

Manipur: Four non-local laborers held for ILP violations

PNS ■ IMPHAL

Four people were held in Manipur's Thoubal district for allegedly violating the Inner Line Permit system, CM N Biren Singh said. They were apprehended from Yairipok Bishnunaha on Saturday and steps are being taken for their "deportation", he said. "Today, four non-local laborers were apprehended for violating the Inner Line Permit (ILP) system. They were found residing without valid ILP cards and overstaying at the Yairipok Bishnunaha water reservoir construction site," he said in a social media post. They were identified as Afsar Ali (22), Md Sanfaraj (20), Md Rahamtullah (23) and Sahabaj Alam (20), the CM said. "The defaulters were taken into custody by Yairipok Police Station and have been produced before the Executive Magistrate, Thoubal. Legal action will be initiated against them as per the provisions of the ILP system, and steps are being taken to deport them from the state," he said.

Haryana scraps bonus marks based on socioeconomic status

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ CHANDIGARH

The Haryana Cabinet has approved amendments in the Common Eligibility Test policy to remove the grant of five per cent bonus marks to certain candidates based on socioeconomic criteria for government jobs in Group C and D posts. The government decision follows a May 31 order by the high court on the matter. The approval was given in a meeting chaired by Chief Minister Nayab Singh Saini on Saturday, an official statement said. "As per the amendments, the 5 per cent weightage for social economic criteria provided for the bona fide residents of Haryana has been removed. The said amendments have been done as per the directions of the Punjab and Haryana High Court," said the statement. The amended policy will be called Policy for Recruitment to Group C and D posts through Common Eligibility Test, (Amendment) Rule, 2024, it said. In May, the Punjab and Haryana High Court had struck down the state

government's policy of granting five per cent bonus marks based on the socioeconomic status of the candidate from the state, in the CET for groups C and D posts. Later, in June, the Supreme Court had upheld the Punjab and Haryana High Court order. The apex court was hearing an appeal filed by the Haryana Staff Selection Commission against the Punjab and Haryana High Court's May 31 order. "The Policy for Recruitment to Group C and D posts through Common Eligibility Test, (Amendment) Rule, 2024 shall apply to direct recruitment to Group C posts including the posts of police service, prisons and home guards etc, excluding the teaching posts, ex-Agniveer and Group D posts for which minimum educational qualification is below matriculation...", said the statement. "Furthermore, after the amendment, now the maximum number of eligible candidates to appear for the skill and/or written examination shall be ten times the total number of posts advertised by the

Commission. Earlier, the candidates equal to four times the number of posts advertised were eligible to appear," the statement said. On May 5, 2022, the state government introduced Common Eligibility Test (CET) for Group C and D posts. In another decision, the cabinet approved the decision to bring an ordinance for further amending the Haryana Contractual Employees (Security of Service) Act, 2024. Under this amendment, the phrase "in a calendar year" will be replaced with "during a period of one year of contractual service." This amendment is being introduced to address request raised by contractual employees regarding the calculation of their service days, the statement said. Employees had requested that the 240-day service requirement be calculated based on the actual number of days during a one-year period of contractual service, instead of a calendar year. The current system posed challenges for employees who joined between May and December, as the service

days for their first year of employment were not being fully counted. "For instance, employees whose date of joining falls after May and before December would not meet the 240-day service requirement for their first calendar year of service, thus affecting their job security," it said. "In addition, for the year 2024, employees raised concerns as the number of days until the cut-off date of August 15, 2024, is only 227, which falls short of the required 240 days," it added. In response to these requests, the Haryana Cabinet has approved the amendment to consider 240 days of service during a period of one year of contractual service, thereby addressing these issues and ensuring better job security for contractual employees, it said. Under the Haryana Contractual Employees (Security of Service) Act, 2024, the benefit of job security is admissible to those contractual employees who fulfil the five years contractual service between August 15, 2024, the statement added.



The ceremonial installation of Lord Ram's idol in Ayodhya's temple positioned UP as a symbol of cultural and spiritual significance.

PTI

Uttar Pradesh 2024: Lord Ram idol installation marks historic year for the state

BISWAJEET BANERJEE ■ LUCKNOW

Uttar Pradesh, experienced a year of transformation in 2024, marked by remarkable milestones and a blend of cultural preservation and developmental progress. The year began with the historic installation of Lord Ram's idol in Ayodhya's grand temple, an event that symbolized the culmination of a 500-year-long wait and reaffirmed the state's cultural heritage. As the year comes to a close, Uttar Pradesh is engrossed in preparing for the grand Maha Kumbh 2025 in Prayagraj, showcasing its ability to merge tradition with modernity. On January 22, the ceremonial installation of Lord Ram's idol in Ayodhya's temple was conducted by Prime Minister Narendra Modi, with Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath in attendance. This historic event drew global attention to Ayodhya, positioning it as a symbol of cultural and spiritual significance. Shortly after, the state demonstrated its economic prowess during the Groundbreaking Ceremony 4.0, held on February 19-20 in Lucknow. At this event, investment proposals worth Rs 10 lakh crore were turned into reality, underscoring Uttar Pradesh's rising prominence as a business-friendly destination. Healthcare also saw unprecedented growth in 2024 with the inauguration of 18 new medical colleges, including government institutions in districts like Bijnor, Bulandshahr, and Kushinagar. On February 25, PM Modi virtually inaugurated AIIMS Raebareilly, making it the second operational AIIMS in the state, alongside Gorakhpur. These developments represent the Yogi government's commitment to enhancing healthcare access for all. For the first time in 24 years, scholarships for

Sanskrit students were significantly increased, benefiting over 1.5 lakh students. Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath distributed these scholarships at Sampurnanand Sanskrit University in Varanasi on October 27, reinforcing his government's dedication to promoting traditional education. Ayodhya's Deepotsav 2024 set a new Guinness World Record with over 25.12 lakh diyas illuminating the city, surpassing the 2023 record of 22.23 lakh. The event saw 1,121 Vedacharyas performing the Sarayu Aarti, adding spiritual grandeur to the festivities. The state's achievements extended to infrastructure development as well, with the first validation flight landing at Noida International Airport in Jewar on December 9. This milestone, coupled with an increase in land acquisition compensation for farmers to Rs 4,300 per square meter, marked significant progress toward the airport's operational launch in 2025. In addition to these milestones, Uttar Pradesh made strides in employment generation, with over 7 lakh youths securing government jobs through transparent recruitment drives. The Mukhyamantri Kanya Sumangala Yojana saw its financial aid increased from Rs 15,000 to Rs 25,000, providing greater support to families across the state. Environmental conservation efforts also bore fruit, with the summer census recording 19,918 Sarus cranes and the plantation of 36.80 crore trees, expanding the state's forest cover by 559.19 square kilometers. As 2024 concludes, Uttar Pradesh stands as a testament to cultural pride and developmental progress. From record-breaking celebrations to infrastructural advancements and economic growth, Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath's leadership has positioned the state as a beacon of progress, ready to embrace the opportunities of the future.

Cyber warriors, drones, AI cameras: Maha Kumbh 2025 to be under 24x7 surveillance

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI, PRAYAGRAJ

In a first, "underwater drones" capable of diving up to 100 meters will be deployed during the upcoming Maha Kumbh to provide round-the-clock surveillance at Sangam area in Uttar Pradesh's Prayagraj, the Union Culture Ministry said on Sunday. Besides, renovation of 92 roads and construction of 30 pontoon bridges and installation of 800 multilingual signages are being undertaken there to facilitate the pilgrims and other visitors showcasing India's culture and diversity. Under Prime Minister Narendra Modi's leadership, the Uttar Pradesh government is making "extensive preparations to ensure that Mahakumbh 2025 in Prayagraj is a grand, safe and spiritually enriching event", the ministry said. Expected to host over 40 crore devotees from across the globe, this 45-day festival from January 13 to February 26 will showcase India's rich cultural heritage and spiritual traditions. The Culture Ministry shared details on the preparations underway and the civic amenities and security arrangements that will be in place for the mega congregation. "For the first time, underwater drones capable of diving up to 100 meters will provide round-the-clock surveillance at the Sangam area," it said in a statement. Also, the deployment of 2,700 cameras with artificial intelligence (AI) capabilities will provide "real-time monitoring" and facial recognition technology will be used at entry points for enhanced safety, the ministry said. "A team of 56 cyber warriors will monitor online threats. Cyber help desks are being set up in all police stations," it said. The ministry had recently announced that it would set up a thematic space -- 'Kalagram' in Prayagraj to showcase India's cultural heritage and diversity during the Maha Kumbh.



An aerial view of Sangam, the confluence of the Ganga and Yamuna rivers, area ahead of the Mahakumbh 2025. PTI

"Special provisions have been made for international visitors with multilingual signages and cultural programmes showcasing India's diversity. Through these comprehensive efforts, Mahakumbh 2025 aims to be not just a religious gathering but a global celebration of spirituality, culture, safety, sustainability and modernity," the statement said. 'Mahakumbh Nagar' is being transformed into a temporary city with thousands of tents and shelters, including super deluxe accommodations like the IRCTC's "Mahakumbh Gram" luxury tent city which offers deluxe tents and villas with modern amenities, the ministry added. According to the statement, renovation of 92 roads and beautification of 17 major roads are nearing completion. The construction of 30 pontoon bridges using 3,308 pontoons is underway and 28 are already operational. A total of 800 multilingual signages (Hindi, English and regional languages) are being installed to guide the visitors, the ministry said. "Over 400 have been

completed, with the rest to be ready by December 31," it said. Besides, "over 2,69,000 checkered plates have been laid for pathways" and mobile toilets and robust waste management systems will ensure hygiene, the statement said. A number of measures have been taken to ensure robust disaster response in case of any untoward incident. A state-of-the-art multi-disaster response vehicle would enhance safety and disaster readiness, "capable of handling situations ranging from natural disasters to road accidents", it said. "This includes a lifting bag with a capacity of 10-20 tonnes, enabling the rescue of individuals buried under debris and specialised machines to lift and move heavy objects weighing up to 1.5 tonnes," the statement said. The deployment of four Articulating Water Towers (AWTs) capable of tackling fires up to 35 meters high and 30 metres wide will be in place, the ministry said.

Kutch records third tremor over 3 Magnitude this month

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ AHMEDABAD

A tremor of 3.2 magnitude jolted Gujarat's Kutch district on Sunday morning, the Institute of Seismological Research (ISR) said. There was no report of any casualty or damage to property, the district administration said. The tremor was recorded at 10.06 am with its epicentre located 18 kilometres north-north east of Bhachau, the Gandhinagar-based ISR said. It is the third seismic activity of more than 3 magnitude in the district this month. A 3.7 magnitude tremor jolted Kutch on December 23. On December 7, a tremor of 3.2 magnitude was recorded in the district, according to the ISR. Last month, Kutch recorded an earthquake of 4 magnitude on November 18. Earlier, on November 15, Patan in north Gujarat was jolted by an earthquake of 4.2 magnitude.

Jammu-Srinagar highway reopens after day-long closure

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ JAMMU

The 270-km Jammu-Srinagar highway was on Sunday reopened for vehicular traffic after a day-long closure due to heavy snowfall, allowing stranded vehicles to proceed to their respective destinations, officials said. However, several other

important inter-district routes, including the Mughal Road, Sinthan Pass, Sonamarg-Kargil inter-UT road, and Baderwah-Chamba interstate road, remained closed for vehicular traffic due to heavy snowfall. "The highway has been reopened today following the clearance of snow accumulated on various stretches of the road,"

a traffic official said. The stranded vehicles along the highway are being cleared, he added. "Passenger traffic is plying on the highway. Commuters are advised to follow lane discipline, as overtaking may cause congestion," J-K Traffic Police said in an advisory. It also advised commuters to drive cautiously, as the road is

slippery between Banihal and Qazigund. The Mughal Road, which serves as an alternative link to the Kashmir Valley from Jammu region's Poonch district, remained shut due to snow accumulation, officials said. Similarly, the Sinthan Pass in Kishtwar has been closed for vehicular traffic due to heavy snowfall.

Danapur division completes 100 years of service, celebrations planned

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI, PATNA

The historic Danapur division of the Indian Railways network that manages some of the lines and stations originally set up nearly 160 years ago will complete an eventful journey of 100 years on January 1. The division has planned a grand celebration on January 31 at the old Jagjivan Stadium where it will also host an exhibition showcasing its rich history through archival documents, photographs and railway artefacts. We are also working on a coffee table book on the centenary of the Danapur division. Besides going through our old documents and photographs kept in different departments at the DRM office, we are also trying to crowd-source relevant material for the book," said a senior Railway Ministry official of the Danapur division. Danapur (earlier Dinapore) division was established on January 1, 1925. Its office is located in a majestic building erected in



The headquarters of Danapur Division of the Indian Railways, at Khagaul, near Patna.

1929 near the historic Danapur station at Khagaul town near Patna. The first divisional superintendent of Danapur was C Eyers, who took charge on January 1, 1925. The post was redesignated as divisional

railway manager (DRM) from 1980s onwards, according to information displayed on the succession board. While the division is 100 years old, the Danapur (earlier Dinapore) railway station was

built in the 1860s, along with the old Patna station (now Patna Sahib station) located in Patna City, and the erstwhile Bankipore station (near the site of the current Patna Junction built much later) on the

Howrah-Delhi line, as per railway experts and some archival records. The old stations at Fatuha, Bakhtiarpur, Barb, Mokama, Gulzargarh and Bihta, located on a section of this line which

falls within the limits of Danapur division, were built in later years, they said. The current Danapur division spans the rail network from Jhajha to Kuchman. The Mughalsarai rail network was also part of it before it was carved out as a separate division in later decades after Independence. Till the redevelopment of Patna Sahib station a few years ago, a plaque bearing 'PATNA 1861' embedded on a wall of its building was visible from the platform. The then East Indian Railway (EIR) system laid the line from Howrah to Delhi, and operations on it began phase-wise from early 1850s to late 1860s, which included construction of the iconic bridge over Sone river at Koelwar and a bridge each over Yamuna at Allahabad and Delhi, all major feats of civil and railway engineering. A team at the Danapur DRM office is currently busy scouring through old files and records, searching for old photographs, correspondences and other

archival material which can be used in the planned exhibition and the coffee table book. The red-and-white building located near Danapur station is the centrepiece of a quaint railway colony at Khagaul, dotted with many handsome British-era structures such as the official residence of the DRM, 'Rail Sadan', old railway school and hospital, and a few beautiful churches, besides humble railway colonies. Danapur division was put under the Kolkata-based Eastern Railway (ER) established in 1952. From 2002 onwards, it came under East Central Railway (ECR), carved out of ER, with headquarters at Hajipur in north Bihar. According to old publications, after the government of India took over the management of EIR, with effect from 1925, it was split into six divisions -- Howrah, Asansol and Dinapore, known as lower divisions, and Allahabad, Lucknow and Moradabad, known as upper divisions.

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PAPER WITH PASSION

Shifting stance

Trump's support for H-1B visas marks a major shift, offering relief to US companies and Indian tech workers alike

Politicians seldom walk their talk and do not mind taking u-turns even if it means reversing their own previous positions. Donald Trump the US President elect is the latest example. Trump has expressed his support for the H-1B visa program, which facilitates the entry of skilled foreign workers into the United States. This development comes as a marked departure from his earlier stance during his first presidential term, where he labeled the program 'very bad' and 'unfair' to American workers. Trump's latest remarks not only align him with tech magnate Elon Musk but also have significant implications for Indian professionals and US companies. The controversy surrounding the H-1B program reignited when Musk took to social media to vociferously defend the program against criticisms from immigration hardliners. Musk's electric vehicle company, Tesla, alone secured 724 H-1B visas this year, underscoring his vested interest in maintaining the program. Trump echoed Musk's sentiments in an interview, stating, "I've always liked the visas. I have used it many times. It's a great program."



This admission not only signals a softening of his earlier rhetoric but also a pragmatic acknowledgment of the program's benefits to the US economy. Indian IT professionals stand to benefit immensely from Trump's change in stance. Historically, Indians have been the largest beneficiaries of the H-1B visa program, occupying a lion's share of the annual quota. Trump's endorsement could reassure prospective applicants and existing visa holders about the continuity of the program, which has often been a lifeline for skilled workers seeking opportunities in the United States. The move

also counters recent fears of stringent immigration policies that could hinder their aspirations. The US technology sector, which has long relied on the H-1B visa program to address skill shortages, is likely to welcome Trump's shift. Companies like Google, Microsoft, and Tesla have consistently advocated for the continuation of the program, citing a lack of homegrown talent to meet the industry's demands. Musk's pointed critique of American culture's celebration of mediocrity over excellence highlights the role of foreign talent in driving innovation and maintaining the US's competitive edge globally. Trump's stance, however, has drawn ire from far-right activists and prominent figures within his own party. Critics, including Steve Bannon and Nikki Haley, argue that prioritising foreign workers undermines American labour and exacerbates domestic unemployment. Trump's endorsement of the H-1B visa program reflects a pragmatic shift rather than an ideological reversal. Recognising the indispensable role of skilled immigrants in the US economy, his administration's move signals a commitment to fostering economic growth and maintaining technological leadership. For Indian professionals, it offers renewed hope, and for US tech companies, it ensures access to the global talent pool they rely on to innovate and thrive.

PICTALK



An elderly woman makes kites for the upcoming Makar Sankranti kite festival, in Hyderabad

The statesman and a gentleman



V K BAHUGUNA

Dr Singh's journey from a humble student to a distinguished statesman is a testament to perseverance, intellect and humility

As the country mourns the death of former Prime Minister Manmohan Singh who breathed his last on 26th December 2024 at the age of 92. The world leaders condone the death of a man who was a common man's Prime Minister and a golden boy of destiny. He ruled the nation for 10 years after having successfully dealt with the economic crisis of 1991 when the then Prime Minister Narsimha Rao appointed him Finance Minister and the rest is history of dismantling the license raj and ushering in economic liberalization of the economy and the nation is grateful to him and the Narsimha Rao for opening up the economy of caged lion that is India the benefits of which the nation is reaping today. I write this article when the country's politics is witnessing high conflicts and drama and the entire gamut of politicians coming from a background which is miles away from Dr Manmohan Singh's academic background as most of the time the politicians are jostling with each other in the quest for power, position and money.

The fractured polity of India is the creation of politics of power and money which also seamlessly spreads across sectors of society and administration. Dr Manmohan Singh was born in Pakistan and came to India as a poor student but due to the sheer talent, perseverance and hard work obtained a scholarship and attained high educational qualifications as an economist from the University of Cambridge and Oxford. As an academician and economist, he served the nation with dignity and aplomb as an officer and bureaucrat in the Planning Commission, Chief Economic Advisor and Secretary in the Ministry of Environment, Governor of the Reserve Bank of India, Chairman of the University Grant Commission and finally as politician member of Rajya Sabha for more than 30 years and Prime Minister for 10 years. The luck favours the brave as the saying goes and he had plenty of it. No Prime Minister in the past nor the near distant future is going to have such a background



and rich profile as Dr Manmohan Singh has and with this, he has etched his name in the history of India. As such no academician or economist in India could hope to achieve the post of Prime Minister of India considering our varied polity and its nature. Most of the professionals end up on bureaucratic posts and some may occupy the constitutional position of President or Vice-President of India or Governors. Sonia Gandhi will also be remembered for choosing him as Prime Minister of India after she was elected as leader of the Congress Parliamentary Party in the year 2004 and refused to hold the post considering opposition to her foreign origin. The Indian masses specially educated elite and young brains aspiring to be great leaders in many fields including politics must take several lessons from the life of Dr Manmohan Singh. The first, he was talented and humble but more than that he had a very high emotional intelligence. These days lot of people in diverse fields end up failing even though they have high calibre, capability, knowledge and intelligence but lack emotional intelligence. It is the emotional intelligence that frames the mental makeup of individuals reflected in their demeanour while dealing with



THE LUCK FAVOURS THE BRAVE AS THE SAYING GOES AND HE HAD PLENTY OF IT. NO PRIME MINISTER IN THE PAST NOR THE NEAR DISTANT FUTURE IS GOING TO HAVE SUCH A BACKGROUND AND RICH PROFILE AS DR MANMOHAN SINGH HAS AND WITH THIS, HE HAS ETCHED HIS NAME IN THE HISTORY OF INDIA

people of diverse background and situations. Second, he had an uncanny talent for perceiving things with poise and confidence coming his way and organizing his capability most efficiently for the benefit of his organizations and ultimately for the country as Prime Minister of India and for his party. Many of our leaders in politics as also in bureaucracy lack poise and confidence and that results in making mistakes at crucial times. Third is how to handle provocative situations and when to be outspoken. This quality is essential while handling diversified issues with conflicting claims and counterclaims in both politics and administration. The fourth is to be silent like when Rahul Gandhi tore a proposed bill of his government publicly, and act firm like a solid rock and take a decision to its logical end without any compromise. The iron will he had shown when while signing the nuclear deal with America had shown his strong commitment and capability to carry his decision to its logical end even though the CPM withdrew support for his government. His government was, however, bailed out by the Samajwadi party but it has shown his strong personality as a national leader while dealing with international diplomacy. This attitude is the

hallmark of excellent leaders who can balance things considering what is best for the governance and the country. The fifth lesson which is most important for today's leaders is; that he was above favouritism, caste or religion and thus deftly handled his government with loyalty to his party leader and the country. However, sometimes the hangers-on in power especially in the bureaucracy do play mischief as observed by this writer nevertheless, such things always happen with all powerful posts and people. Though he was criticised by the opposition he maintained his poise and firmly remained loyal to his way of doing things and because of his scholarly eloquence and demeanours he was respected by all world leaders who mattered in international diplomacy. Dr Manmohan Singh, the academician par excellence, achieved dazzling heights. Such personas are born in politics once in a century or not born at all. I hope the current politicians of his party and the budding politicians/social and administrative aspirants imbibe these virtues to become effective leaders of tomorrow, which India needs today.

(The writer is the former Director-General in the Ministry of Environment and Forest, Government of India; views are personal)

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

THE LEGACY OF MANMOHANOMICS

Madam — In the article Dr. Manmohan Singh's legacy as a pivotal figure in Indian politics and economics is thoughtfully and comprehensively evaluated. Through his tenure as prime minister for two consecutive terms and as finance minister in the 1990s, it recognizes his crucial contribution to the development of contemporary India. His strategic diplomatic engagements and economic liberalisation initiatives, such as the historic civil nuclear agreement between the United States and India, are rightfully hailed as turning points that have improved India's resilience and status in the world. Singh's lasting impact on India's socio-economic structure is also highlighted in the article, from social welfare reforms to Aadhaar-based delivery systems. Nonetheless, it is not afraid to criticize his administration, pointing out his difficulties with coalition politics, the impression of policy paralysis, and corruption scandals that damaged his administration's reputation. His personal integrity and his special status as a technocrat negotiating the turbulent waters of Indian politics are acknowledged in order to counterbalance these criticisms. What is noteworthy is the article's claim that, despite changes in administration, Singh's vision and policies continue to support India's advancement. It is convincing and evidence of Singh's enduring influence that "Manmohanomics" is being promoted as a "Make in India" paradigm for emerging countries. Overall, this article is a contemplative homage to a leader whose accomplishments merit a more lenient assessment from the past.

Janvi Rajwani | Ujjain

THE FALLING RUPEE

Madam— Apropos, "Rupee falls further 23 paise to hit fresh record low of 85.5 against US dollars," The Pioneer, Dec 28. Its a cause of concern that rupee has crossed the psychological barrier of 85

Memorial for Dr Singh



In a bid demand to allocate space for a memorial" for the former Prime minister of India, Dr. Manmohan

Singh. The people of our country are simply unable to understand why govt of India could not find a location for his cremation and memorial that is befitting of his global stature, record of outstanding achievements, and exemplary service to the nation for decades.

Kharge also demanded that Singh's last rites be conducted at a place where a memorial can be built. When Kharge explained the demand and his communication with Modi to CWC, sources said a member of the Gandhi family even suggested that the cremation could be done at Shakti Sthal or Veer Bhumi - the resting places of former PMs Indira Gandhi and Rajiv Gandhi.

Dimple Wadhawan | Kanpur

against the dollar. It is an all-time low after a steady drop for some weeks, and the rupee is unlikely to rise soon. There are situations when a weaker currency does good to the economy and sometimes, conscious policy initiatives are taken towards that. But that is not the case with India now. Both global and domestic factors have contributed to the weakening of the rupee. India's economic growth has fallen to its lowest level in three quarters and merchandise trade deficits widened. The weaker rupee offers some opportunities. It provides an export advantage and could boost export-oriented industries like textiles. Incentives may be offered to such industries and suitable trade strategies can be formulated in their favour. Meanwhile, domestic manufacturing and productivity should be improved and reliance on imports should be reduced as they will become costlier. But, a weaker rupee fuels inflation as imported goods and services become dearer. RBI interventions and other

measures will provide only temporary relief. The lasting solution to rupee depreciation and other global challenges is to strengthen the domestic economy by improving production and increasing exports.

N Sathasiva Reddy | Bengaluru

PROVIDE MEDICAL HELP TO DALLEWAL

Madam — Apropos to providing medical help to Dallewal. The Supreme Court has clarified in clear terms to provide medical help to the agitating farm leader to save his life and deal with the resisting crowd with iron hand if required. However the state government representatives have expressed their reservations of taking the risk of physical jostling with the resistance. The point to ponder is who is then going to do the needful if not the state authorities putting the credibility of the Supreme Court order in question.

R S Narula | Patiala

Send your feedback to: letterstopioneer@gmail.com

The paradox of happiness: Why we fear what we seek

As much as we strive for everlasting joy, we often find ourselves wary of its fleeting nature, hesitating to fully embrace it



ASHA IYER KUMAR

If there is one thing that we relentlessly pursue in life—the only thing we put all our pennies on in this big worldly gamble—it is happiness. The ultimate goal that we all crave is everlasting bliss. What charades and circuses we play to attain the state of eternal joy! While this rignmole governs our everyday thoughts and actions, another element sneaks in as soon as we reach our dream: Fear—the fear of losing the happiness that we know is ephemeral. Come to think of it, much as we covet it, happiness frightens us. It also makes us wary of revealing our joys, and we often hide good things to avoid getting jinxed. Why do we fear happiness? Why do we think every moment of joy comes at a price? The fear of happiness is a paradox embedded in the human psyche. It's almost as if we've been conditioned to believe that joy is too fragile to last, that it carries an expiry date we cannot predict. This belief turns happiness into a double-edged sword: on one side, it is the elation we strive for; on the other, it is the dread of its inevitable end.



Where does this fear originate? Perhaps it stems from a deep-seated awareness of life's impermanence. We've all seen moments of bliss snatched away by unexpected turns of fate. A child's innocent laughter may be followed by tears, a promotion at work may bring unforeseen stress, and a long-anticipated celebration may be marred by tragedy. These experiences condition us to approach happiness with caution, to brace ourselves for the fall even as we revel in the peak. This trepidation finds cultural expressions, too. Superstitions like "knock on wood" or "touch iron" are more than quaint habits; they are safeguards against the perceived fragility of joy. Similarly, the kaala teeka or talisman traditions reflect a universal belief that happiness attracts envy and, by extension,

misfortune. We place such conditions maybe because happiness, unlike sorrow, feels fleeting and illusory. Pain lingers and forces us to adapt, but happiness feels transient, like a butterfly—beautiful, delicate, and always ready to flit away. Is it fair to treat happiness as a precarious treasure? By fearing it, do we not dilute its essence and sabotage our ability to experience it fully? Modern life has made this paradox even more pronounced. With social media encouraging us to share our highs, celebrating joy has become a public event. On one hand, we feel validated by likes and comments; on the other, the exposure amplifies our unease. Will the digital applause somehow disrupt the balance of our good fortune? These questions linger, even as we hit the "share" button with a smile. But perhaps the greater fear is not external—it's internal. Happiness asks us to be present, to be vulnerable, and to believe that we deserve good things. For many, this is a daunting proposition. When shaped by struggles or conditioned to expect the worst, joy feels for-

eign, even undeserved. The fear of losing it becomes a defence mechanism, a way of preparing ourselves for the inevitable end of happy times. It is important to recognise that happiness, like all emotions, is inherently fleeting. Accepting its impermanence allows us to savour it without clinging or dreading its end. Happiness deserves the same grace. Vulnerability is the price of true happiness, and the courage to embrace it, however briefly, is what makes life rich. Sharing our joy—whether with loved ones or the world—is not an invitation to misfortune but an act of trust in the abundance of good things. Let's challenge the belief that happiness comes at a cost. Life's highs and lows are inevitable, but they are not always sequential. A moment of joy does not necessitate a subsequent sorrow. Joy, in its purest form, deserves to be embraced—without caution, without apology, and most importantly, without fear. It's all easier said than done, I admit. (The author is a columnist and writing coach based in Dubai. Views are personal)



FIRST COLUMN

THE CHALLENGES OF A NOBLE PROFESSION

Despite their vital role, educators remain undervalued and overstressed, leading to burnout



SAKSHI SETHI

The teaching profession, often referred to as one of the noblest vocations, faces significant challenges in today's world. As society evolves, so do the expectations placed upon educators. Despite their pivotal role in shaping future generations, teachers grapple with numerous issues ranging from inadequate compensation to increased workloads and shifting societal dynamics. Addressing these challenges is crucial towards ensuring the sustainability and effectiveness of education systems worldwide.

Today, one of the most pressing issues for teachers is the sheer volume of work they manage. Beyond classroom teaching, educators are tasked with lesson planning, grading, administrative duties, and even participating in extracurricular activities. This workload which quite often extends beyond school hours, leaves little time for their family life or personal development. Even the pressure to meet standardized testing benchmarks and adaptiveness to diverse student needs adds to their stress levels, contributing to burnout and high attrition rates within the profession. Despite the critical importance of their role, many teachers feel undervalued and underpaid. In numerous countries, teacher salaries lag behind those of other professions requiring similar levels of education and expertise.

This financial disparity not only affects their quality of life but also discourages talented individuals from entering the profession. There is no denying that recognition for the hard work and dedication put up by a teacher is very limited which nowadays is diminishing their morale and job satisfaction. The integration of technology into education has trans-



formed teaching methodologies, requiring teachers to continually update their skills. While digital tools have enhanced learning experiences, they also demand significant effort from educators to adapt and implement effectively. The shift to online and hybrid learning models during the COVID-19 pandemic underscored this challenge, highlighting gaps in training and access to resources. Not only adaptations towards new learning models but another complexity that a teacher faces is classroom management.

With the advent of Gen Alpha, the role of a teacher has become increasingly complex as they now have to deal with a wide range of student behaviours and needs. Issues such as bullying, mental health challenges, and lack of discipline have increased enormously, and the abolishment of corporal punishments requires educators to act as counsellors and mediators in addition to their teaching roles. At the same time, rising parental expectations and involvement have also created added pressure, with some parents demanding individualized attention for their children. Despite so many challenges, there are multiple opportunities to improve the teaching profession and support educators. Increased investment in education systems, including better salaries and benefits, can help attract and retain talented teachers. It is extremely important to know that teaching is the only profession that creates other professions.

Promoting a culture of respect and appreciation for teachers, by recognizing their contributions through awards, public acknowledgement, and meaningful feedback can boost morale and reaffirm their value to society. The challenges faced by teachers today are multifaceted and require comprehensive solutions. By addressing issues such as workload, compensation, and training, society can ensure that educators are equipped and motivated to excel in their roles. Supporting teachers is not just an investment in their well-being but in the future of the students they inspire and educate. It is imperative to honour their dedication and create conditions that allow them to thrive, for the benefit of all.

(The writer is an educator; views are personal)

Reaching for the stars, ruining the earth



NILANTHA LANGAMUWA

In 2024, a year of rising conflicts and environmental crises, the race for space supremacy highlights a paradox: we look to the stars while neglecting our planet

That was a harrowing near-miss. Trump endured an assassination attempt, and the ensuing spectacle was nothing short of fantastical. As he emerged, emboldened and defiant, a self-proclaimed martyr rallying Americans to "fight...fight...fight," the undercurrent of turmoil in the U.S. political sphere became irrefutable. Following the attack, responsibility was squarely placed on the Secret Service, prompting the resignation of its chief, Kimberly Cheatle. However, the pivotal question is not about security oversights but rather the significance of his survival.

The fact that Trump has now emerged from such an ordeal only solidifies his centrality in American political discourse. His rhetoric will escalate to unprecedented levels of provocation, further inflaming a deeply divided nation. As January 20 nears and he ascends to the presidency as the 47th leader, we must confront an uncomfortable truth: America is on the precipice of a more ominous epoch. This is not merely about one man's political endurance—it is about the disintegration of American society itself, driven to the brink by long-standing forces in motion. On the broader geopolitical stage, 2024 has been a year of unsettling reconfigurations.

In Asia, China's dominance over Taiwan is undeniable, with global consensus growing that Beijing's ambitions will not yield to Western opposition. For years, the U.S. has provoked China through military deployments and arms to Taiwan. Yet, China's psychological and economic warfare has shifted the global balance of power, eroding America's influence in the Pacific. Despite this, the U.S. persists, its foreign policy increasingly marked by desperation and entrenched arrogance. Meanwhile, the war in Ukraine, now in its third year, serves as a painful reminder of the West's misguided strategy of intervention. NATO's resolve is deteriorating, and support for Kyiv is dwindling in many Western capitals as the economic cost of the war becomes more pronounced. Public disillusionment with the conflict is palpable, yet the U.S. continues to allocate resources to a war with no clear resolution in sight.

The arms industry flourishes, and NATO's failure to pursue a diplomatic resolution leaves a bitter aftertaste, as Russia, empowered by internal European divisions, presses its advantage. In 2024 alone, the global arms trade reached a staggering \$632 billion, with much of that revenue enriching manufacturers who profit from relentless destruction. The grim reality is that war has evolved into a lucrative enterprise, sustaining the military-industrial complex while civilians bear the cost.

A similar dynamic is unfolding in West Asia, where Israel's military actions against Palestine and Lebanon have extended into Syria by year's end, driven by a voracious expansionist agenda, all under the protective mantle of U.S. support. The missile exchanges between Iran and Israel risk escalating into full-scale warfare, with no resolution in sight. Yet, the West remains obsessively focused on preserving its hegemonic power, blatantly disregarding the mounting humanitarian catastrophes. In parallel, the Arab world exposes its deep-seated fragmen-



INDIA IS POISED TO BECOME THE WORLD'S THIRD-LARGEST ECONOMY WITHIN FIVE YEARS, YET RISING TENSIONS WITH THE UNITED STATES PRESENT AN OPPORTUNITY TO REASSESS THE TRUE NATURE OF AMERICA'S 'ASIA PIVOT'

tation, driven by centuries-old dogmas and self-serving political agendas, all of which continue to wreak havoc on the lives of millions of Muslims.

The situation in South Asia mirrors this instability. With the reelection of Narendra Modi and the BJP, India is significantly expanding its global influence, even as internal crises—such as communal violence in the Northeast and Kashmir—continue to intensify, with the government blaming its negligence. India is poised to become the world's third-largest economy within five years, yet rising tensions with the United States present an opportunity to reassess the true nature of America's 'Asia Pivot'. As tensions escalate in Pakistan and neighbouring Afghanistan, the region teeters on the brink of broader conflict. Political instability in Bangladesh, exacerbated by alleged U.S.-sponsored 'people's protests' that ousted Sheikh Hasina, and fragile politics in Nepal, which increasingly aligns with China, further fuel the growing unease.

Sri Lanka and the Maldives, after years of political turmoil, have found a degree of stability by year's end. Sri Lanka, in particular, has experienced a remarkable political shift, with a single party securing a supermajority in parliament, now populated by a wave of inexperienced young politicians.

While the Maldives continues to navigate its political challenges, South Asia—often dismissed as a 'dead regional idea'—remains a crucial player in global geopolitics. Meanwhile, in 2024, Africa boldly rejects colonial influence, with nations like Niger, Burkina Faso, Senegal, and Chad expelling French forces and reclaiming sovereignty. Yet, the continent's vast resources fuel a neocolonial

scramble, exposing deep-rooted corruption and divisive leadership. Despite efforts to break free, Africa remains trapped by external exploitation and the greed of its elites, hindering true autonomy and progress. At the same time, the relentless march of artificial intelligence in 2024 highlights a more subtle threat: the obliteration of labour.

Entire industries, from retail to finance, have been disrupted by automation, leaving millions of workers displaced. In the U.S., unemployment rates hovered around 4.5% in 2024, but these statistics scarcely reflect the many individuals who have been relegated to underemployment or excluded from the labour market entirely. Meanwhile, global projections suggest that job displacement due to automation will increase by up to 30% over the next decade. While the technocrats celebrate AI's progress, millions are left behind. Simultaneously, the integration of AI into military systems raises the frightening possibility of autonomous warfare, where human lives are subject to the whims of algorithms.

In 2024, climate change worsened, but leaders offered only empty words. The COP29 collapse highlighted the wealthiest nations' evasion of responsibility, leaving the vulnerable to suffer while the crisis, fueled by inequality and unchecked industrialisation, deepened. By 2024, over 700 million people worldwide were living in extreme poverty, with hunger rates climbing sharply due to both the economic pressures of conflict and climate-related calamities.

For many, securing enough food to survive has become an increasingly insurmountable struggle. In space, the race for hegemony reached new heights, as the U.S.,

China, and private corporations competed for supremacy in the cosmos.

Yet, one must question: why are such vast resources being allocated to space exploration when the world's most pressing issues remain unaddressed? The billions being invested in Mars colonisation could be better used to address the problems on Earth, yet the Western obsession with space reflects a deeper sense of hubris.

Humanity looks to the stars but fails to confront the crises that are unfolding on its soil. The year 2024 will be remembered as one that exposed the profound contradictions of our age. The Western world is at war with itself, consumed by political divisions, economic inequality, and an incapacity to respond to the genuine challenges of our time. The rise of populism, authoritarianism, and unchecked technological advancement portends a future in which the divide between the rich and the poor widens, and the planet teeters on the brink of environmental collapse. In this environment, the struggle for survival will no longer be merely political—it will be existential.

We are increasingly forfeiting our collective responsibility, continuing to vie for better accommodations in a sinking vessel, fully aware that we are all doomed to submerge. As we enter 2025, may we dare to confront the tumult of our times with the audacity to question everything, forging a future that challenges the very forces seeking to dominate us. Wishing you a year of purpose and unity.

(The writer is a journalist and policy analyst. Views expressed are personal)

Veganism: A resolution for health, planet, and compassion

Beyond being a dietary choice, veganism offers transformative benefits for personal health, environmental sustainability, and animal welfare.

As the year winds down, it is natural to reflect on the resolutions that were made in January. While there would be some of us who could hold on to their resolutions and some others who could not. However, there is no reason to feel lost. Making a New Year's resolution itself is a combination of awareness about oneself and a conscious decision to do better. Even setting a goal is a step in the right direction; this is more than most people manage. Being vegan once seen as a fringe lifestyle choice, appears to be occupying an increasingly bigger place not only in the West but also in India. Reports indicate that vegan diets create 75% fewer



PRASHANTH VISHWANATH

greenhouse gas emissions that contribute to global warming, as well as much less water pollution and wildlife damage. Fruits and vegetables, legumes, and grains require less energy, land, and water to produce than animal-derived diets. While diet seems to be the biggest concern for those wanting to

make the switch fact is that veganism is not just about diet, it is a lifestyle that refrains people from any form of animal exploitation. **Veganuary- the global behaviour**

change organisation encouraging people to try vegan in January and beyond- understands the importance of building a supportive community. Prashanth Vishwanath, who heads the organisation in India says "We know it takes a whole ecosystem to form positive habits. That's why we work with brands, restaurants and retailers to make plant-based products more accessible. Our 11 celebrity ambassadors from India show how they're on top of their game while eating

vegan. And anyone trying vegan with us receives more than 10 free resources including daily support emails. The idea is to make the transition to eating more plant-based as fun and rewarding as possible." **Building the 'try vegan' ecosystem**

Collaborating with brands In January 2024, 140 Indian firms participated in the Veganuary movement, launching new goods, special deals, and menu items. More than 40 new goods were launched in India, ranging from vegan eggs to curry meal sets. Nature's Basket, Amazon Fresh, Hilton Hotels, Big Basket, and Hard Rock Cafe were among the firms that participated, and the cam-



paign anticipates that many more will join this year. **Celebrity support** Veganuary's Indian Ambassadors include film stars, professional athletes, and mountaineers, with Mallika Sherawat being the most recent addition. They are passionate about it and

they have literally helped show millions of people how enriching plant-based eating can be. They send a loud and obvious message: a plant-based diet is a huge advantage for looking good on screen, channelling inner creativity, and fueling world record

feats. Free resources Annual Veganuary campaigns that encourage people to try vegan for a month as the new year rolls in come with an impressive list of free goodies to make the transition enjoyable and hassle-free.

Participants gain access to a digital celebrity cookbook, with vegan recipes from Indian and global celebrities, a complete vegan starter kit, with comprehensive answers to any questions about adopting a plant-based diet and a lot more. In India, embracing veganism is especially practical, thanks to the wide range of naturally vegan foods that are culturally familiar, and easy to prepare taking out the need for expensive or

exotic ingredients. It just needs a little bit of planning to ensure it meets all the necessary nutrients. The list of vegan food varieties is expanding every day, offering plenty of options to not only nourish your body but also delight your taste buds.

So, whether it's for your health, the planet, or compassion for animals, embracing a plant-based lifestyle is more accessible than ever. With the right support and an abundance of options, choosing to eat better could be the most rewarding resolution you take on this year.

(The writer is Country Director for India, Veganuary; views are personal)



DESIGN IDEAS FOR HUMAN WELLNESS



By ANURAAG BHARDWAJ

With the scaling up of urban landforms, it becomes very difficult for architects to prioritise wellness over price per square inch. We belong to the land that has rich cultural-centric heritage as well as postmodern rising towers and much diversified living environments and this takes a very new approach. This approach focuses towards more wellness centric designs that not only nurture their function or spatial needs but also has tangible effects on their physiological and emotional needs. A primary tool in this consideration is always a *biophilic design* that connects built and unbuilt environments together with methods of natural lighting, ventilation and greenery. Traditional physical spaces showcase various features like courtyards and verandah that modern architecture can easily showcase as green roofs, vertical gardens, and open plan layouts that invite the same elements of traditional design like natural light, ventilation and greenery. *Smart Homes* concepts are a great deal breakers today, by applying technology into wellness; we can greatly improve our living spaces. Simply matching the temperature of light to the function of that space greatly controls the mood and efficiency of the people using that space. Let's assume you are in your library, and you do not have ample space to place your book on that table, or there is not enough natural light available, you will always feel uncomfortable and might not use the space altogether. The choice of material and their specifications is a challenging task in the modern competitive market, that is where the main role of an architect

jumps in, and we help you choose the best and most sustainable material non-toxic, eco-friendly materials that do not off-gas harmful chemicals enhances indoor air quality and supports a healthier environment. We tend to choose surfaces that are maintenance free, and require little to no maintenance which reduces the risk of illness. Sustainability is deeply ingrained in traditional Indian architecture, which used locally sourced materials and passive cooling techniques to create eco-friendly structures. Reintroducing these principles in contemporary designs can reduce environmental impact while enhancing the well-being of occupants. For instance, rainwater harvesting systems, energy-efficient appliances, and

solar panels not only contribute to sustainability but also ensure long-term savings and resilience. Ultimately, designing for wellness is not just about aesthetics, it is a holistic approach that combines functionality, culture, and sustainability to create spaces that nourish the mind, body, and soul. In India, where the diversity of climates and traditions offers both challenges and opportunities, embracing wellness-focused design can transform living spaces into sanctuaries of health and happiness. As cities expand and lifestyles evolve, these principles will be pivotal in shaping a healthier, more harmonious future for all. — The author is an architect, the founder of Anjaney Vastu and AB Architects



AYURVEDIC FOOD AND REMEDIES FOR FATTY LIVER

By MOOL MEENA

Fatty liver, a condition where excess fat accumulates in liver cells, is considered a growing health concern. Generally, poor dietary habits and a sedentary lifestyle, with excessive alcoholism, induce fatty liver disorder. Fortunately, Ayurveda-India's ancient holistic medicinal science that not only proposes natural but sustainable remedies can checkmate such ailments with their methodology to heal the body system, emphasising detoxification, maintaining an equilibrium of the human body, and good digestive health.

FATTY LIVER THROUGH AYURVEDA: Fatty liver, in Ayurveda, is caused by an imbalance of Pitta and Kapha doshas. While pitta controls metabolism and digestion, kapha deals with the stability and structure of the body. Disruption of these doshas, brought about by unhealthy diets, stress, or lack of exercise, leads to the accumulation of toxins (Ama) and fat in the liver. Ayurvedic treatments aim to detoxify the liver, stimulate the digestive fire (Agni), and restore harmony between the doshas to support liver health.

AYURVEDIC FOODS AND REMEDIES FOR LIVER HEALTH: Diet plays a central role in the approach of Ayurveda to the management of fatty liver. Incorporation of nutrient-rich foods, herbs, and spices into daily meals can significantly enhance liver function. Herbs like *Turmeric*, which contain

curcumin, are known to reduce fat accumulation in the liver due to its anti-inflammatory properties. Apart from that, *Kutki*, *Bhuiamla*, *Punernava*, *Bhringraj*, *Triphala*, *Makoi* and *Kansi* help in fatty liver, as they detoxify the liver and improve digestion. Healing foods like *Amla* or *Indian Gooseberry* help to fortify liver cells with Vitamin C, accelerating natural detoxification. Bitter gourd and greens like spinach and fenugreek reduce oxidative stress, further helping the liver clean up. Whole grains, such as barley and millet, aid digestion, prevent spikes in blood sugar levels and ease the liver's workload. *Triphala tea*, a combination of three fruits, is highly effective in cleansing the liver and improving digestion. Liver detox water prepared with cumin, coriander, and fennel seeds help to flush out toxins and improve liver function.

THE ROLE OF LIFESTYLE IN AYURVEDIC LIVER CARE: Lifestyle plays a major role in the Ayurvedic care of the liver. Lifestyle activities, including physical exercise such as practicing *Bhujangasana* (Cobra Pose) and *Dhanurasana* (Bow Pose), stimulate liver function and increase blood flow. Dietary discipline is equally important. Processed and fried foods, excessive sugar, and alcohol must be avoided to not add more burden to the liver. Ayurveda advocates conscious eating home-cooked food, chewing food properly, and maintaining

regular meal timings to improve digestion. **AYURVEDIC HERBAL FORMULATIONS FOR FATTY LIVER:** Besides dietetic and lifestyle measures specifically designed formulations for liver health in the form of Ayurvedic herbal drugs are gaining popularity. These often contain powerful herbs like *Turmeric*, *Guduchi*, and *Kalmegh* that help with detoxification and promoting liver health. Such formulations provide a convenient way to incorporate Ayurveda into daily routines, providing a natural and effective solution for managing fatty liver. Consulting a qualified Ayurvedic practitioner before starting these remedies ensures their safe and proper use.

A HOLISTIC PATH TO RECOVERY: Ayurveda's approach to fatty liver focuses on the root cause of the condition rather than just its symptoms. Through detoxification of the liver, enhancement of bile production, and re-establishment of metabolic balance, Ayurveda brings about holistic health and well-being. Unlike conventional treatments that focus on medication alone, Ayurveda uses natural remedies with personalised dietary and lifestyle changes for sustainable health benefits. Ayurveda proves to be an excellent additional therapy for patients with liver conditions, helping them undergo a more comprehensive and efficient recovery process with the proper guidance of conventional medicine. — The author is the COO of Sheopal's



