in the branch of Malayalam novels and was instituted by M

K Menon (1928-1993), the author of India's longest novel The Inheritors (Avakaasikal) published in 1980. When Menon found that there were no serious studies about Malayalam novels, he set apart Rs five lakh as a corpus fund and instituted an award for the best study undertaken on Malayalam novels. The award carried a prize money of Rs 50,000 and a citation. The one stringent condition by Menon was that the award should be given to a serious and quality study on a novel. He also wanted the award should be named after O Chandu Menon, author of Indulekha, the first ever Malayalam novel. The Marxists ruling the Kerala Sahitya Academy threw to

the winds all the norms prescribed by M K Menon and selected Pokker's collection of essays "The Blue Light of Creativity" for this year's award. Menon had instructed in his will that there is no need for the academy to honour the writers as a ritual every year. "He had mentioned that if no quality studies are available, the award need not be given at all," said A B Reghunathan Nair, who helped Menon to draft the will.

Pillai points out that this is not just one case of nepotism and favouritism which are the hallmarks of Sahitya Academy. K P Ramanunni, executive committee member of the National Academy of Letters chose Unni Ammayambalam, a hitherto unheard writer for

a sub-standard work on children's literature. "The reason? Unni who was the chairman of Pottekkat Memorial Award Committee had ensured that Ramanunni got the award for the best story.

Self-styled poets are all members of the award mafia ruling the roost in Malayalam literature. The National Academy of Letters, as part of a cover-up mission, has stopped publicizing the names of jury members, books that were considered and what made the selection process have put an iron curtain on queries under the RTI Act. Well, it is better to leave certain things unsaid, unexplained and undisclosed. (The writer is the south India Bureau chief of the Pioneer; views are personal)

Dissanayake sworn in as Lanka's new president

PTI ■ COLOMBO

Marxist leader Anura Kumara Dissanayake on Monday took oath as Sri Lanka's new president and said he will usher in a "Renaissance" for his country. Dissanayake, 56, was sworn in as Sri Lanka's ninth president by Chief Justice Jayantha Jayasuriya at the Presidential Secretariat. In his inaugural address to the nation, Dissanayake thanked his predecessor Ranil Wickremesinghe for respecting the people's mandate and facilitating a peaceful transfer of power. "I assure you that I will do my best to preserve democracy and work towards restoring the honour of politicians as people have misgivings about their conduct," Dissanayake said in an address after taking the oath. Dissanayake stressed Sri Lanka cannot remain in isolation and needed international cooperation. He said he is not a magician, but his objective is to be part of a collective responsibility to elevate the economic crisis-stricken country. "I'm not a magician. I'm an ordinary citizen born in this country. I have abilities and shortcomings. I have things I know and don't know. My first task is to make use of people's talents and know-how and make better decisions to lead this country," he said. "I



Supporters of Marxist lawmaker Anura Kumara Dissanayake cheer outside the president's office as he arrives to be sworn in as Sri Lanka's 10th president in Colombo, Sri Lanka, Monday. AP/PTI

want to be a contributor to that collective responsibility," he added. Later in a post on X after the swearing-in ceremony, Dissanayake said, "I promise to fulfill your responsibility to usher in a new era of Renaissance for this country, and I look forward to your collective contribution to that." In another post, he thanked

Prime Minister Narendra Modi for his congratulatory message and said he shared the Indian leader's commitment to strengthening bilateral ties. "Thank you, Prime Minister Modi, for your kind words and support. I share your commitment to strengthening the ties between our nations. Together, we can work towards enhancing

cooperation for the benefit of our peoples and the entire region," Dissanayake said. Dissanayake, clad in a white long-sleeved tunic and black trousers, received blessings from the Buddhist clergy present after the ceremony. Dissanayake, the leader of the Marxist Janatha Vimukthi Peramuna party's broader front National People's

Power (NPP), defeated his closest rival Sajith Premadasa of Samagi Jana Balawegaya (SJB) in Saturday's election. The election was the first to be held since mass protests unseated Gotabaya Rajapaksa in 2022 after the country suffered an economic crisis. His swearing-in comes hours after Prime Minister Dinesh Gunawardena resigned from his post as part of a power transition in the country following the presidential election. The country's Election Commission had to order an unprecedented second round of counting on Sunday after no candidate secured over 50 per cent votes needed to be declared the winner of the presidential election. Dissanayake won the election obtaining 5.74 million votes, with 105,264 preferences. Premadasa got 4.53 million votes with 167,867 preferences. Dissanayake's anti-corruption message and his promise of a change in political culture resonated strongly with young voters who had been demanding system change since the economic crisis. "We are over the Moon. We have been waiting for this moment for a long time. We fought for this. Two years ago, in the same place, we were fighting to send the corrupt government home, demanding our money back—those were our slogans. They are the ones who

brought us to the economic crisis we face now. Right now, this is our victory, but there is a long way ahead," one of his supporters told PTI outside the Presidential Secretariat. The accession of Dissanayake, who is popularly known as AKD, to the top post is a remarkable turnaround for his half-century-old party JVP, which had long remained on the margins. He is Sri Lanka's first-ever Marxist party leader to become head of state. The NPP's popularity has risen sharply since 2022 after securing only around three per cent of the vote in the last presidential election in 2019. Dissanayake, who hails from rural Thambuttegama in the North Central province, is a science graduate from the Colombo suburban Kelaniya University. He joined the JVP, the mother party of the NPP, in 1987 at the height of their anti-Indian rebellion. In the 2000 parliamentary election, he entered Parliament from the JVP. He has been an opposition livewire since 2001. Dissanayake re-entered Parliament from the northwestern district of Kurunegala after the 2004 election in an alliance with the Sri Lanka Freedom Party. He was appointed the minister of agriculture.

Xi congratulates new Lankan Prez, pledges more BRI investment

Beijing (PTI): Chinese President Xi Jinping on Monday congratulated his newly-elected Sri Lankan counterpart Anura Kumara Dissanayake, pledging more high-quality cooperation through BRI, amid speculation that his Marxist background may lead to stronger ties with Beijing and a delicate balancing act between China and India. In his congratulatory message to 56-year-old Dissanayake, Xi said that he prizes the development of China-Sri Lanka relations, and stands ready to work with the Lankan leader to carry forward the traditional friendship and enhance political mutual trust. Xi, 71, also pledged to work with the Sri Lankan president to facilitate more fruitful high-quality Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) cooperation and make steady and long-term progress in the China-Sri Lanka strategic cooperative partnership. The BRI is a multi-billion-dollar initiative launched by Chinese President Xi when he came to power in 2013. It aims to link Southeast Asia, Central Asia, the Gulf region, Africa and Europe with a network of

land and sea routes. However, the initiative has raised global concerns over China's debt diplomacy of extending huge loans to smaller countries for unsustainable infrastructure projects. India is opposed to BRI as a key section of the massive infrastructure project—the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC)—runs through Pakistan-occupied Kashmir (PoK). China's high-value BRI projects in Sri Lanka, including the Hambantota port acquired by Beijing on a 99-year lease under a debt swap during Mahinda Rajapaksa's presidential tenure, have been criticised for exacerbating Sri Lanka's economic crisis. China is Sri Lanka's largest bilateral lender owning 52 per cent of the USD 40 billion external debt when Sri Lanka announced its sovereign default in 2022. Sri Lanka managed to emerge from a severe economic crisis due to the USD 2.9 billion lifeline provided by the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and the USD 4 billion financial assistance given by India.

France's new govt meets first time to discuss budget and migrant issues

AP ■ PARIS

France's new government dominated by conservatives and centrists gathered for the first time Monday as Prime Minister Michel Barnier set budget and migrant issues as top priorities. Barnier convened a meeting on Monday morning with newly appointed ministers ahead of a Cabinet session in the afternoon with centrist President Emmanuel Macron at the Elysee presidential palace. The long-awaited list of government members was unveiled Saturday, more than two months after elections that produced a hung parliament and deepened political divisions as France grapples with growing financial and diplomatic challenges. Speaking on Sunday evening in his first televised interview since his appointment, Barnier acknowledged a key challenge for his government will be the 2025 budget bill to be debated at parliament starting from next month. Barnier called on France 2 television for a "national effort required to redress the situation" after France was placed earlier this year by the European Union's executive arm under a formal procedure



for running up excessive debt. "I'm not going to further increase the tax burden on all French people," Barnier promised, yet suggesting that "the wealthiest contribute to this national effort." In June, the EU Commission recommended to seven nations, including France, that they start a so-called "excessive deficit procedure," the first step in a long process before any member state can be hemmed in and moved to take corrective action. Barnier also vowed to "control and limit immigration" in Sunday's interview. He said

numbers of migrants coming to France "has become unbearable." He referred to measures taken by neighbouring countries like Germany, which this month ordered temporary controls at all land borders. Barnier was appointed at the beginning of the month. His first major political test will come on October 1, when he is set to deliver his general policy speech to the National Assembly, France's powerful lower house of parliament. A left-wing coalition, the New Popular Front, secured the most seats in June-July parli-

amentary elections but failed to win a majority. The New Popular Front was not given a chance to form a minority government, and refused to make concessions and join a more left-leaning government alliance. Barnier argued that the deal made by his conservative allies and Macron's centrists will allow them to have a bigger support at the National Assembly. Barnier, a 73-year-old political veteran known for his role as the EU's Brexit negotiator, is no stranger to complex political tasks. "We'll make compromises," he said. "That's how I managed to unite the EU 27 countries during the Brexit negotiations." Barnier also insisted there will be "no controversy" between him and Macron despite both coming from a different political background, because "that's the interest of the country." Macron is to head Tuesday to New York for the UN General Assembly, before a two-day visit to Canada. In France, the president holds a dominant role on strategic matters of defence and foreign policy while the prime minister leads the government and usually focus more on domestic issues.

Pope cancels audiences due to slight illness

AP ■ ROME

Pope Francis cancelled his audiences Monday because of a "slight flu-like state," just days before he is to embark on a trip to Belgium and Luxembourg, the Vatican said. A statement from the Vatican described the clearing of Francis' agenda for the day as a "precaution." Francis is due to visit Luxembourg on Thursday and then spend the rest of the week in Belgium, ending with a Mass in Brussels on Sunday. The 87-year-old pope, who has been using a wheelchair for two years, has battled a series of health problems in recent years and had part of one lung removed as a young man because of a respiratory infection. He has had a packed schedule of audiences since returning from a four-nation, 11-day journey through Asia on Sept 13, which was the longest and farthest trip of his pontificate. The audiences have included multiple meetings with visiting bishops, individual audiences with his Vatican aides as well as a big encounter on Friday with members of popular movements. The statement from the Holy See press office described

Francis as having a "flu-like state." Through much of last autumn and winter, Francis battled acute bronchitis and recurring bouts of influenza, which forced him to cancel a quick trip to Dubai in November to participate in the UN climate conference. He did so, the Vatican said at the time, at the recommendation of his doctors. In Belgium, Francis is due to celebrate the 600th anniversary of the country's main Catholic universities, and minister to Belgians who have been rocked by years of unrelenting revelations of clergy sexual abuse and cover-up. The challenging Asia trip, followed so closely by the Belgium and Luxembourg visit, was already going to test Francis' health, especially as he heads into a busy autumn. As soon as he returns from Belgium, he is due to preside over a three-week synod, or meeting of bishops, which involves long days of closed-door debate about the future of the church. Francis' audiences on Monday included with the members of the Pontifical Academy of Sciences, who are meeting at the Vatican this week for their plenary assembly, and participants in a Christmas contest. The Vatican

published the texts Francis was supposed to have delivered to both. Francis has had several health problems in recent years. In 2023, he spent three days in the hospital receiving intravenous antibiotics to treat a respiratory infection. In 2021, he had 13 inches (33 cm) of his colon removed, and then had a follow-up surgery two years later to repair an abdominal hernia and to remove scar tissue. The Vatican has confirmed that plans remain in place for Pope Francis to go to Belgium and Luxembourg later this week, despite having cancelled all his audiences Monday because of a "slight flu-like state." Vatican spokesperson Matteo Brunini said the cancellation only concerned Monday's audiences. He spoke to reporters before the official start of his Vatican briefing to illustrate details of the trip. Earlier in the morning, the Vatican announced that Francis had canceled his audiences Monday as a precaution. He returned on Sept 13 from Asia, where he visited four countries. He is due to travel to Luxembourg on Thursday and then spend the rest of the weekend in Belgium.

Rival protesters clash in Bolivia

El Alto (Bolivia) (AP): Bolivia's pro-government supporters and security forces confronted protesters loyal to former president Evo Morales in a street melee Sunday, the second such violent escalation this week as fears grew of further unrest in the Andean nation. The protesters and counterprotesters hurled firecrackers, small dynamite bombs and stones at each other across a dusty sprawl in the city of El Alto, while riot police unleashed tear gas into the crowds. At least eight people were injured, Bolivia's health ministry reported. The standoff—erupting while thousands of Bolivians supporting Morales continued a weeklong 190-kilometre march to the capital of La Paz—spoke to the depth of the schism in Bolivian politics ahead of next year's presidential election. Morales and his former economy minister-turned-bitter-rival, current President Luis Arce, are vying to lead Bolivia's long-dominant socialist party, known by its Spanish acronym MAS, into the 2025 vote. In recent months their power struggle has paralysed the government, exacerbated the depletion of Bolivia's foreign-exchange reserves and fuelled street protests. The rolling political crisis began in 2019, when Morales—who came to power in 2006—was forced to resign.

Harris raises \$27 mn in New York fundraiser, promises economic speech this week

AP ■ NEW YORK

Vice President Kamala Harris raised USD 27 million at a packed New York City fundraiser on Sunday, her largest fundraising haul since she took over at the top of the ticket from President Joe Biden, according to a Harris campaign aide. Though Harris has far more money than former President Donald Trump, the money will be needed to compete with pricey advertising by deep-pocketed outside groups that support Trump, said the aide, who spoke on condition of anonymity to discuss private fundraising details. The blockbuster fundraiser was held at Cipriani Wall Street in a massive Greek Revival ballroom with over a dozen columns. Much of the crowd stood shoulder to shoulder as Harris needed Trump for refusing to debate her again. "My opponent seems to be looking for an excuse," Harris told the crowd. "I feel very strongly that we owe it to the American people, to the voters, to meet once more before Election Day." She reiterated that later, telling reporters after landing outside Washington, "We have more to discuss." Trump has rejected more debates, saying Saturday that "it's just too late." "Voting is already started," he said at a rally in Wilmington, North Carolina. Voters cast the

first in-person ballots last week in Minnesota, South Dakota and Virginia, the states with the first early in-person voting opportunities. About a dozen more states will follow by mid-October. Harris also said she would deliver a speech Wednesday outlining her economic vision, saying there is "more we can do to invest in the aspirations and ambitions of the American people while addressing the challenges they face." She cited the high cost of home ownership and stubbornly high grocery bills as examples. "I grew up a middle-class kid and I will never forget where I came from," she said. By fleshing out her economic agenda in more detail, Harris can address an issue that's front of mind for voters after prices soared during Biden's presidency and distance herself from the president's economic track record. Trump has criticised her for being slow to release detailed policy proposals of her own since she rose to the top of the ticket. Harris has said she'd push for middle-class tax cuts and tax hikes on the wealthy and corporations, and she adopted Trump's proposal to end taxes on tipped wages, though she'd limit her plan to low- and middle-income taxpayers. She's also criticised Trump's plan to impose large tariffs on most imported goods, which she says would severely raise the cost of goods.

Scholz's Social Democrats hold back far right in state vote

AP ■ POTSDAM



The Social Democrats of Chancellor Olaf Scholz won an election in the eastern German state of Brandenburg on Sunday, gaining a narrow edge over a growing far-right party, according to the vote count. The vote took place three weeks after the far right made gains in two other states in eastern Germany. According to final results published Sunday evening by the state electoral administration, the Social Democrats won 30.9 per cent of the votes in the election to the parliament of Brandenburg, the state that surrounds Berlin. The far-right Alternative for Germany was a close second with 29.2 per cent. A new leftist movement, the Sahra Wagenknecht

Alliance, or BSW, came in third with 13.5 per cent while the centre-right Christian Democrats took 12.1 per cent. The first-place showing for the Social Democrats brought a reprieve to the beleaguered Scholz, whose three-party governing coalition has fared poorly in elections so far this year. The Social Democrats have governed Brandenburg con-

tinuously since German reunification in 1990, and a loss there would have been a major setback for Scholz, who has his constituency in the state capital, Potsdam. Scholz has said he would like to be the party's candidate for chancellor in next fall's federal election, and Sunday's vote was also being watched for what it might signal about his political future. "It's great that we won," Scholz said from New York, where he was attending a meeting at the United Nations, according to the German dpa news agency. But the success of the Social Democrats in Brandenburg—after defeats elsewhere—was largely credited not to Scholz, but to the efforts of the popular state governor, Dietmar Woidke. He distanced himself from

Scholz during the campaign and took the gamble of promising to resign in case of a win by the far right. He was able to celebrate his political survival on Sunday night. "It is an important victory for me, it's an important victory for my party, and it's an important victory for the state of Brandenburg," Woidke said after polls closed. But he also said he felt the strong showing of the far-right party means there is work to do. "They (the AfD) have achieved about 30 per cent, a lot of voters have voted for the AfD, and that's too much. So we have to think about these results and we have to make our policies better," Woidke told The Associated Press. The far-right party has gained support amid a growing backlash against large-scale migra-

tion to Germany over the past decade and recent extremist attacks. Germany's economy, once a powerhouse, has been weakening, adding to a general feeling of malaise. Sunday's vote followed a heated election campaign centered on the issues of migration, internal security and peace. Both the far right and the new leftist movement want to end weapons deliveries to Kyiv as Ukraine tries to defend itself against Russia's full-scale invasion. The Alternative for Germany won the most votes in the state of Thuringia and also did well in Saxony in elections held on September 1. The new party on the left, the BSW, also made a strong impact, while the parties in Scholz's unpopular national government obtained extremely weak results—as

they did again on Sunday in Brandenburg. The vote in Thuringia marked the first electoral victory for a far-right party in Germany since World War II. It triggered concerns in Germany and abroad about the growing support for the extreme right in Germany, a NATO member and the largest European Union country. Towards the end of voting on Sunday afternoon, a group of anti-AfD protesters gathered near a restaurant where the far-right party's supporters gathered to learn of the election results. Their chanting and the sound of whistles sought to disrupt the party. One carried a placard saying "AfD is so 1933," referencing the year Adolf Hitler and the Nazis came to power.

Search underway for Alabama mass shooting suspects

Birmingham (US) (AP): Authorities have reported no arrests after a weekend mass shooting killed four people and left 17 others injured in what police described as a targeted "hit" by multiple shooters who opened fire outside a popular Alabama nightclub. The shooting occurred on the sidewalk and street outside Hush, a lounge in the entertainment district, where blood stains were still visible on the sidewalk outside the venue on Sunday morning, Birmingham Police Chief Scott Thurmond said authorities believe the shooting targeted one of the people who was killed, possibly in a murder-for-hire. A vehicle pulled up and "multiple shooters" got out and began firing, then fled the scene, he said.

"We believe that there was a hit, if you will, on that particular person," Thurmond said. Police said about 100 shell casings were recovered. Thurmond said law enforcement was working to determine what weapons were used, but they believe some of the gunfire was "fully automatic." Investigators also were trying to determine whether anyone fired back, creating a crossfire. In a statement late Sunday, police said the shooters are believed to have used "machine gun conversion devices" that make semiautomatic weapons fire more rapidly. Officers found two men and a woman on a sidewalk with gunshot wounds and they were pronounced dead there.

An additional male gunshot victim was pronounced dead at a hospital, according to police. Police identified the three victims found on the sidewalk as Anitra Holloman, 21, of the Birmingham suburb of Bessemer, Tahj Booker, 27, of Birmingham, and Carlos McCain, 27, of Birmingham. The fourth victim pronounced dead at the hospital was pending identification. By the early hours of Sunday, victims began showing up at hospitals and police subsequently identified 17 people with injuries, some of them life-threatening. Four of the surviving victims, in conditions ranging from good to critical, were being treated at

the University of Alabama at Birmingham Hospital on Sunday afternoon, according to Alicia Rohan, a hospital spokeswoman. The area of Birmingham where the gunfire erupted is popular with young adults because of its proximity to the University of Alabama at Birmingham and the plethora of nearby restaurants and bars. The shooting was the 31st mass killing of 2024, of which 23 were shootings, according to James Alan Fox, a criminologist and professor at Northeastern University, who oversees a mass killings database maintained by The Associated Press and USA Today in partnership with the university.

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Massive money losses for 75 lakh individual F&O traders says SEBI

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

More than 91 per cent, or 73 lakh, individual traders lost money in the Futures & Option (F&O) segment in FY24 with an average net loss of Rs 1.2 lakh per person, a study conducted by markets regulator Sebi revealed on Monday.

Further, 93 per cent of over 1 crore individual F&O traders incurred average losses of about Rs 2 lakh per trader (inclusive of transaction costs) during the three years from FY22 to FY24.

The aggregate losses of such traders exceeded Rs 1.8 lakh crore during the period.

In FY24 alone, individuals incurred about Rs 75,000 crore in net losses, it added.

The Sebi study found the top 3.5 per cent of loss makers about 4 lakh traders faced an average loss of Rs 28 lakh per person over the same period, inclusive of transaction costs.



On the other hand, only 7.2 per cent of individual F&O traders made a profit over the period of three years and only 1 per cent of individual traders managed to earn profits exceeding Rs 1 lakh, after adjusting for transaction costs.

Moreover, the number of retail traders, or individual traders, has almost doubled in two years to about 96 lakh in FY24 from about 51 lakh in FY22.

Although such investors contributed about 30 per cent in the total turnover in FY24, they are a clear majority in number terms, as 99.8 per cent of total traders in the equity F&O segment are individuals.

"The availability of sophisticated trading platforms and lower transaction costs have enabled retail investors to actively trade in options and futures contracts,

contributing to the surge in market liquidity," Sebi said.

The regulator said rapid growth in F&O trading activity has highlighted the need for investor education and risk management practices, as a significant proportion of retail traders continued to incur losses in the market.

This study follows up on a report published by Sebi in January 2023, which found that 89 per cent of individual equity F&O traders lost money in FY22.

With increased participation of individual investors in equity and equity derivatives markets, the current study was undertaken to analyse profit and loss patterns for individual traders in F&O during FY22 to FY24, and for all the categories of investors in F&O during FY24 alone.

While individuals made losses in F&O, the FPIs and proprietary traders earned profits. The proprietary

traders earned about Rs 33,000 crore of gross profits in F&O segment in FY24, followed by FPIs who earned about Rs 28,000 crore in gross profits.

Against this, individuals and others incurred losses of over Rs 61,000 crore in FY24 (before accounting for transaction costs).

In terms of demography, the proportion of young traders - less than 30 years of age has significantly increased trading in the segment to 43 per cent in FY24 from 31 per cent in FY23.

Nearly 93 per cent of these young traders incurred losses in F&O in FY24, higher than the average loss makers of 91.1 per cent in FY24.

The proportion of female traders participating in F&O has decreased from 14.9 per cent in FY22 to 13.7 per cent in FY24.

Compared to male traders, less proportion of female traders incurred losses.

PM attends tech CEOs roundtable in New York

PTI ■ NEW YORK

Prime Minister Narendra Modi participated in a "fruitful" roundtable with the CEOs of leading American tech companies, where he emphasised India's growth prospects and discussed initiatives to foster bilateral collaborations across various sectors.

The meeting took place at the Lotte New York Palace Hotel on Sunday during the second leg of Modi's three-day US visit. It saw the participation of CEOs of 15 major US-based firms working on cutting-edge technologies such as AI, quantum computing and semiconductors.

"Had a fruitful roundtable with tech CEOs in New York, discussing aspects relating to technology, innovation and more. Also highlighted the strides made by India in this field. I am glad to see immense optimism towards India," Modi said in a post on X.

During the conference, Modi said technology collaboration and efforts such as the Initiative on Critical and Emerging Technologies (ICET) lie at the core of the India-US Comprehensive Global Strategic Partnership, according to a Ministry of External Affairs press release.

The prime minister stressed that in his third term, India will make every effort to become the third largest economy in the world, and encouraged the companies to take advantage of India's growth story for collaboration and innovation.

"They can co-develop, co-design, and co-produce in India for the world, harnessing the

opportunities from India's economic and technological growth," the press release said.

Organised by the Massachusetts Institute of Technology (MIT) School of Engineering, the CEOs of top US tech firms, including Google CEO Pichai, Adobe CEO Shantanu Narayana, Accenture CEO Julie Sweet and NVIDIA CEO Jensen Huang attended the conference.

Others who participated in the roundtable include AMD CEO Lisa Su, HP Inc. CEO Enrique Lores, IBM CEO Arvind Krishna, Dr Nourab Afeyan, Chairman of Moderna, and Verizon CEO Hans Vestberg.

Assuring the business leaders of India's deep commitment to the protection of intellectual property and to fostering tech innovation, Modi highlighted the economic transformation happening in the country, particularly in electronics and information technology manufacturing and semiconductors.

Modi asserted that his government was committed to making India a "global hub of semiconductor manufacturing". He also talked about India's BIO E3 (biotechnology for environment, economy and employment) policy to develop the country into a biotech powerhouse and on the topic of AI, noted that India's policy is to promote AI for All, underpinned by its ethical and responsible use.

The CEOs appreciated India's growing prominence as a global technology hub, driven by its innovation-friendly policies and flourishing market opportunities. They also expressed strong interest in investing and collaborating with India.



Audi India announces festive package

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

German luxury carmaker, Audi has announced a '100 Day' celebration package to celebrate 100,000 vehicles sold in India. The 100 day celebration campaign includes a 10% discount on service plans and

comprehensive service value plans, along with a 10% discount on extended warranties and Audi genuine accessories.

Balbir Singh Dhillon, Head, Audi India said, "We have curated exclusive benefits for our esteemed customers, enhancing the entire

ownership experience. We are also offering unmatched loyalty and corporate benefits, along with exciting finance and exchange offers."

The German carmaker recently launched the new Q8 Sports Utility Vehicle for Rs 1.17 crore.

Centre steps up onion sales to curb price surge

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

The Centre has intensified its efforts to check onion prices by stepping up the sale of buffer stock in wholesale markets, following a spike in retail prices after the recent removal of export duty.

Consumer Affairs Secretary Nidhi Khare on Monday said the Centre has begun offloading onions from its buffer stock in wholesale markets of Delhi and other key cities, with plans to expand subsidised retail sales nationwide.

"We anticipated a price surge after lifting the export duty. With our 4.7 lakh tonne buffer stock and increased khairif sowing area, we expect to keep onion prices in check," Khare told reporters here.

The government plans to

increase retail sales of onions at a subsidised rate of Rs 35 per kg across India, focusing on cities where prices exceed the national average.

Official data shows retail onion price in Delhi at Rs 55 per kg on September 22, up from Rs 38 per kg a year ago. Prices in Mumbai and Chennai have reached Rs 58 and Rs 60 per kg, respectively.

Since September 5, the government has been selling onions at Rs 35 per kg through mobile vans and outlets of NCCF and NAFED in Delhi and other state capitals.

Khare expressed optimism about the upcoming khairif onion crop, citing significantly higher acreage compared to last year. "Arrivals will begin next month, and we foresee no production concerns," she said.

The secretary also addressed other commodity prices.

On edible oils, she acknowledged a price rise following recent import duty hikes, explaining the move was to protect domestic farmers.

Regarding tomatoes, Khare said the government would monitor trends and intervene if necessary.

With domestic tur and urad production looking promising and increased pulses imports, Khare expects stable prices of pulses in the coming months.

Ten days back, the government removed USD 550 per tonne minimum export price on onions, while raised import duty on crude palm oil to 20 per cent and on refined sunflower oil to 32.5 per cent, aiming to support domestic oilseed farmers and processors.

Anil Ambani's Reliance Group starts transformation journey

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

Anil Ambani's Reliance Group has in recent years seen marquee firms being auctioned in insolvency proceedings and piling debt-fold businesses. But the group has, in the week gone by, made announcements that investors believe may mark its transformation.

In three days -- from September 18 to September 20 -- the group announced it has turned into nearly zero debt and is implementing long-term fund raising plans that are said to solidify its financial position.

Reliance Infrastructure's board approved fund raising of up to Rs 6,000 crore via preferential issue and QIP, while Reliance Power board is meeting on September 23 to consider and approve the fundraise via multiple routes.

The speed at which Anil Ambani moved to clear the debt of his companies, and simultaneously announce and execute the fund raising plans for future expansion of his companies, has surprised the investors.

Shares of both firms surged on stock markets.

The announcement to invest Rs 1,100 crore by the promoters group in Anil Ambani's flagship company, Reliance Infrastructure, has further boosted the confidence of investors in the group's revival plans and its long-term growth story, investors said.

Anil Ambani's twin strategy of debt reduction, coupled with fresh capital raising, has set the stage for a long-term transformation of the Reliance Group, they feel.

Reliance Infrastructure's market capitalisation by the end of this week surged nearly 50 per cent, rising from Rs



8,500 crore to Rs 12,500 crore. Similarly, Reliance Power's market capitalisation increased over 25 per cent, moving from Rs 11,500 crore to Rs 14,600 crore.

Reliance Infra announced a significant reduction in standalone external debt, lowering it from Rs 3,831 crore to just Rs 475 crore. This was achieved by clearing outstanding dues to prominent lenders such as Life Insurance Corporation of India (LIC), Edelweiss ARC, ICICI Bank, and Union Bank, according to company filings.

The move signals a robust financial recovery and enhances Reliance Infra's financial flexibility.

Also, Reliance Infra board approved a preferential issue to raise Rs 3,014 crore, increasing the stake of Rise Infinity Pvt Ltd, a promoter group entity, along with other investors such as Florintree Innovation LLP and Fortune Financial & Equities Pvt Ltd.

The board also approved seeking shareholder authorization to raise an additional Rs 3,000 crore via a qualified institutional placement.

This will provide further capital to strengthen the balance sheet and invest in new growth opportunities.

With these fund infusions, Reliance Infra's net worth is set to rise from over Rs 9,000 crore to more than Rs 12,000 crore, according to the filings.

TVS Mobility launches electric two-wheeler fleet service

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

Digital automotive aftermarket platform myTVS on Monday said it will add 10,000 electric two-wheelers to its fleet by March next year for its new venture 'Mobility-as-a-Service' offered to last-mile electric vehicle operators.

The company, part of the TVS Mobility Group of the TS Rajam branch of TVS family, has partnered with MoEVing, an EV-based logistics firm to start Mobility-as-a-Service (MaaS) to provide end-to-end vehicle management solutions.

Group firm TVS Vehicle Mobility will invest up to Rs

150 crore for the acquisition of 10,000 electric two-wheelers.

"The opportunity window is that 10 lakh vehicles have to be electrified in the next 5 to 10 years in the e-commerce space...But we see an immediate need of having to do at least 10,000 vehicles...By March," myTVS Managing Director G Srinivasa Raghavan told reporters here.

The 10,000 vehicles will be electric two-wheelers, he added.

When asked how much investment will be required to add those new vehicles, he said it will be anywhere between Rs 100 crore and Rs 150 crore, which will be



made by group firm TVS Vehicle Mobility alone or with its partners.

He said the company has started with the first rollout of 250 vehicles of electric two-wheelers and around 50 light commercial vehicles (LCVs).

Bullish on the new venture, Raghavan said, "We believe that given the quantum of opportunity with more than a million vehicles which has to be electrified in the e-commerce phase in the next 5 to 10 years, we are well positioned to provide a solution which is differentiated, unique and has inherent value to the free us."

He said the company's 'MaaS'

platform has been designed to meet the evolving needs of both personal mobility and fleet customers delivering efficiency and sustainability.

MoEVing CEO Vikas Mishra said, "The launch of 'MaaS' platform by myTVS addresses a critical need in the market, offering a comprehensive solution... By leveraging myTVS' extensive network and technology this collaboration will allow us to provide customers better service while expanding our national footprint."

The company provides aftermarket services to vehicles across brands and has over 1,000 service centres across India with over 10 lakh customers.



Naidu calls for focus on human factors, aviation psychology

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

Civil Aviation Minister K Ramamohan Naidu on Monday highlighted the need for developing the area of aviation psychology as well as robust stress and fatigue management systems for the safety of aircraft operations.

Ensuring continued safety is a collective responsibility as human factors are contributors to aircraft accidents, he said.

The minister was speaking at the national seminar on

Human Factors in Aircraft Accidents organised by the Accident Investigation Bureau (AIB) in the national capital.

Safety measures need to keep pace with the Indian aviation sector's rapid growth, Naidu said and called for continuous skilling and upskilling of people.

He also pitched for robust stress management and fatigue management programmes, including for pilots.

There is a lack of formal

programmes for aviation psychology and advanced psychological aspects need to be integrated into training programmes, Naidu said.

India is one of the fastest-growing civil aviation markets in the world and more than 1,200 planes have been ordered by the country's airlines.

Naidu also stressed on the need for technical and cognitive skills for personnel in the aircraft maintenance segment as more planes will be coming into the country.

Commission hike for content creators ahead of festive sale: Amazon

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

E-commerce platform Amazon on Monday announced an increase in its standard commission income rates across 20 plus sub-categories for over 50,000 content creators engaged with it.

The revised structure will offer content creators 1.5x-2x increased income across a wide range of product categories, including popular choices like fashion, beauty and personal care appliances, home, kitchen, toys, and books, Amazon said.

"This empowers creators to earn more during the peak shopping season and capitalise on the increased consumer demand during the Amazon Great Indian Festival (AGIF)," a company statement said.

The Amazon Great Indian Festival is set to start on September 27, with 24-hour



early access for Prime members.

Apart from the overall increase in standard commission income rates, it has also introduced targeted incentives of up to 10-15 per cent of revenue generated, it added.

As part of the Amazon Live program, hundreds of creators will run over 1,500 live streams across categories including Mobiles, Home Appliances, Home Decor,

Fashion and Beauty among many others for the AGIF (Amazon Great Indian Festival), the statement said.

Director of shopping initiatives for India and emerging markets at Amazon, Zahid Khan said this enhanced support system will not only benefit creators but also translate into a more engaging and rewarding shopping experience for the customers.

INBRIEF

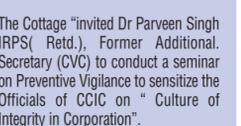
CENTRAL BANK OF INDIA CONDUCTS COMPETITION

NEW DELHI: Central Bank of India, Regional Office Delhi South concluded a School Level Competition at Manav Bharti India International School, Panchsheel Park, New Delhi under Vigilance Awareness Quarter, which is aimed at fostering Culture of Integrity for Nation's Prosperity.



COTTAGE ORGANISES A PREVENTIVE VIGILANCE SEMINAR

The Cottage "invited Dr Parveen Singh IRPS(Retd.), Former Additional Secretary (CVC) to conduct a seminar on Preventive Vigilance to sensitize the Officials of CCIC on " Culture of Integrity in Corporation".



GNDU SIGNS MOU WITH IIT ROPAR

AMRITSAR: The Guru Nanak Dev University has taken a significant step toward fostering innovation and entrepreneurship by signing a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) with the Indian Institute of Technology (IIT) Ropar's Technology and Innovation Foundation.



'FATHER OF INDIAN CHESS BOOM'

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

If you had to roll the dice, these are pretty good teams to roll them with." Viswanathan Anand had a strong hunch that India would go on to be more than within "smelling" distance of gold at the Chess Olympiad this time. And much to the delight of the revered Grandmaster, who played a key role in shaping some of the brightest youngsters in Indian chess right now, the country swept both the men's and women's gold at the 45th Olympiad in Budapest, Hungary.

World Championship challenger D Gukesh, R Praggnanandhaa, Arjun Erigaisi, Vidit Gujrathi, and P Harikrishna decimated competition to clinch the gold in the open section, finishing ahead of top seeds USA and Uzbekistan.

Then Harika Dronavalli, R Vaishali, Divya Deshmukh, Vantika Agrawal, and Tania Sachdev claimed the top honours in the women's event ahead of Kazakhstan and USA to complete an Indian sweep. It was a first for the country and it was fitting that Anand, its original superstar of the game, had a role. Both the teams had fetched bronze medals in the previous

Olympiad, which was held on home turf in Chennai. Anand knew they "were smelling the gold" at that time but let it slip in the closing stages.

However, the 54-year-old five-time world champion, in an interview to PTI before the Olympiad, put his faith in both the teams' ability to go the distance in Budapest and it was icing on the cake that he was there to witness history being made by them in the Hungarian capital.

"...You know, if I had to roll the dice, these are good teams to roll them with," he had said.

Gukesh, Praggnanandhaa, Erigaisi and Vaishali have trained at the Westbridge Anand Chess Academy (WACA) that the bespectacled chess wizard set up four years ago in Chennai.

The 18-year-old Gukesh and the 19-year-old Praggnanandhaa have often stated that they would not be where they are without "Vishy sir".

So, it was hardly a surprise that the International Chess Federation (FIDE) addressed him as the "father of Indian chess boom". This was after the great Garry Kasparov paid tribute to his genius by saying that the "children of Vishy Anand are on the loose!" after Gukesh won the Candidates in

THE ANAND EFFECT SHAPING A 'GOLDEN GENERATION'



April to become the youngest world title challenger. Anand prefers to share the credit with the parents and formative coaches of the players but does say that his idea of a chess academy, which was inspired by schools he had seen in the Soviet Union more than three decades ago, did play its part.

"The aim was very simply, to help. Indians were consistently getting to the top 200, but not quite in breaking into the top 100 in the same way. So the idea was, you know, can we support the most talented youngsters and see if we can just help them get past that stretch? I think we have been successful now," he had said before the Olympiad.

"I mean, obviously, there are lots and lots of people involved. Not only, you know, WACA, but also their parents, their own coaches, we try to integrate and make sure that we can fit in nicely. But I think, you know, we definitely played our part."

In his interaction with FIDE during the Olympiad, Anand did admit to being surprised at the pace with which the likes of Gukesh and Praggnanandhaa have risen.

"I took all the youngsters who had become Grandmaster before the age of 14. To be honest, the idea was to support them from being top juniors to becoming world beaters," he said.

"My initial group was Praggnanandhaa, Gukesh, Arjun joined a bit later. In the girls, Vaishali was there. Did I expect it to go this fast? Not really. Did I suspect this could happen? Yes. But somehow this is unbelievable," he added.

"This is not a coincidence but at the same time, exceeds my expectations."

The affable, semi-retired player, who still manages to win tournaments for fun, the last being the Leon Masters in Spain a couple of months back is quite content with what he has managed to achieve as a mentor given the challenges that WACA faced before taking off.

The COVID-19 pandemic was at its peak when the academy was founded in 2020.

Anand knew he had a bunch of very special kids putting their faith in him to steer them and he is glad to have been there.

"It feels like a magical time for India. As I said, with such players, you know that you'll have a certain amount of results, but they consistently exceeded (expectations). It's very nice to have it all at the same time," he said grinning widely.



India look to rotate players against Maldives

PTI ■ THIMPHU

Having already booked their spot in the semi-finals, India will eye the top spot in Group A when they take on Maldives in the SAFF U17 Championship here on Tuesday.

In their opening match last Friday, Ishfaq Ahmed's boys saw off Bangladesh 1-0 in a repeat of last year's final at Sumit.

Sharma Brahmacharimayum headed in the winning goal in the 92nd minute.

Sunday's 1-1 draw between Bangladesh and Maldives meant that India qualified for the semi-final with a game to spare.

Ahmed suggested that might allow him to rotate the squad and give valuable game time to more players, while resting a few starters from the first game.

"Well, since we have already qualified, I want to make sure the other players get some game time as well. All our players are important. There are a few niggles as well. We want to win this match and top the group," he said.

The Indian squad was in attendance for the match between Bangladesh and Maldives, which was dominated by the former as they took the lead early in the second half.

However, Maldives, with a rare attacking opportunity, equalised through their captain Mohamed Ilan Imran in the 79th minute and held on for the point.

"Maldives showed good

character to come back in the game. Bangladesh had a lot of chances, but in these kinds of tournaments, if you want to beat every team, you have to play extremely well.

"This game was an example of what can happen if you get a little bit careless. So yeah, we want to get all three points and qualify as group winners," said Ahmed.

The way things stand in Group A, Maldives require a draw to qualify for the semi-finals, while Bangladesh will hope for an Indian win by a margin of more than one goal. Should India win 1-0 against Maldives, it would come down to disciplinary points between Bangladesh and Maldives to determine the group runners-up.

The winners of Group A will face the runners-up of Group B (either Bhutan, Pakistan, Nepal or Sri Lanka) in the first semi-final on September 28.

Exactly 12 months ago, India beat Maldives 8-0 in the semi-final of the SAFF U16 Championship at the very same venue, which should give a psychological edge to Ahmed's boys.

Five of the goalscorers -- Vishal Yadav, Levis Zangminlun, Manbhakupar Malngiang, Mohammed Kaif and Md Arbash -- are part of this year's squad as well.

The other advantage India have over Maldives is two days of extra rest. The Blue Colts have had three training sessions after arriving in Thimphu and are rapidly getting acclimatised to the conditions.

Australia appoints Tony Popovic as new head coach

AP ■ SYDNEY

Football Australia has appointed former Asian Champions League winning manager Tony Popovic as the new head coach of the Australian men's team until the end of the 2026 World Cup.

Popovic, 51, replaces Graham Arnold, who stepped down last week after an indifferent start to the Socceroos' World Cup qualification in the Asia zone.

"I am extremely honoured to be given this opportunity to lead the Socceroos as head coach," Popovic said in a statement on Monday. "It's a role that comes with great responsibility, and I'm deeply grateful for the opportunity."

"To be entrusted with guiding our national team is a privilege that I do not take lightly.

Popovic is best known for guiding the Western Sydney Wanderers to the Asian Champions League title in



2014, and has also had successful stints with the Perth Glory and Melbourne Victory in Australia's A-League.

Earlier in his career, Popovic had stints as an assistant at Crystal Palace and coached at clubs in Turkey and Greece.

Popovic, who won 58 caps for Australia as a defender, decided not to renew his contract with the Victory for the upcoming A-League season making his immediate appointment to the Socceroos post possible and timely with vital home World Cup qualifiers against China on Oct. 10, followed by a trip to Japan five days later.

Australia are winless through their first two games of the third stage of qualifiers, after a shock loss to Bahrain at home and a dour 0-0 draw away to Indonesia.

"We have moved swiftly to secure the best possible candidate for this crucial role," said FA chief executive James Johnson. "Our prompt action reflects our commitment to maintaining the momentum and success of the Socceroos program, especially as we are at the beginning of the critical third round of AFC Asian qualifiers."



Barcelona extend perfect start in Spanish league

AP ■ MADRID

Barcelona extended their perfect start to the Spanish league season but lost goalkeeper Marc-Andre ter Stegen with a serious knee injury.

Barcelona routed host Villarreal 5-1 on Sunday night to pick up its sixth straight victory in the competition, but saw captain Ter Stegen leave the match on a stretcher just before halftime after his right knee buckled when he fell awkwardly after going up for a ball crossed into the area.

Barcelona president Joan Laporta said the injury appeared to be a torn ligament but more tests would be conducted. Local media reports said Ter Stegen went from the stadium to the hospital in an ambulance, and left the hospital in a wheelchair.

"This injury makes us sad. I think the injury will be huge but we have to wait for more information," Barcelona coach Hansi Flick said. "We have to accept it. It's not easy. It was an accident. It's very tough."

Players from both teams immediately called for medical assistance after Ter Stegen fell to the ground in pain. He was replaced by reserve goalkeeper Inaki Pena.

Real Madrid goalkeeper Thibaut Courtois, who missed most of last season with a similar injury, showed his support to Ter Stegen with a message on X, saying that it hurt to see his colleague leave the field like that and that he hoped he would recover soon.

It was the latest injury to Flick's Barcelona, which is already without Dani Olmo, Frenkie de Jong, Gavi and Ronald Araujo, among others.

Robert Lewandowski scored a pair of first-half goals and Raphinha added two after the interval, with Pablo Torre also scoring for the Catalan club in the second half. Lewandowski now has six goals from the first six matches and leads the league in scoring.

Ayoze Pérez scored the only goal for the hosts in the 38th, with his team already trailing 2-0. Villarreal had entered the round in fourth place, four points behind Barcelona.

Barcelona has outscored its opponents 22-5 in its first six games. It has a four-point lead over Real Madrid, which beat Espanyol 4-1 on Saturday.

ATLETICO MADRID HELD: Atletico Madrid missed a chance to keep pace with Barcelona after a 1-1 draw with Madrid rival Rayo Vallecano. Rayo took the lead through Isi Palazon in the 35th minute, and Conor Gallagher equalized for the visitors in the 49th. Atletico was coming off three straight wins in all competitions. In other results Sunday, Getafe and Leganes drew 1-1 and Athletic Bilbao defeated Celta Vigo 3-1.

Ricciardo helped out a driver from what's officially a different team, but Norris isn't complaining.

"That's how it's been in Formula 1 probably since before I was born, so nothing to complain about," he said. "It's the logical thing to do, the smart play by them."

Alcaraz clinches Laver Cup for Team Europe in 13-11 victory over Team World

AP ■ BERLIN

Four-time Grand Slam champion Carlos Alcaraz overcame Taylor Fritz 6-2, 7-5 as Team Europe rallied to beat Team World 13-11 and win the Laver Cup.

Alcaraz broke the U.S. Open runner-up Fritz in the 11th game and then closed out victory on serve, sparking celebrations as the Europe team rejoiced with captain Björn Borg in Berlin.

Team World was favorite to win the Laver Cup for a third straight time after leading 8-4 on points heading into the last of the three days.

Europe began the comeback Sunday when Alcaraz and Casper Ruud won the doubles 6-2, 7-6 (6) against American pair Ben Shelton and Frances Tiafoe. But Shelton then downed Australian Open finalist Daniil Medvedev 6-7 (6), 7-5, 10-7 to move the World team into pole position.

Tiafoe, who reached the U.S. Open semifinals, could have sealed it for them but he lost to French Open finalist Alexander Zverev 6-7 (5), 7-5, 10-5,



setting up the decider between Alcaraz and Fritz. The Laver Cup is formatted like golf's Ryder Cup with the first team to 13 points winning the contest. Each of the four matches on Sunday was worth three points.

Europe's only win in Saturday's four matches came from Alcaraz, who won the French Open and Wimbledon this year.

On Sunday, the 21-year-old Spaniard showed his big-match temperament once again.

Emotional Daniel Ricciardo heads toward likely F1 exit

AP ■ SINGAPORE

Daniel Ricciardo was once tipped as a future Formula 1 champion. His last act in F1 might be playing spoiler in the title race. The Australian's late rally at the Singapore GP on Sunday snatched the bonus point for the fastest lap away from title challenger Lando Norris and helped out Max Verstappen.

Ricciardo drives for RB, the sister team of Verstappen's Red Bull, and has previously been a teammate to both Norris and Verstappen.

"If Max wins by a point then I just guaranteed myself a nice Christmas present," Ricciardo told British broadcaster Sky Sports. Verstappen thanked Ricciardo over the radio to Red Bull.

The lap put the visibly emotional Ricciardo — a popular figure in F1 — in the spotlight ahead of a widely expected decision to replace him with RB's reserve driver Liam Lawson. It generated controversy, too.

Ricciardo finished outside the top 10 so the point isn't credited to him in the standings, and he finished further back — in 18th place — because he stopped for fresh tyres before the lap.

McLaren chief executive Zak Brown objected.

"This once again illustrates that the issue of A/B teams and dual ownership in F1 needs to be addressed as it creates opportunities to manipulate outcomes," Brown told The Associated Press.



"It is precluded in the sporting regulations and we must make sure this type of incident doesn't happen again in the future, as in Singapore only one team benefited and it wasn't the team which set the fastest lap."

RB's team principal Laurent Mekies said the team had wanted to give Ricciardo a race to remember. "Given this may have been Daniel's last race, we wanted

to give him the chance to savor it and go out with the fastest lap," he said in a statement.

RB has yet to officially confirm Ricciardo is leaving, but the driver gave his clearest indication yet that this may have been his last race. "A lot of emotions because I'm aware it could be it," he said.

Ricciardo's F1 career looked like it might be over in 2022 when Norris soundly beat him at McLaren. After a stint as a Red Bull reserve, he got another chance last year when RB, then branded AlphaTauri, fired the underperforming Nyck de Vries midseason. It hasn't really worked out, with only four top-10 finishes in 25 races.

"I always said I don't want to come back just to be on the grid, I want

to try and fight back in the front and get back with Red Bull, and obviously it didn't come to fruition. So then, I also have to ask myself the question, 'Well, then what else can I achieve?'"

Ricciardo told Sky Sports.

"Maybe, the fairy-tale ending didn't happen, but I also have to look back on 13 or so years, and I'm proud."

Even more than for his eight wins, the last of them in 2021, the Australian was famed for his easy-going manner and sense of humour and became a standout face of the "Drive To Survive" Netflix series, which brought F1 to a new audience and sparked a boom in interest in the United States.

Ricciardo's voice was first heard in the first episode of the 2018 season, which showed him relaxing with his family in Australia and talking about his dream of being a champion.

Ricciardo's fastest lap tipped the title race away from Norris in one very important way. If Verstappen is second in each of the remaining six Grand Prix races and three sprints, he will retain the championship by one point from Norris.

Ricciardo helped out a driver from what's officially a different team, but Norris isn't complaining.

"That's how it's been in Formula 1 probably since before I was born, so nothing to complain about," he said. "It's the logical thing to do, the smart play by them."

INDIA TIGHTEN GRIP ON TOP SPOT IN WTC TABLE



PTI ■ DUBAI
Dominant India tightened their grip on the top spot in the World Test Championship table with a 280-run victory over Bangladesh, while Sri Lanka saw off New Zealand in

Galle to help their move towards a potential spot in the final at Lord's next year. The two results have led to shifts in the race for the two final spots, with Sri Lanka leapfrogging their current opponents into third spot. India's win in Chennai and the

12 WTC points reasserts their status at the top of the table, moving to a percentage of 71.67%, extending their lead on Australia in second (62.50%). Bangladesh, who had jumped to the fourth position following an exceptional 2-0

win against Pakistan, drop to sixth place (point percentage of 39.29%) behind Sri Lanka and England after the defeat. Bangladesh started the fourth day at 158/4 in pursuit of India's 515, with skipper Najmul Hossain Shanto and

Shakib Al Hasan at the crease. The duo resisted briefly, though India's spin duo of Ravichandran Ashwin and Ravindra Jadeja wiped claimed the remaining six wickets for just 40 runs. Ashwin won the Player of the Match award for his brilliant

hundred in the first innings and six-for in the second innings. Moving to third on the WTC25 table after victory in Galle, Sri Lanka stand the best chance of challenging the 2023 World Test Championship finalists for a spot in the 2025 final. The 63-run victory over the Black Caps in Galle was their fourth in eight matches, moving them an even 50% of possible World Test Championship points, with a best possible percentage of 69.23% for Dhananjaya de Silva's men. That figure would likely be enough for a chance of lifting the mace in next year's finale at Lord's, though the side would need to beat New Zealand once more, claim a clean sweep of South Africa, and beat Australia 2-0 at home in a series early next year. The Indians still have nine Tests remaining in this WTC cycle to decide their fate and make it to their third consecutive final of the tournament. They had ended as the runners-up in the previous two editions — to New Zealand (2020) and Australia (2022).



As County cricket suffers, Lancashire CEO terms BCCI's domestic diktat 'fantastic prioritising'

PTI ■ LONDON

The BCCI directing its established players to participate in domestic cricket has been termed "fantastic prioritising" by Lancashire's CEO Daniel Gidney, who accused the English players' agents for facilitating their foray into the lucrative franchise leagues at the expense of the traditional red-ball competition. Gidney feels these agents threaten the future of the English County Championship. The BCCI had mandated all international players, except for seniors like Rohit Sharma, Virat Kohli and Jasprit Bumrah, to play in tournaments such as Ranji and Duleep Trophy when they are not busy with national commitments, the move highlighting the board's emphasis on the role of domestic cricket. In fact two of the younger stars Shreyas Iyer and Ishan Kishan lost their annual BCCI retainership contracts for skipping domestic events at the expense of IPL. While Kishan despite repeated feelers didn't play a single Ranji game, Iyer did play during the knock-out stage including final. This decision by the BCCI found many takers, including Gidney, one of cricket's longest-serving chief executive. "Imagine a governing body (BCCI) actually saying that out loud ... That was fantastic prioritising," Gidney was quoted as saying by 'The Guardian'. Calling the agents the main threat to the future of the English County Championship, the Lancashire CEO said they "don't care" about the county game. "We need to have more of an open conversation. Coaches get blamed, administrators get blamed, but if you want to blame anybody, blame agents," Gidney said on the sidelines of a match between Lancashire and Somerset at Old Trafford. He added, "I think the game as a whole needs to come together to find a way to support the championship. "England players don't have to play in the championship, agents don't care about the championship." According to Gidney, increasing the players' remuneration could be of help. "More prize money would help and I think we need to find a way of paying four or five players a lot more money. Instead of GBP 80,000-90,000 being the top domestic salary, we need to find a way of paying GBP 200k ... and saying part of that deal is that you don't play franchise cricket." Gidney called for a cap on franchise participation to protect first-class cricket but made it clear that he is not against players earning good money from playing in the T20 leagues. The cap on a number of T20 leagues that a particular professional player "They have a career - I'm not begrudging their ability to earn money — but the balance has tipped ... When the bottom rung of the Hundred is what a rookie would earn in the championship - who among us would turn down earning more money for less work?" Earlier this year, BCCI secretary Jay Shah had asked all centrally-contracted India players to turn up for matches in domestic cricket and warned that non-participation could lead to severe implications.

Bumrah arguably the best fast bowler across formats: Steve Smith



PTI ■ NEW DELHI

Seasoned Australian batter Steve Smith has spoken glowingly of Jasprit Bumrah ahead of the Border-Gavaskar Trophy, calling the Indian arguably the best fast bowler across formats. The five-Test series between India and Australia begins in Perth on November 22. India have won the past two series Down Under. If India are to do a three-peat, Bumrah's rare skills will be heavily relied

upon in Australia. "He's a wonderful bowler, whether I face him with the new ball, slightly older ball, or even the old ball. He's got great skills with all of them. He's a great bowler, arguably the best fast bowler across the three formats. It's always going to be a challenge," Smith told Star Sports. The 35-year-old has been opening for Australia in the past couple of series and is expected to do the same against India. Smith, a veteran of 109 Tests, is likely to cross the 10,000-run milestone in the high-profile series, having so far made 9685 runs. Bumrah, on the other hand, has done remarkably well since making his Test debut in January 2018, taking 164 wickets in 37 games at an average of 20.51.

Jayasuriya spins Sri Lanka to victory over NZ in tight 1st test

AP ■ GALLE

Left-arm spinner Prabhath Jayasuriya delivered a stellar five-wicket haul in the second innings and nine wickets overall, to lead Sri Lanka to a 63-run victory over New Zealand in the first Test on Monday. New Zealand resumed play on the final day needing 68 more runs to reach a victory target of 275. However, they managed to add just four runs before Sri Lanka wrapped up the game in only 3.4 overs. Overnight batsman Rachin Ravindra, who had kept New Zealand's hopes alive with a valiant 91 on Sunday, could only add one more run to his total before being trapped leg before wicket by Jayasuriya. The promising left-hander's resistance ended as he misjudged a delivery trying to defend on the back foot. In Jayasuriya's next over, he bowled last man William



O'Rourke for a duck, sealing Sri Lanka's victory in a tightly contested match and the 32-year-old spinner's eighth five-wicket haul in tests. Although Ravindra narrowly missed out on a well-deserved century, his score of 92 is now the highest by a New Zealand batter in Galle, surpassing Ross Taylor's 86. Notably, no Black Cap has scored a century in Galle, where they have now lost all five matches played. Sri Lanka's win moved them up to third place in the World

significant thing on a Galle pitch that becomes increasingly difficult to bat on as the game progresses. However, New Zealand's failure to break the crucial 147-run third-wicket partnership between Dinesh Chandimal and Dimuth Karunaratne in Sri Lanka's second innings proved decisive. Both experienced batters scored half-centuries, with Angelo Mathews also contributing a vital 50, helping Sri Lanka set a challenging target of 275. On a deteriorating pitch, that total proved too much for the visitors. The teams will remain in Galle for the second Test, which begins on Thursday. Sri Lanka will be hoping to win its first Test series against New Zealand since 2009. Since then, the sides have met in six series, with New Zealand winning four and two ending in draws.

South Africa deny Afghanistan sweep of ODI series

AP ■ SHARJAH

South Africa denied Afghanistan a series sweep with a seven-wicket win in the third and final ODI. Aiden Markram's unbeaten 69 led South Africa to 170-3 with 17 overs to spare in the one-day international after Afghanistan collapsed for the first time in the series and was bowled out for 169 in 34 overs. Afghanistan won the series 2-1. An inexperienced South Africa was dismissed for 106 and 134 in the first two games, but Markram paced the chase well on yet another slow wicket at Sharjah Cricket Stadium with a gritty 67-ball innings. "Feeling very happy with the series win," Afghanistan captain Hashmatullah Shahidi said. "I would be more happy if we would have won this match." He called the three run-outs of his team's batters "a

big reason why we didn't finish on top." Afghanistan was missing its ace leg-spinner Rashid Khan because of a hamstring injury. Earlier, Rahmanullah Gurbaz, who made a century in the last game, held the innings together by contributing 89 runs in 94 balls after Afghanistan chose to bat first. But none of the other top eight Afghan batters could score more than 10 with three of them run out. No. 9 batter AM Ghazanfar made a whirlwind 31 not out off 15 but South Africa always looked in control through the disciplined bowling of Lungi Ngidi, Nqabayomi Peter and Andile Phehlukwayo, who all picked up two wickets each. South Africa finally got used to the conditions in the United Arab Emirates as their pace bowlers Ngidi and Phehlukwayo were well supported by some superb



fielding. Ngidi tested the batters upfront through his cutters and slow balls and pinned debutant opener Abdul Malik leg before wicket inside the power play. Ngidi then had Rahmat Shah run out when Gurbaz's drive clipped his fingers in the follow through and hit the stumps at the non-striker's end. Shahidi was run out while going for a second run and Ikram Alikhil met a similar fate when he

went too far down the wicket before Gurbaz sent him back as Afghanistan slipped to 113-5 in the 22nd over. South Africa should have dismissed Mohammad Nabi on 5 but captain Temba Bavuma didn't go for the television referral against Bjorn Fortuin's arm ball before the spinner had Nabi caught behind in his next over. Gurbaz tried to accelerate in search of his second successive

century before he holed out to Reeza Hendricks at extra cover but Ghazanfar's late flurry ensured Afghanistan crossed the 160-run mark. Bavuma (22) and Tony de Zorzi (26) provided South Africa with a solid start of 40 and controlled the power play before Bavuma was undone by off-spinner Ghazanfar and clean bowled. De Zorzi was twice dropped off Nabi's successive deliveries before Nabi had him trapped lbw and Hendricks' run of poor form continued when he mistimed a pull shot and was caught after scoring 18. Markram and Tristan Stubbs controlled the chase with their match-winning 90-run stand with Stubbs 26 not out. "We were quite clinical with the bat," Bavuma said. "In terms of series, not what we planned for, (but) the guys will take a lot of experience and learning from it."

Odisha swimmer Pratyasa Ray to get Ekalabya Puraskar this year

PTI ■ BHUBANESWAR

Pratyasa Ray, a rising star in swimming, was selected for the prestigious Ekalabya Puraskar for 2024, an official said. Ray secured six medals - four gold, one silver and a bronze - in the Khelo India University Games in Guwahati in February this year. The Ekalabya Puraskar committee comprising jury members drawn from various sectors were unanimous in selecting Ray for the prestigious award at a meeting here. Ray will be awarded a cash prize of Rs 7 lakh-an increase from the previous Rs 5 lakh, along with a citation at a ceremony to be held at a later date. Sprinter Dondapati Mrutyam



Jayaram and badminton player Tanvi Patri will also be felicitated for their remarkable performances in various international and national-level events in their respective fields. Each of the citation winners will receive a cash prize of Rs

1.5 lakh, up from Rs 1 lakh, along with citations at the award ceremony. Ekalabya Puraskar was instituted by charitable body IMPaCT in 1993 and managed by IMFA, the leading ferro alloys producer in the country. It is now considered the most prestigious sports award in Odisha. The award is given every year to young sportspersons of Odisha in recognition of their outstanding performance in the preceding two years. Announcing the names of the award winners on Sunday, Bajjayant Panda, chairperson of Ekalabya Puraskar Committee and Trustee of IMPaCT, said the award was instituted to encourage young sportspersons of the state to perform at the national and international arenas.

Ravindra Jadeja: India's stealth warrior

PTI ■ CHENNAI

Unless you're a freak like Jasprit Bumrah, bowlers playing alongside Ravichandran Ashwin can be pushed behind the giant-shadow of the master off-spinner, even if it's Ravindra Jadeja, a genius in his own right. Sometime during the Kanpur Test later this week, Jadeja, now standing at 299 wickets and 3122 runs, will join an elite club of cricketers to have achieved the grand double of 300 wickets and 3000 runs in the longest format. Bear it in mind, only 10 players, including two from India in Ashwin and Kapil Dev, have achieved this mark in the history of cricket and some luminaries such as Gary Sobers and Jacques Kallis are missing from that list too. But still Jadeja's name hardly ever get mentioned in the same breath as some of the aforesaid all-rounders.

In one way, the modus operandi of Jadeja is the primary reason for it. Ashwin is eloquent and is not afraid to talk about his skills in a press meet or in his YouTube channel. Jadeja does neither. He is quite happy to operate under the radar - like a stealth fighter jet. But put him into a situation that demands a bail-out operation, Jadeja's fighting instincts instantly come forth. In that way, he is very task-oriented. Take the case of the first Test against Bangladesh here, which India won by a whopping 280 runs. From 144 for six, Jadeja and Ashwin took India to 376 all out with a 199-run stand for the seventh wicket. Jadeja made 86, but the talk centred around Ashwin's home hundred. Jadeja took five wickets in the

match, but Ashwin 'out-bowled' him with six-wicket haul in the second innings. There was a huge amount of talk about how Ashwin used the angles to set up veteran Bangladesh left-hander Shakib Al Hasan. However, there was hardly any mention about Jadeja dragging Litton Das through hell during his 10-ball stay before eventually snaring him. Jadeja is an artist whose strength lies not in his artistry but in his competitive spirit. But unfortunately, once again Jadeja's valuable all-round effort ended up as a footnote, visible only to a discerning observer. Ashwin was quick to acknowledge the significance of having Jadeja at the other end.



"He's been a very inspirational story. Sometimes, when you're in the race along with your co-cricketers, you want to get ahead of one another. And then you slowly start admiring one another."

"Now, that admiration has gone one step higher, knowing that I can never beat Jadeja. So, I'm comfortable in my skin, but totally inspired by what he's done," Ashwin had said after the first Test.

Since forming a pair in 2012, they have played 45 Tests together at home, winning 34, losing three and drawing the remaining eight. In those 45 matches, Jadeja has taken 218 wickets while the senior partner took home 263 wickets. "It can be safely said that, they feed on each other's presence. I would say Ashwin has benefitted slightly more by the presence of Jadeja, because he hardly gives anything to batsmen. Even on flat wickets, batters struggle against him because of his control. "So, at times, they are forced to take risks against Ashwin or other bowlers. But who are those other bowlers - Bumrah and Shami. So, for visiting batters it is a really no-hope situation, the pressure is continuous on them," a former

India left-arm spinner told PTI. "He is quite selfless too in what he does. He hardly gives big interviews or tussle for any positions. I don't even know whether he likes all the hype around. He seems a contented person, happy in just contributing to the team," he added. Check this image. The Chepauk Test was done and dusted. Celebrations were on. Some players were giving the obligatory bytes to the host broadcaster. But Jadeja, after a few customary hugs and handshakes, stood near the boundary line, tossing a red-ball and gazing intensely at the ground from under his floppy hat. Perhaps, the strategies for the second Test, beginning of September 27, were already brewing in his mind. Jadeja will be soon 35, and is ever closer to the end of his career. Let's give a louder round of applause to him.