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Inside

WORLD 9
THOUSANDS CROWD NEW ZEALAND'S PARLIAMENT GROUNDS IN SUPPORT OF MAORI RIGHTS

HAZE STAYS, IDEAS FLOAT

RAJESH KUMAR ■ NEW DELHI

As the National Capital's air pollution crisis has reached an alarming level, with the Air Quality Index (AQI) consistently in the "severe plus" category on Tuesday, the Delhi government is now pressing for cloud seeding to artificially induce rain to dissipate the thick layer of smog, work from home facilities and considering bringing odd even scheme, that could help combat the worsening air quality. The Delhi government has also sought Prime Minister Narendra Modi's intervention in tackling the issue of air pollution.

Amid Delhi's worsening air quality, which has plunged into the "severe plus" category with an AQI consistently above 460, Delhi Environment Minister Gopal Rai addressed a press conference accusing the Centre of not acting on their repeated request to allow artificial rain in the national capital. He said that he had written to Union government Bhupender Yadav for the fourth time seeking a joint meeting with stakeholders to get clearances for artificial rain to disperse Delhi's high pollution.

"Despite repeated requests through letters on August 30, October 10, and October 23, the Union Environment Minister has not taken cognisance of the situation or responded to the Delhi government's appeals," Rai said in his latest letter. He alleged that despite repeated reminders and requests, the Centre was yet to call a meeting to discuss the



option. Rai said while the GRAP-IV restrictions are being enforced to tackle the alarming levels of pollution, the thick smog layer engulfing the city can only be broken by wind or rain.

In his letter, Rai proposed that this meeting include the Delhi Government, experts from IIT Kanpur who have conducted research on artificial rain, and key Central Government ministries such as such as the Directorate General of Civil Aviation (DGCA), Ministry of Home Affairs (MHA) and the Ministry of Defence along with other relevant departments. Artificial rain is needed in Delhi as an emergency measure to reduce pollution and help citizens at this juncture. While the Delhi Government is willing to initiate the emergency measure, it needs a No Objection Certificate (NOC) from Centre's Directorate

General of Civil Aviation (DGCA), Ministry of Home Affairs (MHA), and Defence Ministry among other agencies.

"After consulting several experts, we believe the time has come to use artificial rain to break this layer of smog in Delhi," he said. "Delhi cannot get relief from pollution unless we break the smog layer. Cloud seeding can help mitigate the crisis and provide immediate relief to citizens," Rai said. Emphasising the urgency of the current situation, Rai said in his letter, "I request the Union Environment Minister to convene an emergency meeting with all stakeholders, including IIT Kanpur and relevant central agencies, to fast-track the clearances required for artificial rain." This cloud seeding technique, which involves the aerial dispersion of salt particles like silver iodide or chloride into clouds to induce rain, is being

considered as a potential solution to the city's dire air quality issues. While the concept of cloud seeding is not new, its effectiveness in combating air pollution remains a subject of debate among experts. The method's success hinges on optimal atmospheric conditions, including adequate moisture and humidity in the clouds, and the presence of specific cloud types that grow vertically.

The high cost and uncertainty of outcomes also raise questions about the viability of this approach as a sustainable solution to air pollution. Additionally, concerns have been raised about the potential environmental impacts of altering natural processes through cloud seeding. Experts emphasise the need for more research to understand the long-term effects of this intervention and call for a multi-disciplinary

approach to policy formulation in this area. He also said that the government is in talks with experts to enforce emergency measures like odd-even and work-from-home options if the pollution levels in Delhi continue to remain in the severe-plus zone-above 450 in the coming days. Delhi is not new to the odd-even vehicle rationing scheme. First implemented in 2016, the AAP government's initiative aimed to control vehicular emissions in the city by only allowing private vehicles whose registration number ends with an odd number to ply on odd dates and even registration numbers to ply on even dates. Vehicles with registration numbers ending in even digits (0, 2, 4, 6, 8) are allowed on the roads on even dates, while those with registration numbers ending in odd digits (1, 3, 5, 7, 9) are permitted on odd dates.

"A decision on implementing work-from-home measures and the odd-even scheme will be taken soon to tackle the city's worsening air quality," Rai said. He said, "People, including children and senior citizens, are struggling to breathe and we deeply regret this situation." On the possibility of implementing work-from-home measures, Rai stated, "We will take a decision on this soon." The minister added that the government has already imposed significant restrictions on vehicles under GRAP-IV. "We are analysing the impact of these measures. If the analysis shows a positive outcome, we will take further decisions accordingly," he said.



CJI asks judges to allow virtual hearings

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

Chief Justice Sanjay Khanna on Tuesday said all judges have been asked to allow virtual hearings wherever possible in view of the severe pollution levels in the National Capital Region. As soon as the Bench comprising the CJI and Justice Sanjay Kumar assembled, lawyers, including Supreme Court Bar Association (SCBA) president Kapil Sibal, referred to the worsening pollution in Delhi and NCR and sought immediate measures to deal with it. "We have told all the judges to allow virtual hearings wherever possible," the CJI said.

The CJI, however, did not allow the submissions that the SC should go online and reiterated that the lawyers have the option to appear online. Sibal said a message is needed to be sent to other courts and tribunals in the national capital in this regard as the "pollution is getting out of control." He was supported by various lawyers that also included Solicitor General Tushar Mehta and Gopal Sankaranarayanan.

On poll eve Vinod Tawde's 'cashgate'



T N RAGHUNATHA ■ MUMBAI

In what came as a major embarrassment for the ruling MahaYuti on the eve of the Maharashtra Assembly polls, Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) national general secretary Vinod Tawde found himself in a fierce controversy over the alleged distribution of cash to some people, following the claims by Bahujan Vikas Aghadi (BVA) that it had caught him red-handed in the act.

The controversy erupted after BVA founder and six-time Member of the Legislative Assembly (MLA) from Vasai, Hitendra Thakur and his son Kshitij Thakur, a three-time MLA from Nalasopara, alleged that their party colleagues and workers had seen Tawde distributing money to people. They alleged that Tawde had arrived with Rs 5 Crore for giving it to BJP candidate Rajan Naik for distribution to people in Vasai-Virar area of Palghar district. Cashing in on the allegations, leader of the Opposition in

Lok Sabha Rahul Gandhi of the Congress singled out Prime Minister Narendra Modi for an attack "Modiji, from whose safe did these Rs 5 Crore come? Who looted the public's money and sent you in the tempo?" Rahul asked.

Congress general secretary in-charge of Maharashtra Ramesh Chennithala demanded the arrest of Tawde. A BJP general secretary, Tawde has been caught red-handed while distributing money in Vasai-Virar. The allegation against him is that Tawde distributed Rs 5 Crore among people on the eve of elections. That being the case, Tawde should be arrested immediately," Chennithala said.

The controversy broke out when BJP's Tawde had gone to the deluxe Le Vivanta Hotel at Virar (East). The BVA leaders alleged that he was carrying Rs 5 Crore cash, along with some 'diaries'. The drama that unfolded in the morning lasted for more than eight hours.



Russian President Vladimir Putin likely to visit India soon

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

Russian President Vladimir Putin is likely to visit India next year as part of a laid down structure between the two countries for reciprocal annual visits by their leaders, diplomatic sources said on Tuesday. The two sides are looking at the possibility of the visit but nothing has been finalised yet, they said.

Prime Minister Narendra Modi invited the Russian President to visit India when the two leaders held summit talks in Moscow in July. Prime Minister Modi visited Kazan in Russia last month to attend the BRICS summit. Earlier on Tuesday, Kremlin Spokesman Dmitry Peskov in a video interaction with senior Indian Editors referred to the strong bilateral relationship between India and Russia, and added Putin's visit is on the cards. He did not give any specific dates or make a definitive announcement of the visit. The interaction was organised by the Russian state-owned Sputnik news agency.

"We are looking forward to the visit. The dates will be mutually worked out soon," Peskov said. "Specific dates of President Vladimir Putin's visit to India will soon be announced and Russia will begin preparing for it," he said.

"I hope soon we'll work out the precise dates of his visit... Of course, after two visits of Prime Minister Modi to Russia, now we have a visit of the President to India, so we're looking forward to it," he added.

EAM meets Chinese counterpart

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI/RIO DE JANEIRO

External Affairs Minister S Jaishankar and his Chinese counterpart Wang Yi deliberated on the next steps in India-China ties at a meeting in Rio de Janeiro, in the first high-level engagement since the militaries of the two sides disengaged from Demchok and Dapsang at the Line of Actual Control (LAC) in eastern Ladakh. The two leaders held the delegation-level talks on the sidelines of the G20 Summit in Rio de Janeiro late on Monday.

The EAM said in a social media post both sides noted the progress in the recent disengagement of the border areas and exchanged views on the next steps in the bilateral ties. It is learnt that both sides are in the process of reviving various dialogue mechanisms including the special representatives talks on the boundary question as decided at a meeting between Prime Minister Narendra Modi and Chinese President Xi Jinping in the Russian city of Kazan last month.

Days after the two sides reached an agreement on October 21 on disengagement in Demchok and Dapsang, Indian and Chinese militaries completed the process marking a virtual end to over four-year standoff in the two



External Affairs Minister S Jaishankar in a meeting with China's Foreign Minister Wang Yi on the sidelines of the G20 Summit in Rio de Janeiro

friction points. The two sides also resumed patrolling activities in these areas after a gap of almost four-and-a-half years. "On the sidelines of the G20 Summit in Rio, met CPC Politburo member and FCM Wang Yi of China," Jaishankar said, adding, "We noted the progress in the recent disengagement in the India-China border areas. And exchanged views on the next steps in our bilateral ties. "Also discussed the global situation." In his opening remarks at the talks, Jaishankar referred to the meeting between PM Modi and President Xi on

October 23 on the sidelines of the BRICS summit. "In Kazan, our leaders reached a consensus on taking the next steps in our relationship, bearing in mind the understanding of October 21. I am glad to note that on the ground, the implementation of that understanding has proceeded as planned," he said.

"Our leaders have directed that the Foreign Ministers and the Special Representatives should meet at an early date. Some progress, some discussions have happened in that direction," he said. Jaishankar and Wang discussed the next steps in the meeting.



End of the road for Himachal Bhawan?

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ SHIMLA/NEW DELHI

The Himachal Pradesh High Court has ordered the attachment of Himachal Bhawan located in Delhi for the recovery of Rs 150 Crore owed by the state government to Seli Hydropower Electrical Company following an arbitration ruling in favour of the power firm.

Passing the order on Monday, a single-judge bench of Justice Ajay Mohan Goel said the company may take appropriate steps for the auction of Himachal Bhawan located in central Delhi's Mandi House area thereof. Advocate General Anup Rattan said the Himachal Pradesh government has filed an appeal against the initial HC order and it is likely to come up for hearing this month. The case pertains to the 340 MW Seli Hydropower Electric Project on the Chenab River in Lahaul and Spiti district.

Vintage cars not to be scrapped: LG

RAJESH KUMAR ■ NEW DELHI

Amidst the crackdown on vehicles falling under scrap years, vintage car aficionados heaved a sigh of relief as Delhi Lieutenant Governor Vinai Kumar Saxena came to their rescue, directing the Delhi Transport Department that there should be no coercive action on the registered vintage vehicles. However, this has come with a rider that they are not to be driven on roads or used for commercial purposes. There are around 10,000 registered vintage cars in India.

LG Saxena has directed that bona fide vintage vehicles will no longer face coercive action by the Transport Department and the Municipal Corporation of Delhi (MCD). According to Raj Niwas, the LG has asked the Commissioner Transport and Commissioner (MCD) to ensure that their enforcement wings desist from coercive action in case of such bona fide vehicles.

Acting on a representation made by the Heritage Motoring Club of India, highlighting that their vehicles are being impounded by the authorities and requesting for clarificatory orders in this regard, the LG had asked his Secretariat to issue appropriate directions. The transport department's data shows there are



Former Union Minister Vijay Goel with one his coveted vintage cars which he used to take out as part of the exhibition he started to mark the birthday of former Prime Minister Atal Bihari Vajpayee

60,14,493 such vehicles in Delhi. The enforcement teams of the Transport Department and Municipal Corporation of Delhi (MCD) impound diesel vehicles older than 10 years and petrol vehicles older than 15 years for scrapping. The Supreme Court in its order in 2019, banned plying of such end-of-life vehicles in Delhi.

"The LG has taken note of harassment being faced by the vintage car owners and directed the Transport and MCD to desist from impounding bona fide vintage vehicles for scrapping," said the note. The

notification issued by MoRTH on July 15, 2021, has enabled provision for the registration of vehicles that are 50 years old or more as vintage vehicles, the LG secretariat said.

Based on the notification of MoRTH, the Transport Department of Delhi government on December 2, 2021, ordered for allotment of common series "DLVA" "DLVA" for vintage vehicles. In further orders, the department specified the procedure for application and issuance of a certificate of registration as a vintage motor vehicle.

"Put up a board, Ganga is not fit to bathe in," NGT to Varanasi DM

BISWAJEET BANERJEE ■ VARANASI

The National Green Tribunal (NGT) expressed strong displeasure over the administration's failure to maintain the cleanliness of the Ganga in Varanasi. In a scathing rebuke, the tribunal even suggested that a board be put up on the banks of the river, stating that Ganga water in the city is not safe for bathing.

The reprimand came during a hearing regarding the slow progress of the restoration of Asi and Varuna, two important tributaries of the Ganges. The NGT bench, led by Justice Arun Kumar Tyagi and Dr. A Santhil Vel, asked Varanasi District Magistrate

(DM) S Rajlingam whether the water of the Ganga in Varanasi was fit for drinking or bathing. When the DM remained silent, the tribunal remarked sharply, "If this is the case, why not place boards along the riverbank stating that the Ganga water in Varanasi is not suitable for bathing or drinking?" In response, DM Rajlingam said, "It's not within my jurisdiction. The District Magistrate acts in accordance with government directives."

The NGT bench, unimpressed by the DM's reply, reminded him of the considerable power vested in his office, urging him not to appear "helpless" in the face of the situation. The tribunal

then directed the government's advocate to submit an affidavit detailing the current status of the restoration of Asi and Varuna and the condition of the Ganga by the next hearing, which is scheduled for December 13.

This marks the second time in recent months that the NGT has expressed its dissatisfaction with the Varanasi administration's efforts. Three months ago, the tribunal imposed a fine of Rs 10,000 on the DM for failing to comply with its orders concerning the Ganga's restoration.

During the hearing, petitioner Saurabh Tiwari highlighted that despite repeated meetings and official



discussions, no tangible progress had been made on the ground in terms of cleaning the Ganga and restoring the tributaries. The NGT was informed that the restoration of the Asi and Varuna rivers was moving at a slow pace, with 40 meetings

having taken place, but no visible work was evident. The bench questioned DM Rajlingam about his efforts since taking office in Varanasi in November 2022 and asked what measures had been implemented during his tenure. The tribunal also

noted that the renovation of the tributaries was meant to be completed within a 12-month deadline, set by the NGT in 2021. However, more than 33 months have passed, and the situation remains largely unchanged.

The government's lawyer, Bhanwar Pal Jadoun, presented the state's efforts, including the Pollution Control Board's initiatives to clean the Ganga. However, the bench found the explanations unsatisfactory, emphasizing the need for concrete actions.

The petition, filed on August 4, 2024, highlighted the slow progress of the restoration work for Asi and Varuna. The NGT had originally set a five-year deadline for the

completion of the restoration in 2021, but after over three years, little on-the-ground action has been seen. The restoration process officially began after a meeting of the Supervisory and Execution Committees in November 2021, but as per the petitioner, the project remains confined to bureaucratic processes, with no substantial work visible in the river areas.

As the December 13 hearing approaches, all eyes are now on the state government and district administration to provide accountability for the lack of progress and to step up efforts to restore the Ganga and its tributaries, which are crucial for the ecological balance of the region.



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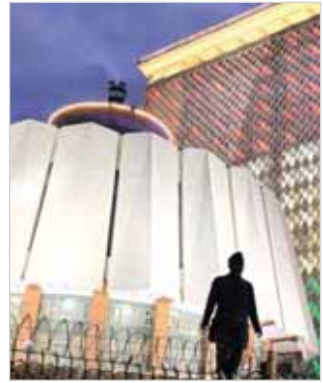
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PAPER WITH PASSION

Time for reckoning

Today Maharashtra will vote to decide its future leadership and political trajectory

Maharashtra, one of India's most politically significant states, votes for all 288 Assembly seats today. This election comes at a time of heightened political fragmentation and social unrest, making its outcome crucial for both state and national politics. A key issue in this election is the split within the Shiv Sena, a party long associated with Maharashtra's regional pride. The party is now divided into two factions: one led by Uddhav Thackeray, aligned with the Maha Vikas Aghadi (MVA) coalition of the Nationalist Congress Party (NCP) and Congress, and the other by Chief Minister Eknath Shinde, supported by the BJP. This division has significantly eroded the party's traditional voter base, creating uncertainty about its performance in this election. Adding to the complexity is the Maratha reservation demand. The Maratha community, constituting about 30 per cent of the state's population, is pushing for inclusion in the Other Backward Classes (OBC) category to access job and educational quotas. Protests, led by figures like Manoj Jarange Patil, have brought this issue to the forefront, with the ruling BJP-Shiv Sena alliance attempting to address it through policy measures. However, the unresolved tensions could influence voter sentiment, especially in rural areas.



The BJP-led alliance faces further challenges from agrarian distress in regions like Vidarbha and Marathwada. Falling crop prices for key produce such as cotton and onions have caused financial strain on farmers, traditionally a significant voting bloc. The MVA has capitalised on this dissatisfaction, highlighting the BJP's failure to protect Maharashtra's economic interests, including the recent relocation of major industrial projects to Gujarat. This election also reflects national-level dynamics. The results will test the BJP's ability to maintain its dominance amid growing opposition unity and could signal the strength of the Congress and its allies. A victory for the MVA might energise the national opposition, while a BJP win could consolidate its position. With a fragmented political landscape, Maharashtra's election promises to be closely contested. Its outcome will likely shape not only the state's future but also set the tone for national politics in the coming years. The political landscape of the state stands at a crossroads today. With a deeply fragmented Shiv Sena, intense debates over Maratha reservations, and agrarian distress weighing on rural voters, this election carries stakes far beyond the state's borders. The outcome would indeed be a pointer to the prowess of the BJP at the national level and the resilience of the INDI alliance. Besides the state is an economic powerhouse and whosoever rules the state also enjoys the support of corporate world to keep its momentum going.

PICTALK



Folk dancers perform during the celebration of the 297th foundation day of 'Pink City', Jaipur

West Bengal's lost opportunity

Tata Nano factory's relocation from West Bengal to Gujarat is a poignant reminder of how political myopia derailed a golden opportunity for Bengal's industrial revival



ANIRBAN GANGULY

In a moving tribute to late Ratan Tata, Prime Minister Narendra Modi spoke of the many dimensions of the industrial icon's personality that endeared him to the people. Pursuit of excellence and empathy were among the most dominant traits in late Ratan Tata leading him to pilot the Tata conglomerate towards greater heights of success and expansion. Under his two decades of stewardship, the Tata group witnessed a phenomenal spread of its global footprints and established itself as a vibrant brand.

Perhaps like many others from West Bengal, Ratan Tata's passing brought to my mind the Singur - Tata Nano factory episode. Those dark days of lost opportunities, signified a major recal, for the hope of an industrial regeneration in the state. A party and government which had, for over three decades patronised, militant trade unionism had suddenly decided to reverse that trend. It was ironic to see it clamber for investment in a feverish pitch after having presided over the de-industrialisation of the state.

The destruction of Bengal's once formidable industrial might is a map of the CPI(M) rise in the state. Howrah, once famed as the 'Sheffield of the east', turned into West Bengal's principal industrial graveyard under the communists. As early as the 1920s Dr Ambedkar had seen through and realised the often-duplicious approach of the communist-led trade-unionism. In the pages of his Bahishkrut Bharat he wrote how communists were 'trying to capture the labour movement in the country' and that 'the main aim behind the strike' was 'not to improve the economic conditions of workers but to train them for revolution.' He could foresee the cancer that was trying to claw into India's industrial entrails.

Let us recall how then West Bengal Chief Minister Jyoti Basu had sanctioned protests against the Metro Rail project. The communist-driven frenzied trade-unionism destroyed several iconic public undertakings such as the Haringhata Milk



Dairy, set up by Dr BC Roy had created a milk supply chain across the state while generating thousands of jobs. Much like Mamata Banerjee who has refused to enlist West Bengal in the Centre's 'Aspirational District Project' and remains lukewarm to the 'Ekalavya Vidyalaya' scheme, Basu in 1986, had forbade the setting up of Navodaya Schools in the state. In 1974, three years before he came to power as Chief Minister, Basu had organised a relay protest in front of the Hongkong Bank regional office in Kolkata to stall the installation of computers. Yet ironically the same Jyoti Basu in 1994, commissioned Arthur Anderson, a multinational business consultant, to carry out a study of the chances of West Bengal's industrial revival based on foreign investment. But progress was halting, it lacked a roadmap.

Thus, when Ratan Tata decided to invest in the state it was a whiff of more than fresh air, it was a long-needed gush of wind for breathing fresh life into a dying industrial ethos. A hopeful Tata had then said that he had 'scanned the country and looked at various locations before deciding to locate this rather revolution-



MUCH LIKE MAMATA BANERJEE WHO HAS REFUSED TO ENLIST WEST BENGAL IN THE CENTRE'S FLAGSHIP 'ASPIRATIONAL DISTRICT PROJECT' AND REMAINS LUKEWARM TO THE 'EKALAVYA VIDYALAYA' SCHEME, BASU IN 1986, HAD FORBADE THE SETTING UP OF NAVODAYA SCHOOLS IN THE STATE

ary project which will give India's truly people's car here in Bengal. It announced a new chapter, a historic opportunity for Bengal's industrial rejuvenation. But that did not happen. Political selfishness, and one-upmanship between the ruling CPI(M) and the opposition Trinamool Congress, leading a blind political opposition to the proposal led to its grounding. In trying to bolster her flagging political prospects, Mamata Banerjee, desperately and deliberately jettisoned the project. Her political arrogance and self-centeredness led to its sinking. In her last fifteen years at the helm, the state has failed to recover from that mindless assault and pushback. An epic opportunity was lost, with a beleaguered Tata announcing his exit from the state due to political reasons. The people of West Bengal lost out. Their hopes of a possibilities-filled future receded in a mist of uncertainty. Both the ruling dispensation then and the opposition were responsible for pushing the state into a dark alley. The alley remains dark even to this day. Ratan Tata announced that he was shifting the car plant to Gujarat's Sanand. It was a plant that would eventually

grow into a mega 1100-acre unit. Narendra Modi was then Chief Minister of Gujarat. As Tata was announcing his exit from West Bengal, Modi texted him 'Welcome', leading to the proposed Nano factory shifting to Gujarat. Modi told Tata that the project was not only his, but ours. Later he had observed, in a lighter vein, that his one-rupee SMS had brought about a major boost to Gujarat's industrial prospects. Ratan Tata later said that he would forever remain grateful to Modi for placing faith in him and inviting him to Gujarat during those difficult days. The saga of the Singur-Tata Nano factory's shift to Gujarat is a saga of petty political squabbles, acute selfishness, arrogance and lack of true commitment to West Bengal's future and progress. That mindset and outlook among the ruling dispensation in the state still dominate. It has to be thrown overboard. Only then will West Bengal's industrial rejuvenation appear to be a possibility.

(The writer is chairman Dr Syama Prasad Mookerjee Research Foundation and member National Executive Committee, BJP; views are personal)

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

India tests hypersonic missile



India's hypersonic missile technology has received a shot in the arm after a long-range hypersonic missile was tested by the Defence Research and Development Organisation (DRDO). With a range exceeding 1500 km, the missile is intended to carry wide-ranging payloads for all three services of the Indian armed forces. These indigenously developed missiles are special because they travel with a speed five

times that of sound at sea level, at approximately 6200 km per hour, and at a mile per second. Hypersonic missiles are extremely difficult to detect, making enemy radars nigh impossible to spot them before they are too close for comfort. Their maneuverability and ability to fly at lower altitudes separate them from the ballistic missiles that follow a set path. Hypersonic missiles can also be partially projected into orbit via a glide vehicle through the fractional orbital bombardment system (FOBS) unlike the ballistic missiles, though the latter can travel faster. Till now, Russia, China and the United States possess full-fledged hypersonic capabilities, while Germany, France, Japan, Australia, Iran and Israel are on course to follow suit. India has, thus, joined the elite 'hypersonic group.' Kudos to ISRO for another feather in the cap.

Ganapathi Bhat | Akola

mobs. Education, health, development and civic administration are in peril. The elected government has turned dysfunctional and there are threats and possibilities of destabilising the state government. It is quite apparent that the efforts of peace in the first phase of violence have failed despite the newly elected state government post-violence. Earlier, there were reports of missionaries inciting violence in the state. The Manipur violence has affected neighbouring states of Assam, Tripura and Nagaland. In fact, the Manipur violence has a secessionist motive and the disruptive and separatist forces behind the Manipur violence are based across the borders. It is, therefore, imperative that President Rule may be imposed in the state and the assembly may be suspended till normalcy returns and the political atmosphere is congenial for restoration of the assembly and the government. The Manipur mayhem should not be taken as political mileage by the opposition parties. The India-Myanmar border should be sealed with immediate effect,

though this is practically very difficult. Vinod Johri | Delhi

KAILASH GAHLOT QUITS AAP

Madam — Gahlot resigned from AAP, citing the party's shift from focusing on public welfare to prioritising political ambitions. In his resignation letter to AAP National Convener Arvind Kejriwal, Gahlot stated that instead of fighting for people's rights, the party had increasingly been focused on its own agenda. He also expressed dissatisfaction with controversies like the 'Sheeshmahal' row, questioning whether AAP still upheld its core identity as the party of the common man. AAP responded by alleging that Gahlot's resignation was influenced by pressure from central agencies investigating him, a claim Gahlot dismissed. The BJP believes that Gahlot's entry strengthens its position as it prepares to challenge AAP in the upcoming elections. Akhilesh Krishnan | Vashi

Send your feedback to: letterstopioneer@gmail.com

Buddhas in the boardroom: How meditation can counter burnout



ISHAN SHIVANAND

Meditation, once reserved for monks, is emerging as a transformative practice for professionals, helping them fight burnout

With increased screen time, back-to-back meetings and the constant scramble of the hustle culture, we need to consider — whether are we running the show, or just running. Workplace burnout is the price often paid for juggling high expectations, tight deadlines and the need to be available for work all the time - while disregarding personal health and wellbeing.



Understanding workplace burnout: Burnout is beyond the feeling of tiredness at the end of a busy day. It's a state of chronic physical and emotional exhaustion, coupled with detachment, cynicism and reduced performance. The WHO officially recognised burnout as an occupational phenomenon, signifying its critical impact on modern work-life. It affects mental clarity and emotional resilience and can even have physiological repercussions on heart health and sleep patterns. **Why meditation:** Amid the workday, meditation offers an oasis — a moment to pause, reflect, and realign. The practice, often associated with

monks and mountain retreats, is now being rediscovered in the boardroom. The reason is simple: meditation fosters the ability to be present, grounded and conscious of one's thoughts and actions. Research has shown that regular meditation can alter brain activity, shifting it from the limbic system (responsible for our fight-or-flight responses) to the prefrontal cortex (the centre for rational thinking and calmness). This neurological shift translates to a greater sense of control over stress, enabling clearer decision-making and enhancing focus. Yoga emphasises how yogic, breathing and meditation techniques can lead to transformative wellbeing. Studies on Yoga have reported a positive impact on holistic wellbeing, with participants reporting reductions in anx-

ety, stress, and burnout by 72-82 per cent. This makes it an effective, research-backed solution for integrating meditation into workplace wellness.

Transforming work culture through yogic practices

The tangible benefits of meditation go beyond stress relief. In practice, this means a more focused team, resilient in the face of challenges, and more open to collaboration. Some organisations are already creating environments where wellness isn't a perk but a pillar of their work culture. We need Buddhas in the boardroom. **How meditation rewrites your life script:** Meditation is more than sitting in silence; it's about training the mind to be resilient. Techniques such as deep breathing, guided protocols and visualisation help individuals develop a heightened state of non-judgemental awareness, balance emotions, and build a strong mental framework to manage stress effectively. One standout programme is YOI, which has garnered attention for its multifaceted approach to wellbeing. Imagine being able to handle feedback with-

out feeling criticised or meeting a deadline without feeling panic — meditation offers a gateway to equanimity. As game-changers in the corporate world, meditative practices build the mental stamina to bounce back from setbacks, maintain composure under pressure, and approach situations with a growth mindset.

Meditation at work

Meditation in the workplace doesn't require a meditation mat or a designated room; it just requires an integration of intention, emotion and awareness. Here are some strategies to help you get started: A few minutes of breathing or focusing on your senses can help reset your mental state. Begin your meetings with a minute of silence or guided breathing. It helps everyone clear their minds and be more present. As the world continues to spin, meditation serves as a reminder — that the power to pause and find a balance lies within.

(The writer is, mental health researcher and the founder of Yoga of Immortals; views are personal)

UKRAINE TO USE LONG-RANGE MISSILES

Madam — If this news is true that finally, US President Joe Biden has given the green signal to Ukraine to use long-range American missiles against Russia, then it is very good news for Ukraine. Because for the last one and a half years, Ukrainian President Zelensky was asking for permission to use these long-range weapons. Otherwise, this weapon will remain just a showpiece and one day Russia will capture it and then it will start using it to capture some third country.

This decision is also necessary because the Biden administration is now a guest for only two months. The president who will come after him, Trump, has already announced that he will stop giving any kind of help to Ukraine. The second big reason for Biden's change of heart seems to be that with the support of Russia, about 10 thousand combat soldiers of North Korea have taken up the front against Ukraine. In such a situation, Ukraine should have gotten this permission at all costs. The news of Biden's decision came after meetings with the leaders of South Korea, Japan and China in the last two days. The inclusion of North Korean troops was the main topic of the talks, which took place during the Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation summit in Peru. Europe was already ready to give permission. But America was not ready. It is said that American missiles will be able to hit up to 300 kilometers inside Russia at three times the speed of sound, which even Russia's anti-missile equipment will not be able to intercept.

Jang Bahadur Singh | Jamshedpur

VIOLENCE ESCALATES IN MANIPUR

Madam — Apropos of the headlines on Manipur violence (November 18), the resurgence of violence in Manipur goes unabated. The violence and sabotage look beyond control. The MLAs and ministers of different political parties are being attacked and their houses are ransacked. The democratic fabric in Manipur has been destroyed by the extremists and irate



FIRST COLUMN

A DIET FOR PEACE: KINDNESS OVER CRUELTY

The food we consume shapes not just our physical health but also our thoughts, actions and the world



RAJYOGI BRAHMA KUMAR NIKUNJ JI

It has been rightly said that we are what we eat because the kind of food that we eat has a direct impact on how we think and therefore it's crucial to what we become finally. Recent studies made by modern medical science have suggested that the human body is not naturally designed to digest and assimilate non-vegetarian food. That is why today most medical practitioners recommend a healthy vegetarian diet to their patients who are suffering from lifestyle disorders. Along with scientific studies, individual researchers made all over the world have also clearly pointed out that when an animal is killed for meat, it experiences fear, anxiety and pain. Its hormonal secretions are then passed on to its consumers.

Such a diet is therefore unhealthy both for the body and the mind. In many religions, a non-vegetarian diet is strictly forbidden not just because it causes pain and suffering to other living creatures but also because it is the source of vicious thoughts and attitudes to its consumers. In other words, non-vegetarian food is a gateway to a non-vegetarian lifestyle, a way of living where vices dwell comfortably. One must understand that human cruelty towards animals is nothing but a way of inviting cruelty onto the self. Also, the current trend of mass consumption of flesh by human beings highlights the way we look at other living beings and our desire to subjugate them.



From a broader perspective, the mass consumption of non-vegetarian food is a way of heaping sin upon the human community. No peace marches, diplomatic dialogues and conferences can bring peace to the planet when we are burdening it with the desperate cries of hapless creatures. For what we sow, so shall we reap. It is so ironic that the largely meat-eating developed countries of the world have stringent laws when it comes to treating a pet and it is ensured that if the pet is hurt, the owner can even be imprisoned. However, in these very countries, millions of animals are killed every day for food and yet no one goes to jail. Isn't it surprising that so many animal lovers continue to be non-vegetarians because they are unable to connect with the cruelty that goes behind, in the making of such food? Even more surprising was a weird recommendation to find humane methods of animal slaughter made by some so-called animal sympathisers. But the contention here is what can be more inhuman than nourishing an animal to kill it one day. It is a breach of morality by all standards. What is more cruel than subjecting generations of animals to a life of stifling captivity that only leads them to a merciless end? And what is more cruel than killing animals in front of each other? While one is bleeding to death, the other watches in horror and waits for its turn. It is a great pity that even sympathetic humans are left with such little kindness that all they can think of is designing a better way to kill. It's high time that all of us should ask ourselves a question: why does our conscience need a rational argument, sanctioned by a research institute in the West, to realise that killing other living creatures is a form of cruelty?

Why do we need facts and figures to understand that cruelty can never be a bringer of any form of health - be it mind, body or the environment & bring peace and harmony to the world? Can't we realise that a heart that heaves no sigh at the sight of violence cannot be a source of compassion for other fellow men? So how do we expect people who do not nurture the feeling of kindness for other living beings to nurture feelings of brotherhood and forgiveness for their community? Aren't we just walking on one path while seeking another's destination? Just give it a thought and then decide whether to Kill or Heal. Learn to live above self when life is precious to all. Let there be the right to live for all & not just Human Rights, then only world peace will descend.

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

Delhi discoms in crisis: Debt and regulatory gaps



UTTAM GUPTA

A convoluted tariff regime, under-recoveries, power theft, and unpaid subsidies are threatening the sustainability of the Delhi discoms



Delhi Government is looking at various options to address twin problems facing its three power distribution companies (discoms) namely BSES Rajdhani Power Limited (BRPL), discom for South & West Delhi; BSES Yamuna Power Limited (BYPL) — discom for Central & East Delhi; and Tata Power Delhi Distribution Limited or TPDDL - discom for North Delhi. These are (i) "Regulatory Assets" or RAs of Rs 27,200 crore lying in the books of these discoms; (ii) an equally staggering amount of Rs 26,500 crore they owe to power generation and transmission companies viz. Indraprastha Power Generation Co. Ltd (IPGCL), Pragati Power Corporation Limited (PPCL) and Delhi Transco Limited or DTL at the end of September 2024. The discoms are expected to sell electricity to the consumers at tariffs — duly approved by the Delhi Electricity Regulatory Commission (DERC) — that are set in a manner such that the revenue generated from sale at these tariffs fully cover the power purchase cost plus the cost of wheeling and distribution. The requirement is mandatory under the Electricity Act, of 2003. But, this is rarely complied with.

Under a highly convoluted regime, the tariff charged from households (HHs) consuming up to 200 units a month is Rs 3 per unit which is just about half of the average cost leading to an under-recovery of Rs 3 per unit. Including levies adding to 44.6 per cent, the shortfall comes to Rs 4.3 per unit (3x1.446). For HHs consuming between 201 and 400 units, the tariff is Rs 4.5 per unit implying an under-recovery of Rs 1.5 per unit. Including the levies, this comes to Rs 2.2 per unit. These under-recoveries are cross-subsidised by charging more from industries and businesses for which the tariff can go up to a high of Rs 16 per unit.

The irony is that despite charging exorbitant rates from industries and businesses, a good slice of under-recoveries from HHs consuming less than 400 units a month remains uncovered. Additionally, the Delhi government doesn't want the latter to even pay the small tariff of Rs



3 per unit (courtesy, of Kejriwal's freebies). Thus, discoms are told not to raise any bill on HHs consuming up to 200 units even as HHs consuming up to 400 units get a flat deduction of Rs 800 per month from the bill amount. Though the government promises to reimburse them for these subsidies from the state budget, this promise is held more in breach. This increases discoms' losses which are compounded by large-scale power theft.

Where do RAs fit in? RAs are created when state electricity regulatory commissions (in this case, DERC) accept that the tariffs don't cover discounts' purchase costs but don't raise rates. The gap between the cost and revenue generated from sales at tariffs (albeit unrevised) for supplied power, is booked by discom as receivable and classified as RA. This is contrary to the Electricity Act (2003) and the National Power Tariff Policy (NPTP) which says that "tariffs must reflect costs and regulatory assets should not be created". In December 2022, the Ministry of Power (MoP) even warned against creating a pile of RAs. But, all these regulations/warnings have fallen on deaf ears.

All losses incurred by discoms in Delhi during the last 11 years or so have been shown in their books as RAs. Regrettably, the RAs persist despite subsisting mechanisms to enable discoms to offset cost escalation by suitable increases in tariff. As per the order issued by MoP on November 9, 2021, discoms are allowed to impose a surcharge known as PPAC (Power Purchase Agreement Cost). Levied as a percentage of the 'total energy cost and fixed charge component' of the electricity bill, the surcharge is meant to compensate them for variations in the fuel and power procurement cost. Effective from July 2023, the DERC had last increased PPAC vide its order

dated June 22, 2023, by 9.42 per cent for BYPL, 6.39 per cent for BRPL and 2 per cent for TPDDL. The current PPACs for these discoms are 31.6 per cent, 27.08 per cent and 33 per cent respectively. Moreover, DERC has allowed discoms to levy a surcharge of eight per cent.

This is intended to plug any shortfall in revenue vis-à-vis the cost still left unplugged after collection of PPAC. Despite these two impositions, the discoms continue to report a substantial shortfall in their revenue from the sale of electricity which is manifest in cumulative monumental RAs of Rs 27,200 crore. It is a manifestation of several glaring pitfalls: (i) the Delhi government isn't reimbursing discoms for the subsidies they give to target consumers on its behalf; (ii) large-scale power theft continues unabated; (iii) discoms have been submitting inflated bills/claims and other financial wrongs; (iv) inefficiencies get full protection. Hesitant to sanction tariff hikes against these extra/unjustified costs, DERC chooses the easy option of putting all these under RAs.

The idea of creating RAs is flawed. When a discom petitions DERC to allow any cost increase in tariff, the latter can either reject or accept. In case of acceptance, it should take the process to its logical conclusion by sanctioning the requisite tariff hike and notifying it. It can't leave things hanging in the air by accepting but not 'approving' and 'notifying' the tariff hike. Unfortunately, this is what the DERC has been doing for over a decade. This has dangerous consequences.

First, once recorded in their books as RAs, discoms will leave no stone unturned in recovering the money say by getting sanction of a steep hike in tariff to make up for the entire cumulative deficit in revenue. Indeed, the matter had gone right up to the Supreme Court

(SC) which in an order given in early 2023 had directed the DERC to let discoms recover their RAs. This could lead to a 100 per cent hike in tariff. So, the regulator decided to contest that order. Second, until such time the requisite tariff hike is actually sanctioned by the DERC, the RAs can't be treated as an asset. Hence, there remains every possibility of the loans taken from banks and financial institutions (FIs) for funding them becoming non-performing assets (NPAs). Moreover, the banks/FIs may not give more to discoms and their suppliers namely IPGCL/PPCL/DTL more loans. Third, the discoms can leverage the ambiguous classification (neither outright rejection of a claim for tariff hike nor approval) to present claims to the DERC which the latter may not be willing to accept.

This leads to substantial claims getting bogged down in legal disputes at the appeal level or in higher courts. To conclude, providing for RAs in the books of discoms is a bad practice. Apart from discoms, it also puts the power generators and transmission companies at serious risk. It can impair the balance sheet of banks and FIs who have given loans to them. It could mean a steep hike in tariffs on supplies to industries/businesses besides HHs consuming more than 400 units a month. To cap it all, it provides a 'cover up' for financial irregularities and corruption. The practice must be shunned. As for the RAs already piled up, a thorough enquiry should be ordered to look into irregularities followed by recovery of money from those found guilty. The discoms should be 'unshackled' from the controls of the State government. If the latter wants to subsidize or provide free power to certain consumers, the money should be given to them directly.

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

Delhi's air quality crisis: Action taken for now, but long-term solutions are crucial

The city faces an urgent need for sustainable, long-term strategies to tackle pollution at its root

The air quality in Delhi has recently deteriorated to dangerously high levels. To address this issue swiftly and effectively, the Commission for Air Quality Management (CAQM) has implemented Stage 4 of the Graded Response Action Plan (GRAP).

This stage involves measures such as restricting bus services, pausing construction work and mining activities, and transitioning primary school classes to online learning. Although these steps are crucial in addressing the current pollution issue promptly, they alone cannot effectively address the underlying factors contributing to air pollution in the long term. It is crucial to prioritise short-term solutions for relief; however, we must not



EILIA JAFAR

overlook the factors that contribute to pollution in the long term as well. One significant factor is the dust produced during construction activities.

While the temporary suspension of construction operations following GRAP guidelines is a move in the right direction, it also underscores the urgency of implementing more environmentally friendly building

methods. Germany and Sweden serve as examples of nations that have successfully implemented construction practices.

For instance, Germany prioritises the use of low-carbon concrete, whereas Sweden focuses on promoting energy-efficient structures with improved insulation and solar innovations. India has the opportunity to implement strategies to minimise dust and emissions from construction activities and promote sustainable development.

The need for transformation in transportation is crucial to address the issue of pollution in Delhi caused by road dust and vehicle emissions. Although the metro system has advanced to some extent in Delhi, there are still areas

with connectivity that need attention.

Expanding the metro network and integrating buses can lead to a decrease in private car usage. Moreover, promoting the adoption of electric vehicles (EVs) could play a role in reducing emissions. Providing benefits such as tax incentives, toll discounts, and even offering parking for EVs could potentially increase their attractiveness to commuters. Biking is becoming more popular as an eco-friendly option in Delhi; however, the city's infrastructure doesn't fully support it yet.

Although smart bikes are being introduced in some areas, which is a move forward, the absence of marked biking lanes and safety precautions deters many people from bik-



ing. Cities such as Copenhagen and Amsterdam serve as models for incorporating biking into urban environments. Delhi could take inspiration from its approach by investing in infrastructure for cyclists, such as bike lanes and bike-sharing services, to enhance the safety and convenience of cycling for its residents.

Encouraging the use of sustainable building methods is crucial too!

Providing incentives for individuals who build energy-efficient houses or utilise eco-friendly materials could greatly support sustainability efforts in communities worldwide.

Numerous nations offer tax advantages or financial aid to developers who embrace green building strategies. India could introduce perks like discounts on energy-saving devices, offers on solar panel setups, or financial assistance for homeowners undertaking eco-conscious improvements. These initiatives would not only lessen the burden on energy reserves but also encourage environmentally responsible construction practices.

Another helpful way to decrease the number of cars on the road is through carpooling initiatives, such as carpool

lanes and discounts for vehicles with passengers, which have proven effective in countries around the world. Introducing strategies in Delhi, such as designated carpool lanes or toll reductions for cars carrying two or more passengers, could play a role in alleviating traffic congestion and decreasing harmful emissions levels.

By implementing these measures, not only would pollution be reduced, but it would also enhance the daily commute experience for numerous residents in the area. The call for action is critical now.

The air pollution crisis in NCR intensified on November 17, 2024, as Delhi's average Air Quality Index (AQI) climbed to a hazardous 441 by 4 PM, classified as 'severe', up from

419 the previous day. The harmful pollutants are linked to health concerns, such as respiratory illnesses and cardiovascular diseases.

The Stage 4 actions outlined in the GRAP are crucial for providing relief; however, it is evident that a comprehensive long-term plan is essential to enhance the air quality in Delhi. By emphasising the enhancement of public transportation services, implementing infrastructure for cyclists, advocating for eco-friendly construction methods and encouraging carpooling, Delhi can strive to diminish pollution levels and establish a healthier and more sustainable environment for all residents.

(The writer is humanitarian and development professional; views are personal)

India beat Japan 2-0, to face China in final of women's ACT hockey

PTI ■ RAJGIR (BIHAR)

Defending champions India continued their unbeaten run and defeated Japan 2-0 to enter the final of the women's Asian Champions Trophy hockey tournament here on Tuesday.

Vice-captain Navneet Kaur converted a penalty stroke in the 48th minute while Lalaremsiami struck from field play in the 56th minute for India, who had plenty of scoring chances including 13 penalty corners.

India will face China, whom they defeated in the league stages, in the final on Wednesday. Earlier, China beat Malaysia 3-1 in the first semifinal.

Malaysia will take on Japan in the third-fourth place match, while Korea finished fifth after beating Thailand



3-0 in the fifth-sixth place classification match.

The Indians continued their attacking game and put on early pressure on the Japanese defence, just like the last league game. The play was mostly inside the Japanese half as the Indian defence was hardly tested.

India had the first shot at the goal inside the initial five minute. Skipper Salima Tete's attempt was thwarted by Japanese goalkeeper Yu Kudo.

The Indians repeatedly penetrated the Japanese citadel and in the process secured two penalty corners in a span of two minutes but Kudo was alert under the bar to deny Navneet Kaur and Deepika.

Three minutes into the second quarter, India secured three back-to-back penalty corners but failed to find the back of the net.

It was raining penalty corners for the hosts as they got back-to-back set pieces in the 21st minute but Kudo produced a brilliant save with her fully-stretched right leg to deny Deepika again.

In the 24th minute, India earned a penalty corner followed by another in the next minute but failed to get past Japanese goalkeeper Kudo, as they also lacked in execution.

A minute after the change of ends, India secured two penalty corners but wasted both. In the 35th minute, Kudo again denied Deepika from a set piece.

In the 41st minute, Deepika stole the ball just outside the Japanese circle, but shot wide from a one-on-one situation with Kudo.

Seconds from the end of third quarter, Kudo once again pulled off a brilliant save to deny Uditra from another penalty corner.

In the 47th minute, India secured their 12th penalty corner but failed to breach Kudo.

But a minute later, India broke the deadlock through a penalty stroke earned by Deepika and Navneet made no mistake.

The goal seemed to have rejuvenated the Indians as they scored a fine field goal in the 56th minute.

Lalaremsiami slammed into the back of the Japanese goal after she was brilliantly set up by Sunelita Toppo's terrific run from the right flank.

Japan got a penalty corner in the dying moments, but failed to get past a rock solid Indian defence.

Pulisic scores twice, US beats Jamaica 4-2 for 5-2 aggregate win in CONCACAF Nations League QF

AP ■ ST. LOUIS (US)

Christian Pulisic scored twice in the first half, Tim Weah got a goal in his return to the U.S. National team from a red card and the Americans beat Jamaica 4-2 for a 5-2 aggregate win in their CONCACAF Nations League quarterfinal.

Playing their first competitive matches under coach Mauricio Pochettino, the United States advanced to a semifinal on March 20 at Inglewood, California. The Americans won the first three editions of the tournament.

The U.S. Also qualified for next year's CONCACAF Gold Cup, while Jamaica will have to play a qualifier.

Pulisic put the U.S. Ahead in the 13th minute when he ran onto a long looping pass from Weston McKennie and kicked the ball past onrushing goalkeeper Andre Blake. Pulisic doubled the lead off a pass from McKennie that Tanner Tessmann dummied in the 33rd minute.



Yunus Musah and sent a shot just under the crossbar for his seventh goal.

Gray got his second goal in the 68th. Costa Rica took a 1-0 lead into its home match against Panama on Monday night. On Tuesday, Mexico is at home trying to overturn a 2-0 first-leg loss at Honduras and Canada is home with a 1-0 lead against Suriname.

Weah started in place of injured Johnny Cardoso after completing a two-game suspension for a red card against Panama in the Copa America last summer. That was the only change made by Pochettino from the first leg.

Defender Tim Ream, at 37 the oldest player on the roster, captained the Americans in his hometown of St. Louis.

Jamaica coach Steve McLaren, a former England manager, told the media that star Michail Antonio wasn't available because he lost his passport and couldn't get a U.

Croatia, Denmark qualify for Nations League quarterfinals with draws

AP ■ MADRID

Denmark and Croatia completed the Nations League quarterfinals lineup after both sides secured draws.

Denmark went 0-0 in Serbia, and Croatia came from behind to share 1-1 with visiting Portugal.

They joined France, Italy, Germany, Spain, Portugal and the Netherlands in the last eight.

The quarterfinals will be held from March 20-23.

In Warsaw, Liverpool fullback Andy Robertson scored an injury time header to give Scotland a 2-1 win over Poland and send the host down into League B. Scotland has a playoff to secure its League A status.

Northern Ireland will step up to League B after topping its group. Northern Ireland let slip a two-goal lead but drew in Luxembourg 2-2. Romania hammered Cyprus 4-1.

San Marino will jump into Group C after beating Lichtenstein 3-1.

Scotland wins again

After going nine matches without a win, Scotland appeared rejuvenated as it condemned a Robert Lewandowski-less Poland to League B.

Scotland took just one point from its first four games in Group A1 but beat Croatia at home on Friday and was 1-0 up after three minutes in Warsaw.

Billy Gilmour's threaded pass found Ben Doak, who rolled the ball to John McGinn to score his second goal in four days.

Scotland hit the woodwork twice in the first half and its inability to open a greater lead almost cost it when Kamil Piatkowski lashed a stunning strike into the top corner of the net to equalize 14 minutes into the second period.

However, Scotland pushed forward for a winner and Robertson headed the decider in the third minute of stoppage time.

Croatia struggle

Croatia needed only a draw to secure qualification but it made the home fans in Split sweat before getting the point it needed against group winner Portugal.



With 32 minutes gone, João Felix brought down a superb 45-yard pass from Vitinha and slipped the ball under the advancing keeper to give the visitors the lead. When Andrej Kramaric hit the post and Josko Gvardiol had a 62nd minute goal ruled out for offside it looked like it might not be Croatia's night.

But Manchester City's Gvardiol got the equalizer just a few minutes later and Croatia held on to take the second quarterfinal spot from Group A1.

Spain beats Switzerland

There was little to play for in Tenerife, where Spain, top of Group A4, took on the already relegated Switzerland.

Coach Luis de la Fuente offered a first start to Barcelona midfielder Marc Casadó and gave debuts to Samu and Aitor Paredes in a much-changed Spain side.

But it was the two Bryans, Gil and Zaragoza, who got the goals that mattered for the European champions.

Pedri's first half penalty was saved but Yeremi Pino converted to put Spain ahead.

Joel Monteiro equalized for Switzerland after 63 minutes but Bryan Gil got Spain back in front five minutes later. Andi Zeqiri equalized again from the penalty spot with five minutes remaining but a stoppage time penalty from Bryan Zaragoza at the other end gave Spain all three points.

Denmark draws in Serbia

In Leskovac, Serbia controlled most of the game against Denmark but could not get the goal it needed to progress from Group A4. Dušan Vlahovic was in fine form for the home side but the Danes held out to take second spot, eight points

Mike Tyson-Jake Paul fight draws record betting for a combat sports event



AP ■ LAS VEGAS

Caesars Sportsbook, said the fight was on par with an NFL Monday night game.

"We knew there would be tremendous interest in the fight, as the betting suggested it was a generational matchup in customer demographics," Mucklow said. "Those old enough to remember a prime Mike Tyson got to live the nostalgia one last time, while those not old enough to know Iron Mike were firmly on the Jake Paul side of the counter."

DraftKings sports operations director Johnny Avello said the fight also was its most-bet boxing match.

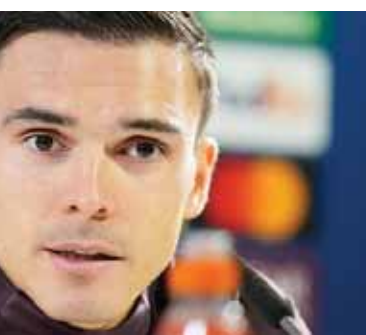
"The bettors were yearning

for Tyson to return to the ring even at 58 years old, and wanted to be a part of this moment with one of the icons of the sport," Avello said. "We'll see who Jake Paul fights next, but his matches have proven to create immense buzz and unprecedented action on our platforms."

The amount of betting can't necessarily be used to draw a direct comparison with betting on big fights in the past since so many major bouts, including Tyson's biggest fights, occurred before sports betting was legalized beyond Nevada in 2018. It's still not legal in 38 states. But the fight at AT&T Stadium in Arlington, Texas, still drew an enormous handle.

Most of the wagers at BetMGM Sportsbook were on proposition bets, with the most popular being on Tyson to prevail either by knockout, decision or a first-round KO. Though Paul was a -175 favorite, 67% of the tickets and 53% of the money at BetMGM was on Tyson.

"Paul winning was a good outcome for the sportsbook," BetMGM senior trader Alex Rella said.



Bayern midfielder Palhinha faces weeks out after injury while with Portugal

AP ■ MUNICH

João Palhinha's year could be over early after the Bayern Munich midfielder was injured on Portugal duty.

Palhinha will "be sidelined for the coming weeks" after he tore a muscle in his right adductor, part of the hip and thigh area, Bayern said on Tuesday.

That kept Palhinha out of Portugal's 5-1 win over Poland in the Nations League on Friday and its 1-1 draw with Croatia on Monday.

He is set to miss tough games for Bayern including hosting Paris Saint-Germain in the Champions League next week, facing Borussia Dortmund in

the German Klassiker on Nov. 30, and taking on defending champion Bayer Leverkusen in the German Cup on Dec. 3. German media reported Palhinha was not expected to return until after the winter break. Bayern's last game before the break is Dec. 20.

Bayern could have to rely on Leon Goretzka, who has been a fringe player this season, because coach Vincent Kompany's other preferred defensive midfielder, Aleksandar Pavlovic, has yet to return following surgery on a broken collarbone last month.

Pavlovic has managed "some elements" of training with the rest of the team, Bayern said on Monday.

number ever since.

It's the latest significant adjustment to the tour since the disruption of Saudi-backed LIV Golf, which began in June 2022. In the last two years, the tour has created \$20 million signature events with limited fields and a postseason for only the top 70 players.

"The reality is that we're all playing under different circumstances than we were four years ago," PAC Chairman Camilo Villegas said in three weeks ago when the changes were proposed. "We had no competition. We were the best. All of a sudden we have competition and there are little shifts. The changes we're proposing make a better product. What does having a PGA Tour card mean?"

The tour also announced changes to the FedEx Cup points distribution that start in 2025, awarding more points to second place and decreasing points from 11th place and down. For signature events, the decrease starts after seventh place.

Monday qualifying will offer four spots only to 144-man fields, reducing the number to two spots for 132-man fields and none when only 120 players are in the field.

There also was the ongoing pace-of-play problem, which rules officials for years have argued was due primarily to too many players on the course. The field sizes would be 120 players before Daylight Savings Time, then up to 132 players and a maximum of 144 in the summer.

PGA Tour approves reduction to 100 players keeping cards off FedEx Cup list

AP ■ NEW YORK

The PGA Tour policy board have approved eligibility changes that eliminate 25 cards through the FedEx Cup in the first reduction of jobs since the all-exempt tour began in 1983.

Starting in 2026, only the top 100 in the FedEx Cup are assured full status the following year.

The board voted on proposals from the 16-member Player Advisory Council aimed at giving everyone who earns a full PGA Tour card a chance to get into enough tournaments to have a fair chance at keeping their cards.

It also approved smaller field sizes — a maximum of 144 players, down from 156 —

for tournaments on one course with ample daylight hours. Another change was eliminating the four restricted sponsor exemptions, allocating them to what amounts to the alternate list.

Open tournaments still get unrestricted sponsor exemptions (typically four) they can give to whomever they want. With changes not taking effect until 2026, that makes next year even more cutthroat with more than 170 players who have cards trying to finish in the top 100.

"The PAC discussions were based on a number of guiding principles, including our belief that PGA Tour membership is the pinnacle of achievement in men's professional golf," said Adam Scott, a player



director on the policy board who also serve on the competitions subcommittee of the PAC.

"The changes approved today will provide equitable playing opportunities for new young talent to be showcased, and positively refine the playing experience for our members."

It will be tougher than ever to get a PGA Tour card. Along with players having to finish in the top 100 — tournament winners still get a two-year exemption — the tour will award only 20 cards to the Korn Ferry Tour, along with cards for the leading 10 players not already exempt on the European tour and five from Q-school.

Players who came through the Korn Ferry and Europe

fall behind the top 100 and tournament winners in the priority list. Previously, they often had to go weeks at a time without a spot for them to play. Up until the early 1980s, only the top 60 were exempt and everyone else had to go through qualifying. Because players had a card that didn't guarantee starts, the PGA Tour switched to the all-exempt tour for the top 125 in 1983. That's been the

