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magazine



Yamuna grows toxic veggies?

BISWAJEET BANERJEE ■ LUCKNOW

The Yamuna River's water has become so polluted that it is no longer safe for drinking, bathing, or even irrigation, a shocking revelation made by the Central Water Commission's latest report, 'Status of Trace and Toxic Metals in Indian Rivers'. The study exposes dangerously high concentrations of heavy metals such as chromium, nickel, and lead, threatening to unleash a public health crisis in cities like Agra and Mathura. According to the report, water samples collected from three locations in Agra, including Poyia Ghat, and one in Mathura revealed alarming levels of these toxic metals. Agra and Mathura are now ranked among 187 worst-hit cities nationwide, where three or more hazardous metals were found in river water, earning them the grim distinction of having the "worst" water quality in the country. The data is damning. In Agra, nickel levels touched 28.87 micrograms per liter, chromium soared to a staggering 135.15 micrograms per liter, while lead reached 23.41 micrograms per liter—several times above permissible limits. In Mathura, chromium was recorded at 138.02 and 0.55 micrograms per liter at different sites, while nickel stood at 56.04 micrograms per liter. Experts have warned that prolonged exposure to such contamination can trigger



skin diseases, ulcers, lung damage, weakened immunity, heart conditions, kidney failure, liver malfunction, and even cancer. What makes the situation worse is that Agra's water treatment facilities are woefully unequipped to handle such a toxic onslaught. The city's two major water treatment plants, Jiwani Mandi and Sikandra Water Works, are still stuck with outdated technologies that can only test for basic parameters like turbidity, color, pH, TDS, hardness, coliform, and E. coli. Heavy metal detection is entirely outside their scope. Sikandra's 144 MLD MBBR plant, which supplies water to nearly half the city, lacks the necessary filtration systems to remove deadly metals. "We currently don't have equipment to detect heavy

metals in Yamuna water. Samples are tested at external labs occasionally, but there's no real-time monitoring," admitted Arvendra Rajput, General Manager of the Waterworks Department. The root cause of this toxicity is an unchecked flow of industrial waste into the Yamuna. Electroplating units, chemical factories, welding and refining plants, foundries, and even the automotive industry are said to be dumping hazardous waste into the river with impunity. Pollution from pesticides, detergents, and fertilizers has further aggravated the crisis. Environmentalists have slammed regulatory bodies for failing to enforce pollution norms. "If the Pollution Control Board claims to have stopped factories from discharging waste into the

Yamuna, how are such dangerous levels of heavy metals still present in the river? This report exposes the regulatory failures and calls for immediate corrective action," said Dr. Sanjay Kulshreshtha, an environmental expert. Echoing similar concerns, environmentalist Shachindra Sharma issued a stark warning: "The toxic state of the Yamuna River is a ticking time bomb for both public health and the environment. Strict regulations and immediate steps are essential to prevent irreversible damage." With the specter of a full-blown environmental disaster looming large, experts are urging swift government action before the Yamuna turns into an irreversible toxic nightmare.

Special SC Bench to hear validity of Places of Worship (Special Provisions) Act

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

With multiple petitions seeking surveys in mosques, claiming they were once temples, the Supreme Court has constituted a special Bench of three judges headed by Chief Justice of India Sanjiv Khanna to hear a batch of petitions challenging the constitutional validity of the Places of Worship (Special Provisions) Act, 1991 on December 12 at 3.30 pm. Justices Sanjay Kumar and KV Viswanathan are the part of the special Bench. The 1991 law prohibits conversion of any place of worship and provides for the maintenance of the religious character of any place of worship as it existed on August 15, 1947. The law, however, made only one exception -- dispute over the Ram Janmabhoomi-Babri Masjid in Ayodhya. The petitions filed by many Hindu organisations argue that the 1991 law created an "arbitrary and irrational retrospective cut-off date" of August 15, 1947, for maintaining the character of the places of worship or pilgrimage against encroachment done by "fundamentalist-barbaric invaders and law-breakers". The Union Government has yet to file its counter-affidavit in the matter, despite the several extension times given by the Supreme Court. On July 11, 2023, the Court asked the Union to file the counter by October 31, 2023. The SC is already seized about six petitions, including the PILs



File photo: Ranjan Dimri

filed by Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) leader Subramanian Swamy and lawyer Ashwini Upadhyay against certain provisions of the law. The management committee of, Anjuman Intezamia Masajid, Varanasi, in its plea filed through lawyer Fuzail Ahmad Ayyubi, filed an intervention application in the top court seeking dismissal of the pending pleas against the 1991 law on the ground that they were based on "rhetorical and communal claims" that could disrupt communal harmony and the rule of law. Upadhyay, in his PIL, sought setting aside of Sections 2, 3, 4 of the Places of Worship (Special Provisions) Act, 1991 on various grounds, including that these provisions took away the right of judicial remedy to reclaim a place of worship of any person or a religious group. While Swamy wanted the apex court to "read down" certain provisions to enable Hindus to stake claim over the

Gyanvapi Mosque in Varanasi and the Shahi Idgah Mosque in Mathura. The Managing Committee of the Gyanvapi Mosque has filed an intervention before the Supreme Court on Friday on pleas challenging the validity of the Places of Worship Act 1991. It said that the consequences of the declaration sought by the petitioner that the Act was unconstitutional "are bound to be drastic." The mosque committee further underscored the potential "drastic consequences" of overturning the law, citing incidents like the Sambhal case, where a recent survey order reportedly triggered widespread protests and resulted in six fatalities. The committee warned that repealing the Act could lead to a surge in disputes over religious sites across the country, prompting tensions in "every nook and corner" while threatening communal harmony.

Repatriate B'deshis staying illegally: Nizamuddin locals

RAJESH KUMAR ■ NEW DELHI

Amid the killing of Hindus in Bangladesh, a delegation of prominent Ulemas and residents of the Hazrat Nizamuddin Dargah and Basti Hazrat Nizamuddin area met with Lieutenant Governor Vinai Kumar Saxena on Saturday and demanded a special drive to identify and repatriate Bangladeshis staying illegally in the city. The delegation further demanded that Bangladeshi people should not be given employment by any establishment and those who have given employment to them should remove them. Meanwhile, sources in the Delhi police said there is not much information about the exact number of Bangladeshis in Delhi. In a statement, the Lieutenant Governor's office said, reiterating that they were worried about the situation of their Hindu brethren and other minorities in Bangladesh and worsening state-of-affairs in the country, the delegation demanded stringent action against Bangladesh nationals illegally staying in Delhi. In a letter submitted to Saxena, the delegation said they should not be provided rented accommodation or jobs in any establishment. According to the statement, the delegation demanded that illegal Bangladeshi infiltrators should not be given houses on rent and those houses who have already rented out their premises should evict them.

US denies backing anti-India agenda

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

The United States Embassy on Saturday rejected the Bharatiya Janata Party's allegations that organisations funded by the US State Department, and elements in the American "deep state" were behind attempts to destabilise India through targeted attacks on Prime Minister Narendra Modi, and business tycoon Gautam Adani. A spokesperson at the US embassy described the allegations as "disappointing" and asserted that the US government has been a champion of media freedom around the world.



Two murders in a day, AAP raises law and order issue

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

Two murders in different colonies rocked Delhi on Saturday, with the ruling Aam Aadmi Party (AAP) government blasting the Centre over the law and order situation in the National Capital. A 52-year-old businessman was shot dead by two unidentified assailants during his morning walk in Shahdara while a man was stabbed to death during a brawl in South Delhi's Govindpuri. The brazen killings and increased criminal activities have raised concerns about public safety and the efficacy of law enforcement in Delhi. Reacting to the two incidents, AAP national convener Arvind Kejriwal said that criminals have become "fearless" under the BJP rule. "After the firing in Vishwas Nagar, now news of stabbing is coming from Govindpuri. Under the BJP rule, criminals have become completely fearless," he wrote on X.

These latest crimes are sure to result in a major slugfest between the Centre and other political parties over the increasing lawlessness as the Delhi Police and law and order in the national Capital come under the jurisdiction of the Union Home Ministry. The AAP is going to make law and order an electoral issue when Delhi holds Assembly polls in February. In Shahdara, at least eight rounds were fired at the victim, identified as Sunil Jain, near the Yamuna Sports complex. Jain who ran a business of utensils, was returning home on a scooter, when two motorcycle-borne unidentified attackers opened fire at him in the Farsh Bazar area. Shahdara Deputy Commissioner of Police Prashant Gautam confirmed that the police received a PCR call at 8.36 am, and at least seven bullets were fired at Jain after which the accused fled the scene.

December 21 is World Meditation Day, UNGA adopts resolution co-sponsored by India



Representative photo

PTI ■ UNITED NATIONS

India co-sponsored a UN General Assembly draft resolution that was unanimously adopted to proclaim December 21 as World Meditation Day. India, including Liechtenstein, Sri Lanka, Nepal, Mexico and Andorra, was a member of the core group of countries that guided the unanimous adoption of the resolution titled 'World Meditation Day' in the 193-member UN General Assembly on Friday. "A day for comprehensive well-being and inner transformation! Glad that India along with other nations of the core group guided the unanimous adoption of the resolution on the declaration of December 21 as World Meditation Day @UN General Assembly today (Friday)," India's Permanent Representative to the UN Ambassador Parvathaneni Harish said in a post on X. He said India's leadership in

overall human wellbeing stems from "our civilisational dictum of #VasudhaivaKutumbakam - the whole world is one family". Harish noted that December 21 marks the Winter Solstice, which in Indian tradition is the beginning of "Uttarayana - an auspicious time of the year, especially for inner reflection" and meditation. It also falls exactly six months after the International Day of Yoga commemorated on June 21, which is the Summer Solstice. Recalling that India had in 2014 taken the lead in declaring June 21 as International Day of Yoga, Harish said that in a decade, it has become a global movement which has led to common people across the globe practising yoga and making it part of their daily lives. A press release by the Permanent Mission of India to the UN said India's instrumental role in the adoption of the resolution on

World Meditation Day was a "testimony to its firm commitment to overall human wellness and global leadership on this front in tune with our civilisational dictum of Vasudhaiva Kutumbakam". The declaration of World Meditation Day comes at a time when various regions of the globe witness conflicts and growing tensions, the mission said. It underlined that meditation is rooted in ancient practices and is an effective tool to achieve inner transformation and peace in the modern day. It is aimed at comprehensive human well-being, including mental, emotional, physical and spiritual dimensions. It prepares human beings to cope with several modern-day issues such as heightened anxiety and stress and brings about harmony between mind and body, humans and nature. "Modern science attests to the numerous benefits of meditation and its profound impact on our lives. It has been scientifically proven that regular meditation significantly reduces stress, and enhances cognitive and physical functions," the Indian mission added. The resolution, introduced by Liechtenstein, was also cosponsored by Bangladesh, Bulgaria, Burundi, the Dominican Republic, Iceland, Luxembourg, Mauritius, Monaco, Mongolia, Morocco, Portugal and Slovenia.



ISKCON centre in Bangladesh burnt down: Radharaman Das

PTI ■ KOLKATA

The International Society for Krishna Consciousness (ISKCON) on Saturday alleged that its centre in Dhaka district in neighbouring Bangladesh was burnt down earlier in the day. Iskcon Kolkata vice president Radharamn Das told PTI that the targeted attack on members of the community and members of the Vaishnavite order goes unabated as "vandals set ablaze idols inside the temple at the Namhatta property". He said in a post on X handle, "ISKCON Namhatta Centre burned down in Bangladesh. The deities of Sri Sri Laxmi Narayan and all items inside the temple were burned down completely. The centre is located in Dhaka. Early morning today, between 2-3 AM, miscreants set fire to the Shri Shri Radha Krishna Temple and the Shri Shri Mahabhagya Lakshmi Narayan Temple, which fall under the Hare Krishna Namhatta Sangha, located in

Dhour village, under the jurisdiction of Turag Police Station, Dhaka district. The fire was initiated by lifting the tin roof at the back of the temple and using petrol or octane. Address: H-02, R-05, Ward-54," he said in the post. Das claimed that attacks are continuing and despite the ISKCON drawing the attention of the interim government in Bangladesh, not much is being done by the police and administration to assuage their grievances and address their concern. "Iskcon India has expressed concern about the safety of Hindus in Bangladesh and urged its monks and followers from Bangladesh not to wear 'tilaks' and practice their faith discreetly. The targeted attacks continue," he had earlier said. The Iskcon Kolkata vice president also expressed concern over arrested Hindu community leader Chinmoy Krishna Das's safety following his denial of bail and the violent attacks.

Cuttack rly stations 2nd entry opened

PNS ■ BHUBANESWAR

Minister of Railways Ashwini Vaishnaw inaugurated the second entry of Cuttack railway station on Saturday, marking a significant milestone in the station's redevelopment under the Amrit Stations Scheme. This new entry, along with the East Side Station Building, is set to transform passenger travel, offering improved accessibility, safety



and convenience. The second entry is designed to provide seamless

movement for passengers arriving from the National Highway side, making the station

more accessible and ensuring hassle-free access. This development is part of an ambitious ₹303 crore project aimed at redeveloping the Cuttack railway station into a modern transportation hub with world-class amenities. Vaishnaw said the project would also contribute to socioeconomic growth by boosting trade and commerce, making the Cuttack railway station a key hub in the region.

'ASO jobs on sale' BJD protests CM Majhi's remark in Assembly

PNS ■ BHUBANESWAR

A day after Chief Minister Mohan Charan Majhi accused the previous Naveen Patnaik-led BJD government of selling Assistant Section Officer (ASO) jobs for Rs 30 lakh, the opposition BJD created a ruckus in the State Legislative Assembly as soon as the House assembled for the Question Hour session on Saturday. Targeting CM Majhi over

his statement, Opposition Chief Whip Pramila Mallik said, "The Chief Minister came up with a statement that jobs are being sold in the market for Rs 20-30 lakh. I want to ask whether he can tell me the shop and market where the jobs are on sale. If the CM is claiming that he knows the persons involved in the job scam, why no action has been taken against them even after six months have passed since the BJP came

to power in the State?" Mallik asked. "This is a conspiracy to tarnish the image of the previous BJD government," she added. Responding to Mallik's statement, BJP MLA Manas Dutta said, "CM Mohan Majhi is well aware of the irregularities done during the 24 years of ruling by the BJD as he is not new to the House. I request the Opposition to refrain themselves from cheap politics."

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Controversial Asish Singh appointed ITBP IG Prez lays stone for 3 railway lines

PNS ■ BHUBANESWAR
Controversial Odisha-cadre IPS officer Ashish Kumar Singh has been transferred and appointed as the Inspector General (IG) of Indo-Tibetan Border Police (ITBP).
According to a letter issued by the Union Home Ministry to Odisha Chief Secretary Manoj Kumar Ahuja, the IPS officer would remain in the post for a period of five years from the date of assumption of the charge or until further orders. "It is, therefore, re-



quested that Ashish Kumar Singh, IPS (OD:2004) may be relieved immediately to enable

him to take up his new assignment at the Centre," the letter stated. Singh was surrounded by controversies for allegedly acting as a BJD campaigner during the general elections 2024. He was accused of unduly interfering in the general election process in the State.
After the BJP approached the Election Commission of India (ECI) accusing Singh of unduly interfering in the general election process, he was removed from IG (Central Range) position and appointed as IG (CM Security), which was a non-election-re-

lated post.
The ECI, in June, also directed the Odisha Government to take appropriate action against the IPS officer for misrepresentation of facts about his health.
The directive from the ECI came after his health report was submitted by the Special Medical Board of AIIMS, Bhubaneswar following his health checkups.
Later, Singh joined duty on July 3. However, he was removed from IG (CM Security) position and posted as OSD, Home Department.

PNS ■ BARIPADA
President Droupadi Murmu on Saturday laid the foundation-stone for three new railway lines in Mayurbhanj district.
The event took place at the Bangiriposi railway station in Mayurbhanj on the fifth and final day of the President's five-day visit to Odisha.
The railway projects consist of three new lines-Bangiriposi-Gorumahisani, Buramara-Chakulia and Badampahar-Kendujargarh



routes. The new lines will connect the tribals-dominated districts of Mayurbhanj and Keonjhar to several other parts of Odisha. It is expected to be a major boost for industrial and tourism development.
The President also virtually inaugurated a Tribal Research and Development Centre in Rairangpur. She also laid a foundation-stone for upgradation of the Dandbose airport and for construction of a new block at the Rairangpur Sub-Divisional Hospital.

Vig arrests ACF after detecting multiple buildings



PNS ■ BHUBANESWAR
The Vigilance police on Saturday arrested Rebaty Raman Joshi, Assistant Conservator of Forest (ACF) of Hirakud Wild Life Division in Sambalpur, after huge assets were unearthed during raids on his properties on Friday.
Vigilance officials had conducted raids at nine places linked to Joshi in Bargarh and Sambalpur and unearthed disproportionate assets in his name.
During the raid, the Vigilance found Joshi in possession of disproportionate assets comprising three build-

Centurion University holds 12th Convocation

PNS ■ BHUBANESWAR
Celebrates excellence and inclusion
The Centurion University held its Twelfth Convocation at its Bhubaneswar campus on Saturday with 2,738 students from the 2024 batch and 138 students from previous batches receiving their degrees, besides 47 doctoral graduates.
Presided over by Odisha Governor and Visitor to the University Raghubar Das, the event was graced by chief guest Justice Sandeep Mehta, Judge, Supreme Court, and guest of honour Dr Sreedhar Panicker Somanath, Secretary and Chairman of ISRO.
Dr Somanath inspired the graduates to embrace innovative education and leverage cutting-edge



technology for societal benefit.
University Vice-Chancellor Dr Supriya Pattanayak commended the graduates for their hard work and perseverance. She emphasised Centurion University's commitment to sustainable development and its ongoing efforts to empower underrepresented communities through innovative education and vocational programmes.
As the university marked its 12th Convocation, the institution remained committed to fostering a culture of innovation, entrepreneurship and academic rigour. The ceremony also served as a reflection of the university's dedication to shaping the future leaders.
The convocation was also attended by Prof Mukti Kanta Mishra, President of the University, Professor D.N. Rao, the Vice President of the University; Prof Anita Patra, Registrar; and Dr Biswajit Mishra, Pro-Vice-Chancellor.
Notably, the attendees included guardians of the graduating students, adding a sense of familial support to the occasion.

'ASO jobs on sale' Aspirants demand CBI probe into CM's remark

PNS ■ BHUBANESWAR
A day after Chief Minister Mohan Charan Majhi accused the previous BJD government of selling Assistant Section Officer (ASO) posts for Rs 30 lakh, job aspirants here have demanded a CBI probe into the alleged scam. They said their futures have been pushed into the dark.
"Over 5.5 lakh job aspirants have been protesting since last two months demanding cancellation of RI, Amin recruitment examination conducted by OSSSC. This is a very sensitive matter. There are many candidates who study hard for 12-13 hours and rely on Rs-5 Aahaar meal to achieve their dreams. The aspirants should get justice," said a job aspirant.
Another aspirant said, "The CBI should investigate the job scam done during the previous BJD government."
Notably, CM Majhi on Friday accused the former BJD government of ruining the future of students.
"Irregularities in recruitment practices extended into the State's secretariat as well. Assistant Section Officer (ASO) jobs were sold at Rs 25 lakh to Rs 30 lakh each," Majhi had said.

11.8% rise in State excise revenue in 2024

PNS ■ BHUBANESWAR
Earning hits Rs 7,217 crore
Excise Minister Prithviraj Harichandan on Saturday informed the State Assembly that Odisha registered a steady rise in the sale of alcohol in the 2023-2024 financial year as compared to the previous year.
Analysing the figures, it was noted that the sale of foreign liquor increased by a whopping five lakh forty-one thousand litres in the State.
This was evident after the minister's statement that 5.83 crore litres of foreign liquor were sold in the 2022-23 financial year. However, the sale surged to 5.88 crore litres in 2023-24.
Similarly, beer sales surged from 12.9 crore litres in 2022-23 to 15.35 crore litres in 2023-24, an increase of 3.26 crore litres.
Besides, the demand for country liquor also increased from 84.37 lakh litres in 2022-23 to 98.43 lakh litres in the next financial year.
It is pertinent to note that these statistics were recorded before the new excise policy of the State Government came into effect on September 1, 2024. As per the new laws, no new 'ON' liquor shops will be opened in the current financial year.
In the same address, the Excise Minister also noted that excise revenue also saw a significant growth, reaching approximately Rs 7,217 crore in 2023-24 compared to Rs 6,455 crore in 2022-23 (11.8%).

Search for rented house Dentist duped by fraudster in city

PNS ■ BHUBANESWAR
A dentist in Bhubaneswar was allegedly duped of a large sum of money by a man posing as a broker while the former was in search for a rented accommodation.
The incident came to light after the victim, identified as Jyoti Prakash Sahu, lodged a complaint at the Infocity police station on Saturday.
Sahu alleged that the broker vanished after taking a large sum of money from him as an advance payment for a rented house.
Sahu, who originally hails from Jajpur, had come to Bhubaneswar for an internship at a private hospital. While looking for accommodation, he noticed a 'To Let' poster and subsequently contacted the number listed.
He then met the broker in Nandan Vihar and paid two months of advance rent for an apartment via UPI. However, after the payment, the broker neither provided the house nor returned the money, and the dentist realised that he had been duped.
Several such instances of people looking for rented accommodation being duped by fraudsters have been reported from the capital city.

Samanta gets 62nd doctorate

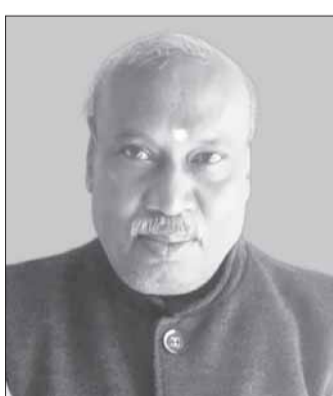
PNS ■ BHUBANESWAR
Eminent social worker, educationist and founder of KIIT & KISS Dr Achyuta Samanta was conferred with his 62nd honorary doctorate by the Poornima University, Jaipur, Rajasthan, at the university's 11th convocation ceremony on Saturday.
While conferring the degree, the university commended his exceptional efforts in transforming lives through education and community development.
Expressing his gratitude, Dr. Samanta said, "For the last



33 years, I have been working relentlessly for the betterment of society. This honorary doctorate will remain a cherished milestone for me."
Dr Samanta has now been awarded 62 honorary doctorates by prestigious universities and institutions worldwide in acknowledgment of his outstanding contributions.
The ceremony was graced by Lt Gen NS Raja Subramani, Vice-Chief of Army Staff, Indian Army, as chief guest.

Dual degree: Balancing academics, finances, future prospects

The National Education Policy (NEP) 2020 was approved by the Union Cabinet on July 29, 2020. This historic move replaced the 34-year-old National Policy on Education (NPE) of 1986, paving the way for a transformative change in India's education system. The NEP 2020 envisions a transformative overhaul of India's school and higher education systems, ushering in a new era of educational excellence and reform.
The NEP 2020 was formulated after an extensive consultation process that initiated by the Ministry of Human Resource Development (MHRD) in January 2015. The process drew in nearly 2 lakh suggestions from a staggering 2.5 lakh gram panchayats, 6,600 blocks, 6,000 Urban Local Bodies (ULBs) and 676 districts. This collaborative process was a testament to the government's commitment to crafting an education policy that truly reflects the needs and aspirations of the people. By engaging with a diverse range of stakeholders, the MHRD ensured that the NEP 2020 is a comprehensive and forward-looking document that addresses the complex challenges facing India's education system.
The NEP 2020 has introduced



BHASKAR NATH BISWAL

several groundbreaking reforms aimed at transforming India's education landscape. Key reforms include a new 5+3+3+4 curricular structure, increasing the Gross Enrolment Ratio in higher education to 50% by 2035 and introducing multiple entry and exit points with certification. Additionally, undergraduate education will be offered in three or four-year formats with multiple exit options, and an Academic Bank of Credits will facilitate credit transfer. Other reforms include promoting multidisciplinary education and research, establishing a National Research Foundation and Higher Education Commission of India and introducing Twinning, Joint

Degree and Dual Degree Programmes for international collaborations.
The University Grants Commission (UGC) released comprehensive guidelines for pursuing two simultaneous academic programmes in 2022, directing higher education institutions to promote this scheme for students' benefit. However, due to a lukewarm response, the UGC issued follow-up letters in 2023. Most recently, on November 20, 2024, the UGC urged institutions to establish supportive mechanisms to facilitate the implementation of the dual degree programme.
Pursuing two degrees simultaneously, either at the same university or at different universities with different modes is known as a dual degree or joint degree. This approach allows for a broader and more diverse educational experience.
The UGC has outlined guidelines for pursuing multiple academic programmes. Students can pursue two full-time programmes in physical mode, provided there's no overlap in class timings. Alternatively, they can pursue one full-time physical programme and one Open and Distance Learning (ODL)/Online programme or up to

two ODL/Online programmes simultaneously. However, ODL/Online programmes must be from UGC-recognised Higher Education Institutions (HEIs). These programmes will be governed by UGC regulations and respective statutory/professional councils. The guidelines are effective from the date of notification by the UGC with no retrospective benefits applicable.
The dual degree system in India offers numerous benefits, including enhanced employability as holders of two degrees have a competitive edge in the job market. Additionally, this system enables students to earn two degrees in a shorter duration, resulting in significant time and cost savings. Dual degree programmes also provide increased specialisation, allowing students to develop expertise in two fields and become more versatile. Furthermore, these programmes offer improved research opportunities, exposing students to diverse fields and fostering a more comprehensive understanding of their chosen subjects.
The Post Graduate Programme (PGP) in Management at IIM Bangalore offers students a unique opportunity to earn two degrees through its Dual Degree (DD)

Programme, in collaboration with prestigious international institutions, including Bocconi University, Italy, ESCP Business School, France, Groupe Kedge Business School, France, and Hitotsubashi University Business School, Japan. Selected students spend their first academic year at IIM Bangalore before transferring to the partner institution for their second year, and upon meeting the academic requirements set by both institutions, can earn two academic degrees, enhancing their global perspective and career prospects.
The University of Delhi has introduced a pioneering dual degree programme enabling students to pursue two concurrent courses within the institution. This innovative initiative allows eligible students to enroll in a regular degree programme offered by any college or department at DU while simultaneously pursuing a second degree through the Open and Distance Learning (ODL) mode at the School of Open Learning.
While the UGC's objective to introduce dual degree programmes is commendable, its implementation in India poses significant challenges. Many students, due to limited knowledge, economic constraints and time

limitations, prefer to pursue a single degree. Consequently, only a select few, who are academically brilliant and financially stable, are likely to opt for dual degrees. Further, the rigid requirements for submitting migration and transfer certificates can hinder smooth admission to the second degree programme. Similarly, managing the demands of two programmes, including timely submissions of assignments, attending classes and sitting for examinations, can be mentally taxing for students. Additionally, the disparity between dual degree and single degree holders may lead to social challenges in the future.
A significant hurdle in implementing the NEP 2020 is the widespread lack of awareness among students, teachers and administrators about the policy's provisions and goals. Despite the policy's well-intentioned recommendations for transforming India's education system, there is a glaring gap in understanding and awareness, particularly at the grassroots level.
The success of NEP 2020 hinges on the ability of all stakeholders to grasp its principles and objectives. Until then, implementing the policy's guidelines will remain a

daunting task.
To harness the full potential of the NEP 2020, it is imperative that institutions dedicate a specific time slot for discussions and awareness sessions. A suggested approach would be to allocate one hour each week for students to engage in discussions about the policy's reforms, choices, and opportunities. This would empower students to make informed decisions and capitalise on the available opportunities.
Similarly, a separate one-hour program should be conducted for teachers and administrators to deliberate on the implementation of the new guidelines. This platform would also serve as an opportunity to address any doubts or concerns among staff members, enabling them to effectively communicate the policy's provisions to students.
Ultimately, the success of NEP 2020 rests on the synergy and co-ordination among stakeholders, including the government. Fostering a clear understanding and co-operation among all parties involved is crucial to realising the policy's intended benefits.
(Dr Biswal is former Principal, Nabarangpur College; mobile: 9437125286, email: bhaskarnathbiswal@gmail.com)

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S Odisha forum's 'Bhubaneswar Chala' on Dec 10

With host of demands

PNS ■ BRAHMAPUR

The South Odisha Development Steering Committee convened a meeting in Brahmapur on Friday to finalise arrangements for the upcoming Bhubaneswar Chala Abhiyan slated for December 10.

Scheduled with the International Human Rights Day, the Bhubaneswar Chala Abhiyan aims to spotlight the rights and developmental aspirations of south Odisha.

Key demands include constructing new railway lines to connect districts such as Rayagada, Gajapati, Nuapada, Kandhamal, Koraput, Kalahandi, Boudh,

Malkangiri and Nabarangpur with major cities like Brahmapur, Bhubaneswar, Delhi, Mumbai, Kolkata, Bengaluru and Chennai.

The formation of a South Odisha Development Council is seen as critical for ensuring integrated and sustainable growth in the region. Additionally, the committee underscored the need for the creation of Greater Brahmapur by merging Brahmapur, Chhatrapur and Gopalpur with 26 adjoining panchayats under the Brahmapur Municipal Corporation (BeMC) to facilitate unified governance and development.

Another major demand is the immediate construction of a national airport in Brahmapur to improve connectivity and boost economic

progress.

The committee also highlighted the importance of protecting ecological landmarks such as Mahendragiri, Niyamgiri and Gandhamardan while pursuing infrastructural advancements.

Pragatisheela Utkal Samaj Convenor Saroj Ranjan Patnaik called for collective efforts to achieve justice and equality for south Odisha. "This movement is more than a protest; it is a fight for the dignity and rightful development of south Odisha," he remarked.

The rally is expected to draw a large gathering of activists, intellectuals, lawyers, and citizens. Organizations like the Dakshina Odisha Unnayana Milita

Kriyanusthan Committee, Pragatisila Utkal Samaj, Ganjam Jilla Bikas Manch, Ganjam District Chamber of Commerce, Odisha Development Forum, Forum for Ganjam, Gopalpur Nagarika Manch, Ama Sankruti Ama Parampara, Bahumukhi Samaj Mangal, Rayagada Jila Nagarik Samukhya, Stayee Bikasha Lakshya, Manab Adhikar Suraksha Manch, and Ghumusar Bikas Samiti have extended their full support to make the event a success.

The organisers have warned that if the 50 core demands are not addressed, they will intensify their agitation, including reviving calls for the creation of Ghumusara district and the revival of a separate "Kalinga State".

JRC Cuttack holds block-level orientation

PNS ■ CUTTACK

Under the guidance of District Education Officer (DEO) Santosh Kumar Rout and ADEO Sonamika Ray, a block-level Junior Red Cross orientation programme for blocks like Cuttack Sadar, CMC and Tangi Choudwar was organised at Ranihat Government High School, Cuttack.

92 JRC counsellors from different schools joined the programme and oriented on different topics like History of Red Cross, First Aid, Disaster Management and HIV AIDS etc. The main objective of the programme was to disseminate the Red Cross activities and strengthen JRC units at school level so that emergency services can be rendered at the



time of bare need.

Headmistress of the school Pallavi Mahajan presided over the meeting. Junior Red Cross Officer Laxman Swain demonstrated different life survival skills and also motivated counsellors for more activities at school level. JRCO Cuttack Partha Sarathi Mallick and JRC secretary coordinated.

Former JRCO Cuttack Mihir Kumar Parida, Paresh Kumar Malla, Ananta Khatei and former headmaster Sukanta Sarangi were present.

'Utilise 1,500-acre unused salt making land in Ganjam'

Ex-Dy Speaker Panda writes to Prez

PNS ■ B BRAHMAPUR

Senior BJP leader and former Assembly Deputy Speaker Rama Chandra Panda has urged the Central Government for fruitful use of about 1,500 acres of salt land lying unused between Ganjam and Huma by side of NH-16.

Notably, the land owned by the Salt Commissioner was used for salt production but for the last 15 years the salt production has been stopped. Consequently, about 2,000 salt workers have lost their livelihood. The vast land is strategically located between Brahmapur city, Gopalpur AD College and Chilika Naval Base.

In a letter to President Droupadi Murmu, Panda said that some salt workers being deprived of their livelihood

had approached the Orissa High Court with their grievance after which, the Salt Commissioner issued an order laying down guidelines for due handover of the land to individuals/interested parties or the State Government for its fruitful use.

He said the people of Ganjam have long been demanding for an airfield while the district's unemployment rate is high.

He requested Murmu to advise the Central government to establish a green air field in the area by acquiring another 500 acre private land available in the adjacent area or to establish a modern salt manufacturing unit or any appropriate industry under PPP mode to generate employment. He also reminded the President that he had also drawn the attention of the Prime Minister to the issue during his historic visit to Brahmapur on May 6.

Rs 1.23-crore fraud Odisha EOW arrests ex-PNB Manager from WB

PNS ■ BHUBANESWAR

The Odisha Economic Offences Wing (EOW) has arrested a former Punjab National Bank (PNB) Manager of Circle Office in Baleswar district in connection with a fraud of more than Rs 1.23 crore.

The accused, identified as Vinay Sonkar, was arrested from Burdwan in West Bengal and produced before the Court of Chief Judicial Magistrate, Purba Burdwan in West Bengal and then brought on transit remand and produced before the Designated Court under the OPID Act in Baleswar.

The EOW had earlier registered a case on the written report of Mrinal Kanti Mohanti, Chief Manager, Punjab Na-



tional Bank, Baleswar, wherein it has been alleged that Vinay Sonkar during his incumbency issued directions to the Branch Manager, Baleswar, for transfer of Rs 1.23 crore to unauthorised accounts in a most fraudulent manner.

Vinay Sonkar was posted as

Branch Manager, PNB, Baleswar Main Branch by fraudulently issuing letters for transfer of huge sum of money to the tune of more than Rs 1.23 crore from the account of the branch in different phases. Sonkar in order to facilitate the transfer of money from the aforesaid branch had made unauthorised transfer of the required amount from the CGTSME and TA.

Earlier, Sonkar while posted at Rishra Morepukur branch in Hooghly in West Bengal during 2022, had also committed similar type of fraud to the tune of Rs.80 lakh for which the bank authority removed him from service on March 24, 2024.

Further, investigation of the case was ongoing.

Man's body seized; probe on in Kakatpur

PNS ■ KAKATPUR

The body of a man was seized from his home in Patpur village of Kundhei Panchayat in Kakatpur under suspicious circumstances.

While his wife says the deceased committed suicide by hanging, the latter's family alleged it to be a case of murder. The police meanwhile after postmortem has launched an investigation into the case.

The deceased was identified as Ranjit Naik (Sola). He had

married Kabita Naik of Panimal 20 years ago. Later, they had two children, a son (17) and a daughter (16).

On December 5, Kavita informed the police that her husband had committed suicide by hanging. Ranjit was a driver of a private bus. However, Ranjit's relatives alleged that he was murdered and doubted the role of his wife Kavita and another person of the same village. Kakatpur police has registered a case and launched a probe.

In Sambalpur 'Godman' held for raping tribal woman

PNS ■ SAMBALPUR

Police on Friday arrested a self-proclaimed godman on the charge of raping a woman on the pretext of offering traditional medicine in the Raiakhol area of Sambalpur district.

The accused, identified as Prafulla Mahala, allegedly raped an unmarried tribal woman when she approached him seeking treatment for her health problems.

As per sources, the accused hailed from Bhalaipadar village under the Manamunda police station in Boudh dis-



trict and he had been presenting himself as a spiritual leader and living in a monastery at Baishnabhjoli under the Rairakhol police station for several years.

It is alleged that when the woman approached Mahala

for treatment, he administered some intoxicating substances to her and subsequently raped her.

Sources also added that despite the ordeal, the woman managed to escape from the spot. However, due to her de-

teriorating health condition, she was admitted to a hospital in Rairakhol.

Following her complaint, the Rairakhol police arrested the accused and launched an investigation.

"The victim is undergoing a medical examination while the accused is currently in our custody. The medical reports would help ascertain the truth behind the allegations," said Rairakhol SDPO Prashant Meher.

The SDPO further said the woman approached the godman because of a previous acquaintance.

sexually assaulted an 11-year-old girl. The mother of the victim lodged an FIR on March 18, 2024 that Mantu had sexually assaulted the girl when she was alone at a relative's place, said Special Public Prosecutor Pranab Kumar Panda.

"The court delivered the judgement after hearing 11 witnesses and 21 exhibits. The court further ordered a Rs 4-lakh compensation for the victim to be paid through the District Legal Services Authority (DLSA)," said Panda.

In Sundargarh Agitation over mines to Adani continues



Police forces deployed

PNS ■ SUNDARGARH

The agitation over the 25-year contract between the Steel Authority of India Limited (SAIL) and the Adani Group for an iron mine in Taldih locality under Koida block in Sundargarh district entered ninth day on Saturday, severely disrupting the transportation of minerals.

While many men and women from three affected panchayats have been staging

a demonstration in front of the mine gate of the mines for the last nine days over fulfillment of their 15-point charter of demands, it has yielded no results yet.

The demonstrators allege that promises made during public hearings for the welfare of the affected locals are not met. The demands include employment to 1,133 people affected by the mining activities and ensuring healthcare, education and transportation facilities for the three affected panchayats of Tensa, Chordhara and

Sasyakala. "We request the SAIL to fulfill our demands; otherwise we will continue our protest," said an agitator.

"Only 143 local people are engaged in mines. After getting 25 years contract, the Adani Group is showing no interest for the employment of locals," alleged a leader of the demonstrators.

As palpable tension continues in the region, three platoons of police forces have been deployed at the spot to avoid any kind of untoward incident.

In Baripada HSM rallies against atrocities on Hindus in B'desh



PNS ■ BARIKADA

The newly-floated Hindu Suraksha Manch on Thursday held a protest march here on the issue of continued incidents of loot, arson, rape and murder of innocent Hindus in Bangladesh. The protestors also demanded the immediate and unconditional release of ISKCON Sadhu Mahant Chinmay Krishna Das.

Hundreds of protestors that included members of VHP, RSS, BJP and several other socio-cultural and spiri-

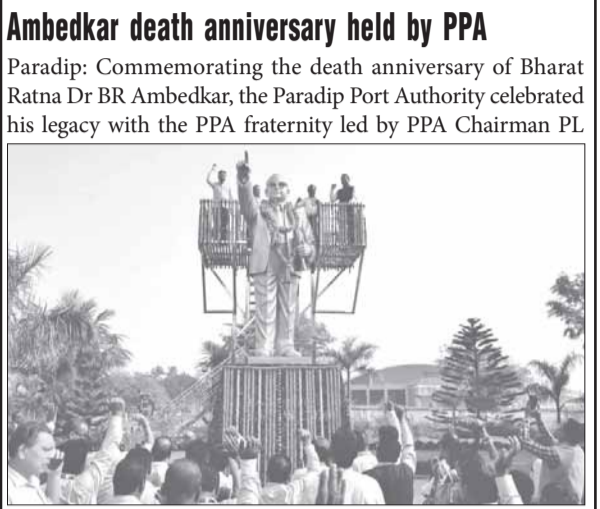
tual organisations began their march from the local Madhuban ground and reached the district collectorate, after covering the major streets and the market areas of the town. Upon their arrival in the collectorate premises, a meeting was held, where the speakers lambasted the Bangladesh government, blaming it for its fanatical approach and the continued atrocities on Hindus and other minorities in neighbouring country. Immediately after the meeting, a memorandum writ-

ten to the Prime Minister was handed over to Mayurbhanj ADM Bibhuti Bhusan Nayak. The memorandum urges for India's immediate diplomatic influence and intervention to stop forthwith the unfortunate happenings in the neighbouring country.

Remarkably, the protest rally and the meeting saw the participation of cross-section of society, including the Mayurbhanj Maharaja and the common public, youths and women, senior citizens and Bajrang Dal workers.

IN BRIEF

Excise Dy Commissioner gets 2-yr Cuttack: The Special Judge, Vigilance, Cuttack on Saturday convicted Swayambhu Prasad Mishra, former Deputy Commissioner of Excise, Northern Division, Sambalpur for possessing disproportionate assets (DA) and sentenced him to two years' rigorous imprisonment (RI). The court also directed Mishra to pay a fine of Rs 1 lakh. The Vigilance would now move the competent authority for stoppage of pension of Mishra following his conviction. Special Public Prosecutor Biren Kumar Panda of the Special Court conducted the case on behalf of the prosecution.



Haranadh offering floral tributes at the statue of Dr Ambedkar. They remembered how his pioneering vision united Indians in the spirit of equality and justice. The meeting was also attended by PPA Deputy Chairman Nilabhra Dasgupta, CME Susil Chandra Nahak and Gangadhar Sethy and Dhuma Chandra Tarai, general secretaries, PPT SC & ST Employees' Welfare Association.

Hemp plants destroyed in Boudh forests

Boudh: In a significant crackdown on illegal marijuana (ganja) cultivation, a joint operation by Police, Forest, and Revenue officials in Boudh successfully destroyed marijuana plants in various parts inside forests on November 24. Boudh police targeted Bramhanipali village jungle and destroyed 32,633 ganja plants in 32.67 decimal area, while Manamunda police carried out a similar operation in Pindhapadar jungle by destroying 51,162 cannabis plants. Boudh SP Nagaraj Devarakonda led the 'Green Clean Operation.'

In Baleswar Man gets 20-yr RI for raping minor girl

Special Judge POCSO Rajan Kumar Sutar on Friday convicted a person for raping a minor girl in Baleswar district and awarded him 20 years' rigorous imprisonment (RI). The court also directed the convict Mantu Singh of Balijhar village under the Berhampur (Nilgiri) police station in the district to pay a fine of Rs 3,000 and in default to undergo another two years' imprisonment.

In Baleswar Spurious tea factory unearthed during raid



Police on Friday busted a factory in Baleswar district that was allegedly engaged in the manufacturing and selling of spurious tea by fraudulently using the labels of several reputed brands from across the country. Several repeated complaints had flagged the matter including petitioners like Tata Tea, following which the Delhi High Court had ordered a crackdown. A special team in coordination with Baleswar police then raided the spurious tea packaging factory near Agrawala Chowk along NH-60 under Jaleswar police station in the district. Reports stated that during the operation, counterfeit tea branded with logos of reputed companies was found to be sold. The operation also revealed that local tea was purchased at low prices from the market and packaged with the logos of well-known brands. Sources also added that the factory was operating from a rented place under the guise of an auto parts shop, with a signboard displayed outside to keep it away from suspicion. However, counterfeit tea packaging activities were underway. Following the raid, authorities seized packaging machines and polythene bags printed with logos of various tea companies, mostly of well-known brands. Additionally, the unit also manufactured tea that carried labels with brand trademarks.

Government committed to make school education accessible: PM Modi

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE NEW DELHI

Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Saturday said his government has taken another big decision to make school education as accessible as possible with the Cabinet approving the opening of 85 new Kendriya Vidyalayas.



"Our government has taken another big decision to make school education as accessible as possible. Under this, 85 new Kendriya Vidyalayas will be opened across the country. While this step will benefit a large number of students, many new employment opportunities will also be created,"

Modi said in a social media post. The prime minister said the government is committed to providing school education to every section of the society in accordance with the National Education Policy.

extent," Modi said in another post in Hindi. The prime minister also said his government is determined to improve connectivity across the country. "In this direction, our government has approved the Rithala-Kundli corridor under the fourth phase of Delhi Metro in the National Capital Region. This will make commuting between Delhi and Haryana easier,"

establishment of the 85 new KV's and the expansion of one existing KV's is Rs 5,872.08 crore spread over a period of eight years from 2025-26. As of date, there are 1,256 functional Kendriya Vidyalayas, including three abroad - Moscow, Kathmandu and Tehran - and 13.56 lakh students are studying in these schools, an official statement said.

ED attaches fresh assets worth ₹388 Crore in Mahadev online betting case

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE NEW DELHI/RAIPUR



The Enforcement Directorate (ED) on Saturday said it has attached fresh assets worth about Rs 388 crore in its ongoing money laundering investigation into the Mahadev online betting case in which various high-ranking politicians and bureaucrats from Chhattisgarh are alleged to have been involved.

of Money Laundering Act (PMLA) on December 5 to attach these assets with a total value of Rs 387.99 crore, the Enforcement Directorate (ED) said. Tibrewal is being investigated by the agency in this case.

past that its probe into the Mahadev Online Betting (MOB) gaming and betting app has shown the involvement of various high-ranking politicians and bureaucrats from Chhattisgarh. The app's two main promoters, Sourabh Chandrakar and Ravi Uppal, hail from the state.

Rajnath Singh to visit Russia on Sunday, witness commissioning of Indian naval warship

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE NEW DELHI

Defence Minister Rajnath Singh will embark on a three-day trip to Russia on Sunday to witness the commissioning of a stealth warship into the Indian Navy and hold talks with his Russian counterpart Andrey Belousov on the expansion of bilateral cooperation in co-production of military hardware.

will accompany Singh to the commissioning ceremony. Defence Minister Singh will pay an official visit to the Russian Federation from December 8 to 10, an official readout said on Saturday.

industrial cooperation, the defence ministry said in the readout. "They will also exchange views on contemporary regional and global issues of mutual interest," it said.

Union Health Ministry determines compensation for patients with faulty Johnson & Johnson implants

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE NEW DELHI

Giving a ray of hope to patients who received faulty implants manufactured by DePuy International Limited (now Johnson & Johnson Private Limited) in India, the Union Health Ministry has reconstituted a central panel of experts to determine the compensation for affected individuals.

compensation as admissible and medical management for the affected patients who were implanted with faulty ASR hip implants," the notice read.

CISF sets up Quality Control Unit to enhance aviation security



PIONEER NEWS SERVICE NEW DELHI

CISF has set up a quality control unit to "enhance" the "operational efficiency" of its aviation security wing that provides a counter-terrorist cover to 68 civil airports of the country.

establishing "world-class" security procedures and technology for the airports that are used by lakhs of domestic and international passengers every day. The initiative is in compliance with the National Civil Aviation Security Quality Control Programme (NCASQCP) of 2024 issued by the Bureau of Civil Aviation Security (BCAS) and the Aircraft (Security) Rules of 2023, he said.

The unit will be part of CISF's Aviation Security Control Center (ASCC) - located in the national capital - which works as a centralised base for coordinating security at all 68 civil airports that are under the security ambit of the force.

Maharashtra opposition stages walkout over EVM manipulation allegations

T N RAGHUNATHA ■ MUMBAI

Still to recover from a shock-ign defeat in the recent Maharashtra Assembly polls, the Opposition Maha Vikas Aghadi (MVA) on Saturday staged a walkout from the Maharashtra Legislative Assembly during the first day of the oath-taking ceremony, alleging that the BJP-led MahaYuti registered a landslide victory in the Assembly polls because of the manipulation of Electronic Voting Machines (EVMs).

by the use of EVMs. This is not the mandate of the public, it is the mandate of EVM and the Election Commission of India," said Shiv Sena (UBT) MLA Aaditya Thackeray, who is the leader of the legislature party. Meanwhile, pro-term Speaker Kalidas Kolambkar - who is administering oath to the newly elected members - administered oath to a majority of 235 ruling MVA members on Saturday. He will complete the administration of oath-taking to rest of the new members on Sunday.

Health Minister JP Nadda launches 100-day TB elimination campaign

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE NEW DELHI/CHANDIGARH



Health Minister J P Nadda on Saturday said the rate of decline of tuberculosis incidence in India has doubled since 2015 and is ahead of the global average. Nadda said this while inaugurating a nationwide campaign in Haryana's Panchkula to reduce such cases and mortality due to it.

suffering from TB were isolated to prevent its spread. Since 1962, there have been many campaigns against tuberculosis, but in 2018 the prime minister put forth a vision to end TB much before the 2030 deadline of the Sustainable Development Goals.

He highlighted that the rate of tuberculosis incidence decline in India has doubled from 8.3 per cent in 2015 to 17.7 per cent now, which is much ahead of the global average. Deaths due to tuberculosis have also reduced significantly in India by 21.4 per cent in the last 10 years, he said.

The 100-day campaign underscores the Union government's commitment to achieving the goal of end-TB by addressing the challenges of tuberculosis notification and mortality in India under the National TB Elimination Programme of the Ministry of Health and Family Welfare.

73 complaints against obscene ads on private TV channels addressed: Govt tells Parliament



PIONEER NEWS SERVICE NEW DELHI

Seventy-three complaints have been received against obscene and vulgar advertisements on private television channels by the regulatory bodies over the past three years, the government has told parliament.

action is taken wherever violation of the Advertising Code is found by issuance of "Advisories, Warnings, 'Apology Scroll' Orders and Off-air orders." In reply to a separate question, Murugan said OTT platforms are required to adhere to the Code of Ethics under Part-III of the IT (Intermediary Guidelines and Digital Media Ethics Code) Rules, 2021.

Opposition Christian MPs urge Church body to support Muslims on Waqf issue

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

Christian community should take an in-principle stand on the Waqf Bill as it affects minority rights enshrined in the Constitution, Christian MPs are learnt to have told the Catholic Bishops' Conference of India (CBCI) at a meeting in the national capital.

The meeting was attended by around 20 MPs, most of them from opposition parties. TMC's parliamentary party leader Derek O'Brien, Congress MPs Hibi Eden, Dean Kuriaokse, Anto Antony, and CPI (M) MP John Brittas were among the MPs who attended the meeting, while union Minister of State George Kurian joined later, a source who was present at the meeting told PTI.

supporting and protecting the community and its rights, increasing attacks and threats against minorities, especially Christians, and misuse of FCRA to target Christian institutions. The source said a senior opposition MP suggested that the community leadership should also highlight "positive points, the important role being played by the community today" and "not just be only reactive to negative news."

and the public that three out of four students in Christian institutions, were in fact from different communities. One MP said that there is a need to put a stop to "photo ops," and stressed that the Christian leadership should take a stand to "call out those who are not protecting the Constitution." Another MP who attended the meeting confirmed that multiple opposition MPs raised strong objections to certain provisions of the Waqf (Amendment) Bill, now under the consideration of

the Joint Parliamentary Committee (JPC). The Bill, among other things, changes the composition of the Central Waqf Council and Waqf Boards to include non-Muslim members. Another MP from Kerala told PTI that the issue of seats for Anglo Indians (all Christians) in Lok Sabha and 10 state assemblies being abolished was also raised, and Foreign Contribution Regulation Act (FCRA) licences of some Christian organisations being targeted

and cancelled in recent years was also brought up. "The meeting was held in a cordial atmosphere but the MPs sharply criticised the church leadership's handling of its relationship with the government since 2014. One MP even suggested it was getting 'transactional', a leader who attended the meeting told PTI. By the time, Kurien, a BJP leader and Union minister, came most opposition MPs were done speaking, the source said. Two BJP MPs, both Christians, were absent.

President Murmu lays foundation for six projects in Odisha

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■
BANGRIPOSI (ODISHA)

President Droupadi Murmu on Saturday laid the foundation for six projects in Odisha, including three new railway lines, worth a total of Rs 6,400 crore. Bangriposi-Goramahisani, Buramara-Chakulia and Badampahar-Keonjhar are the railway lines for which the foundation stones were laid by Murmu in the presence of Odisha Chief Minister Mohan Charan Majhi, Railway Minister Ashwini Vaishnav and Union Tribal Affairs Minister Jual Oram, among others. The President also virtually laid the foundation for three other projects in Rairangpur - Tribal Research and Development Centre,



Dandbose Airport and a sub-divisional hospital. Addressing a gathering on the occasion, the President expressed confidence that the rail projects and the airport would boost transportation, commerce, and business in the region.

The new 100-bed hospital would provide better health facilities to the locals, she said. Noting that Odisha is getting benefitted from the 'Purvodaya' vision of the central government, the President said development of the entire region is getting accelerated through various welfare schemes on education, skill development, health, tourism and transportation. Murmu said that Eklavya Model Residential Schools are being established for tribal children. She said

more than 100 new Eklavya Model Residential Schools are being established in Odisha, including 23 in Mayurbhanj district. She expressed confidence that after getting education from these schools, tribal children would be able to contribute towards the progress of society and the country. According to railway sources, the 82-km Badampahar-Kendujharghar line will pass through Mayurbhanj and Keonjhar districts. The project will be developed at an estimated cost of Rs 2,106 crore. The 86-km-long Bangriposi-Goramahisani line will be built at an expenditure of Rs 2,549 crore. It will facilitate the movement of passengers and freight and contribute to

the economic growth of Mayurbhanj district, they said. Similarly, the 60-km Buramara-Chakulia line, connecting Mayurbhanj district with Jharkhand's East Singhbhum district, will be built at a cost of Rs 1,639 crore. The new rail line will improve access between these mineral-rich areas and boost the local economy by enhancing the transportation of goods, particularly for the industrial sector. Murmu on Saturday ended her five-day tour of Odisha during which she attended a series of events including the Indian Navy Day celebration at Blue Flag Beach in Puri on December 4 and OUART's 40th convocation in Bhubaneswar on December 5.

Broken protocol, undertaken several tours of native Mayurbhanj: Murmu

PNS ■ ODISHA

President Droupadi Murmu said she has broken the protocol and undertaken several tours of Odisha and her native Mayurbhanj district in order to speed up development work. "Generally, there is no provision of visiting own state and district as the President. However, I broke the protocol and came down here frequently because of the difficulties faced by the people of this area. Keeping in view the requirements of this area, I do whatever is possible



on my part," Murmu said. Noting that the love and affection of the people have drawn her to the place, Murmu said she always remains concerned about the development of her native place despite being busy with important work.

Assam CM Himanta expands his Cabinet

PNS ■ GUWAHATI

Assam Chief Minister Himanta Biswa Sarma on Saturday expanded his cabinet with four BJP MLAs sworn in as ministers. Governor Laxman Prasad Acharya administered the oath of office to the four new ministers - Prasanta Phookan, Kaushik Rai, Krishnendu Paul, and Rupesh Goala at the Srimanta Sankardeva Kalakshetra here. The chief minister and members of his cabinet were present on the occasion.



Phukan is a four-time MLA from Dibrugarh, Paul a two-time MLA from Patharkandi while Rai and Goala are first-time MLAs from Lakhimpur and Doom Dooma respectively. Phukan and Goala represent the Upper Assam tea districts of Dibrugarh and Tinsukia respectively while Paul and Rai are from the two Barak Valley districts of Sribhumi (formerly Karimganj) and

for Goala with both representing the tea tribe community. Kishan has since been appointed as the Chairman of the Assam Food and Civil Supplies department. Parimal Suklabaidya had resigned from the Himanta Biswa Sarma cabinet after he was elected to the Lok Sabha from Silchar (SC) constituency earlier this year. All the new ministers thanked the chief minister for including them in his ministry. They also pledged to serve the people and work

for the development of the state. The ministers are yet to be allocated their portfolios with the chief minister likely to reshuffle and redistribute the departments among the 19 ministers by Saturday evening. The newly sworn-in ministers will attend their first cabinet meeting later tonight. Sarma heads the NDA alliance government in the state with two Asom Gana Parishad (AGP) ministers Atul Bora and Keshav Mahanta and United Peoples' Party, Liberal (UPPL) U G Brahma members of his cabinet. The ruling NDA has 84 members in the 126-member state assembly. The chief minister and 14 other ministers were sworn in on May 10, 2021. Sarma expanded his ministry on June 9, 2022, with the induction of two BJP legislators Nandita Garlosa and Jayanta Malla Baruah as ministers.

Rock bolt technology successfully treating active landslide zones: BRO

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■
UTTARKASHI

Border Roads Organisation (BRO) on Saturday said the rock bolt technology is successfully treating active landslide zones in the hilly areas of Uttarakhand where landslides occur almost regularly in the hill areas of the State, especially during the monsoon season, blocking roads and causing inconvenience to Chardham pilgrims, and often claiming lives. Active landslide zones on Gangotri and Yamunotri highways have been a major issue for the Chardham pilgrims as well as the local people for years, the official said. The Australian rock bolt technology involves removing loose landslide debris by soil nailing in soil and rock bolting in bedrock, BRO Commander Vivek Srivastava said. It is being used at present in



the treatment of active landslide zones in Raturisera and Bandarkot on Gangotri highway in Uttarkashi district, he said. The technology was used earlier too in the treatment of Nalupani and Chungi Badethi landslide zones which had long been active along the highway and the good results at the two points encouraged authorities to apply it elsewhere too, he said. The technology is 90 per cent effective in preventing landslides, the BRO official

said. In the widening work done under the Chardham road project, landslide zones active for years have been treated successfully with this technology. The same technique is now being used in Raturisera and Bandarkot, he said. The official said that Rs 19.8 crore is being spent on this work in Raturisera and Rs 9.3 crore in Bandarkot. The target is to complete landslide treatment work at both places using the technology by March next year, he said.

Eight-fold rise in per capita income needs to be achieved to realise goal of Viksit Bharat by 2047: Dhankhar

PNS ■ PATNA/MOTIHARI

Vice President Jagdeep Dhankhar on Saturday asserted that an eight-fold rise in per capita income needs to be achieved to realise the goal of "Viksit Bharat" (developed India) by the year 2047. Addressing the second convocation ceremony of Mahatma Gandhi Central University in Bihar's Motihari, Dhankhar also expressed hope that the country, which was currently the "fifth largest economy" in the world, would "soon leave Germany and Japan behind". Lavishing praise on the Narendra Modi government at the Centre, without taking any names, Dhankhar said, "The last 10 years have been marked by eradication of a culture of corruption and middlemen seem to have been eliminated. The world looks at us with surprise as we keep marching towards getting our due place on the global stage. We are the fifth largest economy as of now but



things are looking up and soon we will leave Germany and Japan behind." He was speaking in presence of Bihar Governor Rajendra Arlekar and local MP and former union minister Radha Mohan Singh. Dhankhar also pointed out that the nation needs to cover a lot of ground if the goal of "Viksit Bharat" is realized by the time 100 years of Independence is celebrated in 2047. "I am not likely to live to see

that day", said the 74-year-old Vice President, adding: "The onus is on young people like the students present here. We must strive to raise the per capita income to eight times of what it is today. This would require our youth to make sacrifices." Dhankhar also spoke of the progress made in Bihar under the Chief Ministership of Nitish Kumar, who was not present on the occasion. Without mentioning the JD(U) supremo by name, the

SP quits MVA alliance in Maharashtra

T N RAGHUNATHA ■
MUMBAI

In an expected fallout of the United Opposition front's debacle in the recent Maharashtra Assembly polls, the Samajwadi Party (SP) walks out of the Congress-led Maha Vikas Aghadi (MVA) citing many reasons, including lack of coordination among the coalition partners on seat-sharing issues and the Uddhav Thackeray-led Shiv Sena (UBT)'s stand on the Babri Masjid demolition. Announcing his party's decision to quit the MVA, State SP President Abu Azmi said that there was absolutely no co-ordination between his party and the MVA constituents on the seat-sharing process and there were also differences on various issues during the electioneering. "There was absolutely no co-ordination between my party and the main MVA constituents during the seat-sharing process as well as campaigning... They never called us for meetings or joint



rallies. They used to avoid sharing each other's campaign platforms and all this resulted in the MVA parties' massive debacle in the Assembly polls," Azmi said. The SP, which had sought 12 seats from the MVA, contested six seats in the State Assembly polls and bagged two. While Azmi himself won from Mankhurd-Shivajinagar (Mumbai), Rais Kasam Shaikh romped home Bhiwand East in Thane district. "Shiv Sena (UBT) chief Uddhav Thackeray, at an

internal meeting, told party colleagues and workers to aggressively pursue the Hindutva agenda (ahead of the civic polls)." On December 6, the party posted a message on social media in favour of Babri mosque demolition. How can this be tolerated?," Azmi asked. One of the main reasons for the SP's exit from the MVA is a post put out on micro-blogging site "X" by Uddhav's personal assistant and MLC Milind Narvekar, hailing the demolition of the Babri Masjid. The post carried photographs of late Shiv Sena founder Balasaheb Thackeray, former Maharashtra Chief Minister and MLC Uddhav Thackeray and his son Aadiya Thackeray, who is an MLC from Worli in Mumbai. "Yesterday, (Dec. 6), a SS (UBT) leader posted a social media message claiming credit for the (undivided) party on the razing of the Babri Mosque demolition (1993). How can we tolerate this?," Azmi asked. "Such posts hurt our sentiments and go against the values of unity and respect for all communities. We are here to promote harmony, not divide people," Azmi said. Azmi made it clear that the SP stood for secular values, saving democracy and the Constitution, and hence it would not side with any party adopting such a communal approach. Asked if his party's decision to quit the MVA would affect the status of the SP national party chief Akhilesh Yadav vis-à-vis his equations with INDIA block, Azmi was non-committal.

Mayawati hits out at SP, Congress for 'exploiting' Sambhal violence for political gain

BISWAJEET BANERJEE ■
LUCKNOW

Chief Mayawati on Saturday lashed out at the opposition parties, accusing the Samajwadi Party (SP) and Congress of using the recent violence in Sambhal for political gains. She alleged that instead of raising public welfare issues in Parliament, the opposition was focused on manipulating Muslim voters by creating divisions within the community. Speaking at a press conference in Lucknow, Mayawati claimed, "The SP and Congress are not concerned about national issues. They are using the Sambhal violence as a political tool to serve their vested interests. They are even trying to create a divide between Turk and non-Turk Muslims." She urged the



Muslim community to be wary of such political tactics. The BSP supremo also took aim at Dalit MPs from various political parties, accusing them of remaining silent on issues concerning caste oppression to please their political bosses. She highlighted the plight of Hindu minorities, especially Dalits, in Bangladesh, alleging that they face widespread atrocities. "Despite being elected by the Dalit community, many MPs stay quiet on such issues. Whether it is the oppression of Dalits in

India or the persecution of Hindu minorities in Bangladesh, they have failed to raise their voices," she said. Mayawati linked the historical oppression of Dalits to what she called Congress's "casteist conspiracy" during India's Partition. She alleged that Hindu-majority areas like Jessore and Khulna, from where Dr. B.R. Ambedkar was elected to the Constituent Assembly, were deliberately handed over to Pakistan, forcing Ambedkar to resign and return to India. Demanding urgent action, Mayawati urged the BJP-led central government to facilitate the return of persecuted Dalits and Hindus from Bangladesh. She warned that if the government failed to do, the BSP would see no difference between the BJP and Congress on the issue of Dalit welfare. Adityanath emphasised

If country is secure, 'religion is safe': Yogi

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■
VARANASI

Uttar Pradesh Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath on Saturday said if the country is secure, then "religion is safe" which will ensure that "we also are safe". He stressed that "Bharatiyata (Indianness) and Sanatan have the power to unite everyone". Adityanath was speaking at the centenary celebration of the establishment of Vihangam Yog Sant Samaj held at Swarved Mahamandir Dham, the UP government said in a statement. Praising the contributions of Sadhguru Sadafal Dev Maharaj, who founded the Vihangam Yog Sant Samaj, the chief minister said he told the world that a true yogi cannot sit idle looking at the conditions of the country and society. Adityanath emphasised



Prime Minister Narendra Modi's belief that all work should be done while prioritising the country's interest and urged everyone to rise above individual, societal, sectarian and religious boundaries. "If the country is safe then religion is also safe. If religion is safe then we are also safe," Adityanath said while advocating actions that conform with India's Vedic-

spiritual tradition and the values of Sanatan Dharma. The chief minister also spoke about the development works undertaken in Prime Minister Modi's parliamentary constituency Varanasi in the last 10 years. "Be it health or education, Kashi is shining today in various aspects of development and along with Kashi, the entire UP is moving ahead under the guidance of PM Modi. Now

we are seeing the vision of 'Ek Bharat-Shreshtha Bharat', where there is development as well as respect for heritage," he said. "If we get good leadership, the results are pleasant. Today, there is respect for heritage and also a big campaign for public welfare through development," he said. He credited Modi for taking the tradition of Yoga to the global stage. "People in more than 175 countries are associated with Yoga. Whenever Yoga will be discussed, it will inspire a feeling of reverence towards the sages of India in the minds of citizens across the world," Adityanath said. He noted that due to the prime minister's efforts, UNESCO recognised Maha Kumbh as an intangible cultural heritage of humanity in 2017. The UP chief minister paid tributes to Sadhguru Sadafal Dev Maharaj, who was born in a small village in Ballia in 1888 and founded the Vihangam Yog Sant Samaj in 1924. "Vihangam Yog Sant Samaj is determined to connect crores of devotees through its efforts by building a divine and grand temple through Swarved Mahamandir Trust, as well as to take India's yoga tradition and spiritual flow to the people," he said. "Maharaj took the spiritual campaign forward and also stated that a true yogi-saint cannot sit idle looking at the conditions of the country and society. "When the country was bound by the shackles of slavery, Sadhguru Sadafal Dev Ji Maharaj, with his spiritual practice, participated in the freedom movement to free the country from foreign slavery and associated himself with the call of the country's first freedom struggle from Barrackpore," he said.



FEATHERS OF COUTURE

Fashion is a language, a story told through fabric and beads, a canvas that speaks of cultures and dreams. When Suneet Varma takes the stage, the fabric transforms into poetry. His latest collection, *Quetzalli*, unveiled in collaboration with PATRÓN Tequila, is a masterpiece that bridges continents, blending the fiery soul of Mexico with the intricate elegance of Indian couture. The evening sparkled with sophistication at The Upper House by Tivoli as Varma's designs graced the runway. Each model brought the audience into a world where tradition and innovation existed side by side. The inspiration? A journey to the legendary Hacienda PATRÓN in Jalisco, Mexico, where tequila is an art form in itself. *Quetzalli* emerged not as a tribute to tequila but to the shared spirit of meticulous craftsmanship that defines both cultures.

The collection redefined the colour black, giving it depth, allure and richness. Sheer black gowns adorned with intricate lacework were delicately touched with hints of gold that shimmered under the lights, like secrets waiting to be discovered. These weren't just clothes; they were symbols of confidence, elegance, and a celebration of womanhood. Accessories played a crucial role, with statement necklaces gleaming in antique gold and belts cinching the waistlines of capes and gowns, adding structure to the delicate. Ornate headpieces gave the models an almost regal aura, transforming the runway into a scene of modern-day queens.

Suneet Varma's artistry lies in storytelling. In *Quetzalli*, lace represented Mexico's ancient traditions, while embroidery techniques showcased India's unparalleled craftsmanship. The

Suneet Varma's *Quetzalli* collection fuses Mexican craftsmanship with Indian couture, celebrating elegance, heritage and artistry, says **SAKSHI PRIYA**



silhouettes flowed effortlessly, structured yet soft, tailored yet fluid. From tiered skirts with voluminous ruffles reminiscent of traditional Mexican dresses to contemporary separates designed for the modern woman, the collection was versatile, sensual and unmistakably Suneet. Silver, drawing inspiration from PATRÓN's meticulous tequila-making process, starting with hand-harvested Weber Blue Agave and crafting exceptional varieties like Silver, Reposado, Añejo and the ultra-premium El Cielo, was used to add a touch of refinement and sophistication to the pieces. Sheer capes adorned with metallic motifs floated behind models, reflecting the mystical energy of the Quetzal bird, after which the collection is named.

The collection also celebrated the art of working with feathers in Mexico, known as plumeria. This technique, highly valued in pre-Hispanic and colonial Mexico, was reflected in the dramatic feather details seen on some pieces in the collection. Suneet Varma's use of this ancient art form was a

reflection of his respect for both Mexican heritage and the craftsmanship behind each element of his designs. The feather details were used not just as decoration but as an integral part of the concept, evoking the elegance and mysticism of Mexico's rich history.

Varma's designs aren't limited by time or trends, they are experiences. *Quetzalli* is for the woman who wants to walk into a room and own it. Whether it's an evening gala, an intimate dinner, or a rooftop soiree, these pieces make the wearer the focus without needing to speak. The grand finale brought the audience to its feet as the designer himself took a bow amidst applause. Dressed impeccably, Suneet Varma acknowledged the partnership that made *Quetzalli* possible. It wasn't just fashion; it was a celebration of how heritage can evolve and adapt without losing its essence.

Fashion is more than just clothes, it's a way of life. *Quetzalli* captures this ethos, blending two cultures while staying true to artistry. It's about reimagining tradition, embracing innovation, and celebrating the craftspeople who bring every stitch and bead to life. As the night ended, the buzz in the air was filled with admiration for Varma's genius and the journey of *Quetzalli*. In the hands of Suneet Varma, fabric becomes a storyteller and *Quetzalli* tells a tale that stays with you long after the runway lights dim. For now, it's not just a collection; it's a legacy waiting to be adorned.

Suneet Varma says, "This collaboration with PATRÓN Tequila brings together our shared passion for artistry and heritage. The *Quetzalli* collection reflects a fusion of refined couture and Mexico's rich culture, honoring both PATRÓN's craftsmanship and my vision for elegance."

j'Viva la moda, viva la herencia!
PHOTOS: PANKAJ KUMAR

THE TALE OF LOVE, OBSESSION AND REVENGE RETURNS

After nearly three years, *Yeh Kaali Kaali Ankhein* makes its much-anticipated return to Netflix with Season 2. Directed by Sidharth Sengupta, the web series brings back its gripping narrative style while aiming to keep the audience engaged with a fresh dose of action. The cast features Tahir Raj Bhasin, Shweta Tripathi, and Anchal Singh in the lead roles, supported by notable performances from Saurabh Shukla, Surya Sharma, and Arunoday Singh.

The second season picks up right where the first left off, resuming the suspenseful narrative with the abduction of Purva, played by Anchal Singh. The creators have consciously tried to maintain the series' intensity, diving straight into the action from the first episode. This decision sets a fast-paced tone that remains consistent throughout the season.

While the relentless action sequences and tightly woven plot aim to fascinate the audience, the series struggles to break new ground. While effective in parts, the continuous focus on action begins to feel repetitive, causing the narrative to lose the unique spark that made the first season stand out. Despite the attempt to

maintain the thrill, the over-reliance on similar storytelling techniques limits its ability to surprise and entertain viewers fully.

The cast of *Yeh Kaali Kaali Ankhein* Season 2 brings their characters to life with relentless dedication, providing the primary reason for viewers to stay invested in the series. Arunoday Singh



Yeh Kaali Kaali Ankhein Season 2 fascinates with its cast and narrative but falls short of delivering the unpredictability that thriller fans crave, writes **ABHI SINGHAL**



delivers a compelling performance as the contract killer Aditya Hafeez, embodying a skilled kidnapper's intense and menacing aura with his brooding demeanor and serious expressions. His portrayal is both convincing and impactful, adding a layer of depth

to the narrative. Tahir Raj Bhasin once again shines as Vikrant Singh Chauhan, the tormented protagonist at the heart of the story. Bhasin's performance is an example of his remarkable acting prowess, as he portrays Vikrant's inner turmoil and

determination with precision. His serious and gritty portrayal further solidifies his reputation as a versatile actor capable of commanding attention with every scene. Shweta Tripathi returns as Sikha, the love interest of Vikrant,



although her role is noticeably reduced in this season. Despite her limited screen time, Tripathi ensures that her presence is felt in all the key moments. The character's development takes an unexpected turn as Sikha finds herself married to a new police officer, adding an intriguing layer to the storyline. A notable new addition to the cast is Gurmeet Choudhary, whose performance as Guru, a close friend of Purva, makes an immediate impression. Choudhary makes out a distinctive space for himself in the series, bringing a fresh dynamic to the plot. His character's arrival stirs up

the narrative, introducing a sense of unpredictability and piquing the audience's curiosity about the unfolding events. While the show's thrilling plot and dramatic twists may resonate with a general audience, it may fall short of expectations for ardent crime and thriller enthusiasts. The plot, while engaging in parts, tends to feel stretched as it goes into repetitive themes, leaving the story feeling somewhat incomplete. Despite these shortcomings, the series manages to sustain interest, largely due to its talented cast and their performances.

RATING: 3/5

the pioneer agenda

"It is in literature that the concrete outlook of humanity receives its expression"
— Alfred North Whitehead



It is a paradox of sorts: while people's reading habits are at an all-time low, there is a flood of writers producing content on virtually every subject. From fiction and non-fiction to cookbooks and travelogues, the book market is booming like never before. The Indian publishing industry was valued at approximately INR 500 billion in 2019, with projections indicating growth to INR 800 billion by 2024. This sector significantly contributes to India's economic development, fostering learning, education, and employment for over 1.2 million people.

Recent reports suggest that the industry is expanding at a compound annual growth rate (CAGR) of around 19.4%, with some estimates as high as 25%. This growth is particularly notable in the printbook market, which is anticipated to see substantial increases in value. Educational books dominate the sector, while the increasing adoption of eBooks and digital content is transforming the industry. Despite a decline in print publishing revenues due to shifting consumer preferences towards online books, magazines, and newspapers, the combined revenue from print and digital publishing continues to grow, illustrating that publishing as a whole is not in decline.

India has approximately 19,000 publishers. The publishing industry in India is vibrant but scattered, with no single association having more than 1,000 members. Evaluating publishers can be challenging, as it involves considering factors such as market size, reputation, genres covered, and influence on the literary landscape. Among the prominent names in Indian publishing, Penguin Random House India stands out as a major player, recognised for its diverse portfolio, literary excellence, and global reach. It publishes celebrated authors such as Arundhati Roy and Salman Rushdie, establishing itself as a giant in the industry.

HarperCollins India, established in 1992, is another notable publisher with a strong presence across genres, including fiction, self-help, and business books. It is home to renowned authors like Amitav Ghosh, Chetan Bhagat, and Paulo Coelho. Rupa Publications, one of India's oldest and most respected publishers, specialises in Indian fiction, biographies, and academic works, with imprints such as Rupa, Oak, and Fingerprint.

Bloomsbury India launched in 2002, has also made a mark in the industry with its high-quality literary fiction, non-fiction, children's books, and academic texts. Together, these publishers play a vital role in shaping India's literary landscape and catering to the evolving preferences of readers. But when it comes to writers it is another story. Given the size of the country, even a small percentage of people trying their hand in writing becomes large in absolute terms. However, not all are equally talented or taught. Of course, creativity cannot be taught in school, but style and form can be. With very few institutions that hone the craft of writing the writing suffers and only a handful of writers stand out in the ocean of mediocrity.

Of course, Books cannot be strictly categorised as good or bad; they are simply those you cherish and those you don't. Some books resonate deeply, while others leave you wondering who they were written for. Even so, labelling a book as 'bad' feels unfair; what one dislikes might be perfect for someone with different tastes or standards. But having said that it is also true some books leave a bad taste in the mouth for almost all.

Though the number of writers is swelling, which is indeed a good thing that cannot be said about the quality of books written by them. There is a

Where are the bold, thoughtful voices that once defined Indian literature? As commercial pressures dominate, the true art of writing seems increasingly overshadowed, writes
GYANESHWAR DAYAL

The write thing!

As they say, it is easy to write a book but difficult to make a person read it. To make it readable it needs to be worth the time and effort of the reader – give him or her some insights, information or perspective he didn't have or make him laugh or cry if that is intended. Translating thoughts into words is an art that deserves to be approached with seriousness. To do so, one must often seclude themselves, almost in a spiritual sense, and dedicate their focus to the act of writing. Writing retreats are an excellent opportunity to refine your skills, learn the ropes, and gain insight into the publishing industry. Mentors, often editors from the industry, along with established writers, offer valuable tips and guidance.

In a world increasingly characterised by distractions, writing retreats have emerged as sanctuaries where budding writers can focus, grow, and thrive. These retreats offer a unique blend of solitude, community, and professional guidance, making them appealing to anyone passionate about honing their craft. Writing retreats often take place in idyllic settings, mountains, beaches, countryside estates, away from the hustle of daily life. This change of scenery not only inspires creativity but also provides the peace needed to concentrate on storytelling. Many retreats combine workshops, one-on-one mentoring, and group discussions, creating a collaborative yet personal environment. Fortunately, we have many literary retreats to choose from, some good, others very good!

TheWriteScene's Landour Writers' Retreat recently unfolded as a vibrant tapestry of inspiration and creativity. Founded by award-winning author Deeba Salim Irfan, this retreat was not just a gathering of minds but a sanctuary for writers from across India, offering them the opportunity to refine their craft in the tranquil surroundings that once inspired the renowned author Ruskin Bond. "I founded the Landour Writing Retreat to provide aspiring writers with the support they need to thrive. Drawing from my own experience as a published and award-winning author, I understand the challenges and rewards of the writing journey. The serene setting of Landour inspires creativity and focus. Beyond Landour, I organise retreats in picturesque locations like Kangra Valley, India, Slovenia and Lapland (Northern Lights) fostering a global community of writers. I also

The Allure of Writing Retreats

Writing retreats emerge as havens for writing enthusiasts, offering serene surroundings to inspire creativity and refine their craft.



curate the English and Filipino sessions of the Tabbib Literary Festival in Dubai, a platform for diverse voices and literary exchange." Deeba says with a smile and a sense of satisfaction.

The sense of community is another powerful draw. Writing can be a solitary endeavour, and retreats allow participants to connect with like-minded individuals. "Writing is a solitary profession. You sit alone with memory and imagination, both equal parts dangerous and exciting. Writing retreats are a warm hand extended in time, nudging you on, picking

you up and sometimes, putting you back on track" says author and lawyer Sonia Chauhan. The Landour Writing Retreat is one such retreat. From the hosts to the sessions to the participants, it was a motivating journey. Sharing ideas, receiving feedback, and networking with peers and mentors can be incredibly motivating and lead to lifelong creative partnerships. What participants feel is indeed writ large on their faces, "the Landour Writing Retreat was more than a getaway, it was a turning point in my writing journey. I discovered the art of truly listening to my inner voice. The retreat's emphasis on discipline balanced with creativity taught me to treat writing as both a craft and a calling. Sessions by seasoned experts from the publishing industry added technical depth, knowledge, and insights into demystifying the process of writing and publishing in India," says Bijetri Roy, an upcoming writer in her own right.

Additionally, retreats often invite established authors, editors, and publishers to guide participants. This access to industry professionals offers budding writers' invaluable insights into the craft of writing and the business of getting published.

growing trend among new Indian authors to just write and have a book under their name. This is perhaps more true of writers writing in English than in other Indian languages. Many recent books feel amateurish and hastily written. It's frustrating to see many careless writings being passed off as literature, leaving readers feeling duped.

Many books are being churned out with similar themes as if other streams have dried up — ala Bollywood which tends to produce similar films after a blockbuster, hoping to cash in on the success. Others who experiment often end up with juvenile themes and shallow characters. It seems the trend began with the overwhelming success of Chetan Bhagat. While Bhagat's book was light and entertaining, its success led many aspiring writers to believe they could replicate his formula without effort—by simply injecting Bollywood-like clichés into their stories. Many times writers succumb to commercial temptations, trying to publish which would get them a filmmaker like Slumdog Millionaire after the film adaptation's Oscar triumph. Thus, we have a trend: literature crafted to satisfy a superficial public demand, rather than to challenge or inspire.

No doubt publishing is a business like any other and must make a profit. It also has to compete with the reader's attention span of human goldfish- the GenZ. But that often comes with a big price tag. Where are the bold, thoughtful voices of Indian literature? Where are the Salman Rushdies, Amitav Ghoshes, R.K. Narayan, and Anita Desais of today? Literature thrives on diversity, but the current scene of Indian writing in English seems weighed down by opportunists chasing fame over craft. And make no mistake this trend is here to stay. It is all over -- visible in the literature festivals even in the reputed ones.

For many budding talents, the challenge isn't just about writing—it's about finding the time and discipline to do so consistently. Writing retreats provide structured schedules that balance writing time with relaxation, fostering a productive rhythm. They also encourage writers to step out of their comfort zones, experiment with new styles, and confront creative blocks.

"The Landour Retreat was a perfect combination of creativity-sparking processes, sufficient unstructured time to allow writing whenever one entered a flow, and quality discussion time with a bunch of like-minded people who write because they love to, and who felt like long-known friends even though we had all just met. The insights shared by publishing industry professionals at the Retreat were invaluable eye-openers for me, says gratified Nilanjana, an avid reader and a writer.

In recent years, writing retreats have gained immense popularity, driven partly by the rise of remote work and digital nomadism. People now seek fulfilling, creative experiences that go beyond their day-to-day routines. As more people explore writing as a career or serious hobby, the demand for such retreats has surged. This trend reflects a cultural shift toward valuing personal storytelling and self-expression. Networking at retreats is also a valuable opportunity to build connections that could open doors to literary agents, publishers, and collaborative opportunities. "India's literary scene is a dynamic blend of tradition and modernity, marked by its linguistic diversity and exploration of contemporary themes like gender, mental health, and identity. Regional narratives and translations are gaining prominence, while digital platforms and self-publishing empower emerging voices. Young writers experiment with genres like fantasy and speculative fiction, and women authors tackle issues of patriarchy and empowerment. International accolades, such as Geetanjali Shree's Booker Prize win, highlight India's global literary impact," says Rajul, who is a well-known mentor and editor.

Writing retreats are more than just creative getaways; they are transformative experiences that equip writers with the tools, confidence, and connections needed to succeed. Whether you're an aspiring novelist, a poet, or a memoirist, a writing retreat could be the spark that ignites your literary journey.

The Art of Authentic Kashmiri Dining

Kashmirana serves authentic Kashmiri food with a cosy setting, bringing the flavours of Kashmir to Gurugram

FOODFREAK



Pawan Soni
Food critic and founder of the Big F Awards

My friends have been dedicated patrons of Kashmirana, a Kashmiri restaurant nestled in Rodeo Drive that's gained a steady following in its five years. They've shared their experiences numerous times, so I was eager to see what the buzz was about on my first visit. Kashmirana has a cosy vibe with a mix of comfortable table seating and a few low tables for those looking to linger. My wife aptly described the interiors as reminiscent of a houseboat's warmth and charm.

We found ourselves indulging in a variety of dishes, given her vegetarian preference. In the non-vegetarian starters, the Tabakmaaz and mutton seekh kebabs were both outstanding. The Tabakmaaz had that perfect crispiness, yielding to the fatty richness inside, while the mutton seekh had a delicate, hollow centre that retained a satisfying bite - some of the juiciest I've had in Gurugram. My wife, on the other hand, enjoyed the lotus root fritters (nadrū chips), cut into long, crispy strips and coated with a flavourful, addictive spice blend.

In the mains, the rista and goshtaba were delightful, with the same signature spongy meatballs but distinct gravies that made each dish memorable. I prefer bigger balls but these tasted as good. On the vegetarian side, the haaq, rajma, and nadru yakhani shone brightly, leaving us no choice but to pack up the leftovers - vegetarian for us and non-vegetarian for my friends. And if I say we loved the non-veg, it's only fair to note the vegetarian options were no less satisfying. Traditional brassware enhanced the authenticity of the experience, and the kehwa added an extra layer of warmth, perfect for the season. Though the phirni was good, I've had more refined versions. However, the dry fruit-laden shufta, cooked in desi ghee, was a decadent finale.

Kashmirana's portions are ample, the pricing fair, and the food impressive, especially as the restaurant filled with fellow Kashmiris as we dined, a clear testament to its authenticity and popularity among those who truly know this cuisine.



RATINGS (Out of 5):
FOOD: 4.0 | AMBIENCE: 3.75 | SERVICE: 4.0 | OVERALL: 4.0



ADDRESS: KASHMIRANA, 1ST FLOOR, RODEO DRIVE, SECTOR 49, GURUGRAM | PHONE: 85953 99049

The Heart of Odisha's Cuisine

Chor Bizarre's Odia pop-up brings an authentic, unique taste of Odisha, writes TEAM AGENDA



Left to right - Culinary Collaborator Mona Lisa Bal, Chef Srinivasulu. A and Actor & Filmmaker Nandita Das

When one thinks of India's diverse culinary landscape, it's easy to be drawn to the well-known dishes of the north or the spicy delights of the south. But what about the understated flavours of Odisha? Often overshadowed by its more famous counterparts, Odisha's cuisine is a hidden gem, rich in taste and steeped in tradition. The recent *Odia pop-up* at Chor Bizarre, the iconic Asaf Ali Road, New Delhi restaurant, offered a rare opportunity to experience the unique vegetarian dishes of Odisha, expertly curated by actor-filmmaker Nandita Das and her culinary collaborator Mona Lisa Bal. The event was an exciting foray into the lesser-known corners of Indian cuisine, offering an authentic glimpse into the simple yet bold flavours of Odisha. With the restaurant's longstanding reputation for bringing regional Indian cuisines to the forefront, this pop-up felt like a welcome celebration of the state's rich culinary heritage, especially for those in New Delhi who may not have had the chance to explore it. The carefully crafted vegetarian menu showcased the simplicity and brilliance of Odia cuisine. The meal began with "Ghole Dahi" (Odia Chhās), a traditional yogurt-based drink that was both refreshing and tangy, setting the tone for the meal ahead. It was the perfect introduction to a menu that relied on fresh, local ingredients and a delicate balance of spices.



addition of "Kusala Saaga" (Amaranth Leaves with Garlic) and "Santula" (Sautéed Vegetables with Five Spices) further exemplified the region's love for vegetables, bringing out the freshness and natural taste of the ingredients in every bite.

The accompaniments were the perfect complements to the main dishes. "Chakuli Pita," a soft, chewy flatbread made with lentils and rice, was ideal for scooping up curries, while the steamed "Bhaata" (rice) acted as a neutral base to balance the complex spices.

No meal would be complete without dessert, and Chor Bizarre didn't disappoint. "Kheer Sagar" (Chhena Balls in Thickened Milk) offered a rich and creamy end to the meal, while "Chhena Poda," a baked chhena dessert, had a beautiful caramelised flavour that left a lasting impression.



The starters were a real treat, with dishes like "Biri Boda with Dhaniya Chutney" (Lentil Fritters with Coriander) and "Besara Chhatu Potra Poda" (Mushrooms with Mustard in Banana Leaf) capturing the essence of Odisha's cooking style. The lentil fritters were crispy on the outside, soft on the inside, and paired beautifully with a fresh coriander chutney that added a burst of flavour. The mushrooms, cooked with mustard and wrapped in banana leaves, offered a smoky, earthy flavour that exemplified the depth of Odia culinary techniques. When it came to the main courses, the dishes truly shone. "Dahi Baingan" (Shallow Fried Eggplant with Tempered Yogurt) was a standout, with its crisp, golden eggplant and creamy, tangy yogurt creating a delicious contrast in texture and taste. "Dalma," a hearty lentil and vegetable stew with coconut, was a comforting dish, light yet full of flavour. The

However, it's worth noting that the non-vegetarian thali also garnered rave reviews, with guests praising its perfect blend of spices and execution. Chor Bizarre's ability to balance both vegetarian and non-vegetarian offerings with such precision only further cements its reputation as a destination for authentic regional cuisine.

The *Odia pop-up* at Chor Bizarre was an enlightening and flavoursome journey into the heart of Odisha's culinary culture. For those who have yet to explore the delights of Odia cuisine, this pop-up provided a rare and memorable experience, showcasing the region's unique approach to vegetarian dishes that are as healthy as they are flavourful. With its emphasis on fresh ingredients, simple yet creative preparations, and a deep respect for tradition, this pop-up was a celebration of the incredible variety India's regional cuisines have to offer.

When it comes to coffee culture, *First Coffee* has always been a name synonymous with quality, creativity and bold flavours. Co-founded by the dynamic trio of Sohrab Sitaram, Shiv Dhawan and Chandini D Purnesh, this café has been a favourite haunt for caffeine enthusiasts and foodies alike. Their latest revamped menu is here to take your coffee and snack experience to the next level. Packed with innovative offerings, trendy beverages and classic delights, the menu is designed to cater to every palate. Whether you're a matcha enthusiast, a fan of indulgent pastries or someone who loves a good sandwich or wrap, *First Coffee* has you covered.

COMFORT AND CONVERSATIONS: *First Coffee's* interiors feel like a warm hug. With cosy seating, soothing earthy tones and the irresistible aroma of freshly brewed coffee, the café offers the perfect setting for everything from a quick catch-up to a leisurely workday. The ambience strikes a delicate balance between modern design and laid-back charm, making it a space you'll want to stay in.

TRENDY SIPS: THE MATCHA LATTE Among the highlights of the new menu is the Matcha Latte, a drink that's as vibrant as it is intriguing. Known for its earthy, slightly grassy



Co Founders : Sohrab Sitaram and Shiv Dhawan



flavour, matcha has become a favourite among those looking for a trendy yet healthy alternative. While it might take some getting used to for first-timers, it's a sip worth acquiring. *First Coffee's* version offers a creamy, balanced taste that pairs beautifully with savoury bites like the paneer tikka sandwich or the chickpea Veggie wrap.

NEVER GO OUT OF STYLE: As much as *First Coffee* excels in innovation, they also understand the value of keeping things classic. Their Classic Iced Coffee remains a cornerstone of the menu, offering a refreshing pick-me-up that's as dependable as it is delicious. Perfectly brewed and served chilled, it's a reminder of why *First Coffee* became a beloved name in the first place.

SWEET DREAMS IN EVERY BITE: Sweet tooth? You're in for a treat. The new menu introduces the incredible range of pastries. First up is the freshly baked Choco-Berry Dream Doughnut, a decadent creation that combines the richness of chocolate and custard with a fresh twist of blueberry jam and shaved chocolate on top. If you're a fan of chocolate, the Choco Truffle Eclairs are not to be missed. They combine deep, indulgent chocolate flavours with just the right amount



MORE THAN JUST A COFFEE!

First Coffee's revamped menu combines innovative flavours, trendy beverages and classic favourites, creating the perfect coffee and snack experience, writes TEAM AGENDA



of berry sweetness, making them the perfect treat for anyone with a sweet tooth. For something a bit more adventurous, the Blueberry Passion Eclairs and the Nutella Cinnamon Roll are a must-try. The cinnamon roll, in particular, is topped with marshmallows and toasted seeds, adding extra texture and sweetness to every bite.

SAVOURY DELIGHTS: The savoury offerings on the menu are just as impressive. The Truffle Mushroom Sandwich is a symphony of flavours, combining truffled mushrooms, caramelised onions and gooey cheese. It's rich, satisfying, and indulgent. For a spicier kick, the Chipotle Veggie Sandwich features Mexican-inspired vegetables and melted cheese layered on hearty Italian bread. Wrap lovers will adore the Chickpea Veggie Wrap, a flavour-packed burrito-style wrap filled with spicy chickpeas, and tangy pickled onions. Pair it with a side of their crispy Classic Fries for a meal that's as comforting as it is filling.

SWEET AND SAVOURY PAIRINGS: The new menu is designed with pairings in mind, offering a curated experience that complements every dish. Enjoy their signature Crunchy Hazelnut Smash for a heavenly mix of chocolatey sweetness and nutty richness. Or, pair the bold Flaky Chicken Seekh Wrap with a soothing Ginger Tea and Masala tea for a balance of spice and warmth.

If you're in the mood to experiment, the Cascara Thunder, a refreshing mix of cascara syrup over ice and lemonade, offers a zesty complement to the bold flavours of wraps. Each pairing has been thoughtfully created to elevate your dining experience.

DESSERTS AND SIDES THAT DELIGHT: *First Coffee* has also introduced indulgent sides and desserts that are worth savouring. The Korean BBQ Potato and Chicken Poppers are perfect companions to their wraps and sandwiches, while the Brookie, a fusion of brownie and cookie, is a dessert dream come true.

WHY YOU'LL LOVE IT: *First Coffee's* new menu blends trendy offerings like the Matcha Latte with timeless classics like the Iced Coffee, creating a menu that caters to every taste and preference. Add in the cosy, welcoming ambience and you have a café that's more than just a place to grab a coffee, it's a destination.

FACT SHEET

LOCATIONS:
Cyberhub, Gurugram
Pacific Mall, Jasola
Pacific Mall, NSP

Nestled gracefully in the foothills of the Kumaon region in Uttarakhand, Mukteshwar is a serene and unspoiled retreat that has yet to gain the limelight it truly deserves. Perched at an elevation of 2,171 meters, this picturesque hill station is located approximately 51 kilometers from the bustling town of Nainital. Mukteshwar offers you an idyllic escape for those seeking solace amidst nature's bounty and a peaceful respite from the chaos of urban life.

The Journey to Mukteshwar

The journey to Mukteshwar is as scenic as the destination itself. Once you cross the town of Nainital and continue your ascent, the winding roads begin to carve through the hills, offering a thrilling experience of hairpin bends and steep curves. The air grows crisper, and the lush greenery surrounding you seems to come alive, offering a visual treat to your senses. The long stretches of forested hills and cascading valleys make the drive a captivating experience, setting the stage for the calm that awaits you.

A Gateway to Himalayan Grandeur

Formerly known as Muktesar, Mukteshwar serves as a gateway to the majestic Himalayas, providing breathtaking views of snow-clad peaks. The Himalayan panorama here includes the towering Nanda Devi, the second-highest peak in India, standing tall as a symbol of nature's grandeur. The pristine mountain air and serene ambiance work like a balm, calming your soul and rejuvenating your spirit. Mukteshwar's unspoiled beauty makes it an ideal destination for mindful activities such as meditation, yoga, or simply soaking in the peace of the surroundings.

Mukteshwar Dham: A Spiritual Treat

The town derives its name from the revered Mukteshwar Dham, an ancient temple dedicated to Lord Shiva. Believed to be over



5,350 years old, this temple is not only a place of worship but also a testament to the spiritual and historical richness of the region. Located 21 kilometres from the town centre, the temple is perched atop a hill, offering mesmerizing views of the valley below. To reach the temple, visitors must embark on a short yet rewarding trek of about 15 minutes. There are two paths leading to the temple: one with well-paved stairs and another with a steep incline, allowing visitors to choose based on their preference and stamina.

Zero Point: A Viewpoint like No Other

Just a short walk from the Mukteshwar Dham lays Zero Point, a spot that offers unparalleled views of the Himalayan range. The 10 to 15-minute walk to this viewpoint is well worth the effort, as the vistas that greet you are nothing short of magical. A small entry fee of Rs. 60 is required, but the sight of the towering peaks bathed in golden sunlight or shrouded in misty clouds is a reward far greater than the cost. Zero Point allows visitors to fully immerse themselves in the raw beauty of the mountains, leaving an indelible mark on their hearts.

Why Mukteshwar?

Mukteshwar is more than just a destination, it is an experience that soothes the mind, body, and soul. Whether you are looking to relax in silence, embrace the beauty of nature, or embark on a spiritual journey, this quaint hill station has something for everyone. With its charming landscapes, rich history, and spiritual essence, Mukteshwar stands as a testament to the timeless beauty of Uttarakhand's Kumaon Hills. The place is a must visit if you want to detox yourself.

THE SCENIC AND SIMPLE MUKTESHWAR



Mukteshwar is a quite destination that will help you discover your calmer self, writes ABHI SINGHAL



WAY TO MUKTESHWAR

Mukteshwar promises not just a tranquil retreat but also a journey filled with stunning views. Whether you prefer flying, riding a train, or driving through scenic routes, the travel itself becomes part of the adventure. From picturesque landscapes to steep turns on the mountain roads, each mode of transport offers a unique charm. Comfortable travel options ensure that reaching this beautiful destination is as delightful as staying there.

Mukteshwar by Road

Mukteshwar is well-connected by road, lying 353 km from Delhi, 51 km from Nainital, and 42 km from Haldwani. State-run buses link Mukteshwar with nearby Uttarakhand cities, including Kathgodam. Luxury buses are also available on the Delhi-Kathgodam route, with buses departing from Delhi's ISBT. The journey from Delhi to Kathgodam takes about 8 hours. For those driving from Delhi, follow NH 24 to Rampur, then NH 87 to Ranibagh. From Ranibagh, take the state highway to Bhowali, and finally another state highway via Ramgarh to Mukteshwar.

Mukteshwar by Train

Kathgodam Railway Station is the closest railhead to Mukteshwar, offering connections to major cities like Delhi, Lucknow, and Kolkata. From Kathgodam, travelers can hire taxis or take buses to reach Mukteshwar conveniently.

Mukteshwar by Air

The nearest airport to Mukteshwar is Pantnagar Airport, located 111 km away. Another option is the Jolly Grant Airport in Dehradun. From both airports, travelers can hire taxis to reach Mukteshwar comfortably.



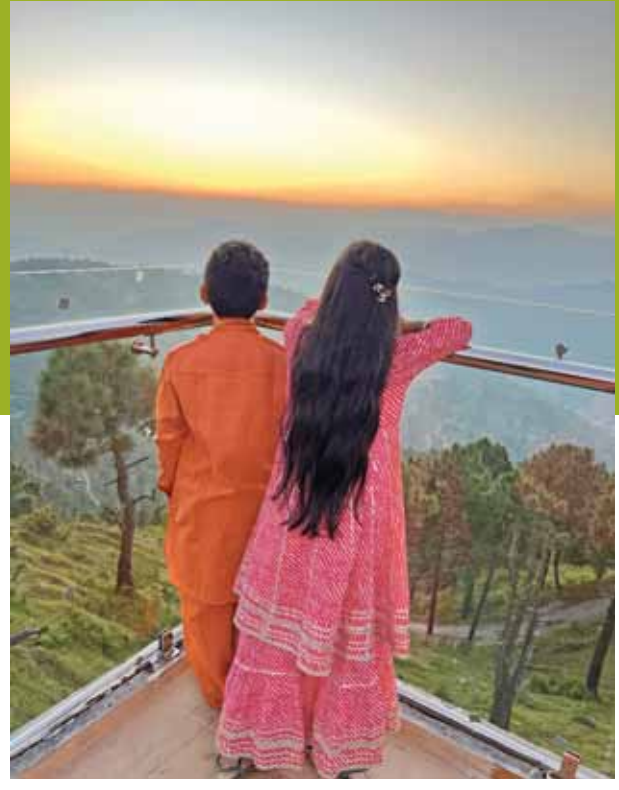
As someone who lives for the thrill of discovering untouched destinations, my recent journey to Jihar Village was a revelation. Nestled in the Almora district of Uttarakhand, this unspoiled hamlet, perched at an elevation of 2,171 meters, offers a serene escape from the chaos of modern life. It lies about 45 km beyond the ever-popular Jim Corbett National Park, yet few venture this far—a detail that adds to its charm. What awaited me was a perfect blend of natural beauty, cultural heritage, and heartwarming simplicity. The drive to Jihar was nothing short of mesmerizing. The winding road was flanked by pine forests and occasional streams that glistened under the sunlight. Accompanied by lovely music in the car, I was lost in the serenity of the place. Two jackals darted across the path at one point, a reminder of the region's rich wildlife. As I drew closer, the snow-capped peaks of the Himalayas greeted me, reaffirming that I had made the right choice to explore this lesser-known gem. For accommodation, I opted for Nivriti Summit View, a boutique property near Basot village. Travelling with my family, I needed a place that catered to both comfort and scenic beauty, and this property delivered on all fronts. The first thing that struck me upon arrival was the sheer grandeur of the views. On one side, the majestic Himalayan ranges seemed close enough to touch, while on the other, the



endless valley stretched into a picturesque horizon. The sight of the Ramganga River winding its way below added to the allure. The property, with its six thoughtfully designed rooms, was a sanctuary in itself. Each room had large windows that framed the surrounding beauty like a painting. What made the stay even more special was the personal touch of the owner, Randhir Brar, whose love for travel and nature was evident in every corner. From curated books to artistic décor, every detail told a story. My mornings began with the golden glow of Nanda Devi, and my evenings ended with a cup of tea as Trisul's snowy peaks reflected the last light of the day. The highlight for my children was the sprawling garden—a perfect space to play and unwind. For me, it was the property's glasshouse rooms, which allowed me to gaze at the stars from the comfort of my bed. The culinary experience was equally memorable. While I enjoyed

Escape to Peaceful Jihar

From stunning Himalayan vistas and hidden waterfalls to the charm of Nivriti Summit View, my journey to Jihar was a perfect blend of adventure, tranquillity, and warm hospitality, writes DIVYA BHATIA



their continental offerings, the Kumaoni dishes—prepared with fresh, local ingredients—stole the show. Don't miss the chance to savour dishes like Bhatt ki Churdhani and Aloo ke

Gutke, prepared with expertise. After a full day of relaxation, we set out the following morning to explore Jihar. Our first stop was the Bhona Devi Temple, a revered shrine nestled deep within the forests. Located about 14 km from Kalason Basot, the temple is more than 250 years old and steeped in local legend. It houses a Shivaling, a pillar of Kaal Bhairavnath,



and the sacred hearth of Harju Devta. The moment we stepped into the temple premises, a serene calmness enveloped us, as though the place radiated an abundance of positive energy. However, it wasn't just the spiritual aura that captivated us. The temple offers stunning panoramic views of the Himalayan range and the five regions of Salt—Talla, Malla, Vichalla, Palla, and Valla. Its potential for spiritual tourism is undeniable, but its tranquillity must be preserved. Next on the itinerary was a hidden waterfall, about 25 km from the property, towards Almora. Accessible only on foot, the path to the falls remained elusive until a local guide helped us navigate the terrain. From the road, it appears like a modest stream cascading down the mountainside, but once you hike up, the scene transforms. The effort was worth it. At the top, I was greeted by a crystal-clear pool fed by cascading waters. Taking a dip in the cool, pristine water felt like nature's own therapy. A jungle walk leading to a secluded spot by the Ramganga River was another unforgettable highlight. Nivriti Summit View

arranged a picnic lunch for us there, and it was nothing short of magical. Surrounded by the sounds of rustling leaves and flowing water, the experience felt like stepping into another world. The locals mentioned occasional sightings of leopards, though they assured us these majestic creatures had never harmed anyone—a testament to the harmonious coexistence of humans and wildlife here. Evenings back at the property were spent stargazing. The clear skies above Jihar unveiled the Milky Way in all its glory, a humbling reminder of the universe's vastness. It's rare to find a place where time slows down, where each moment invites introspection and wonder. Jihar, with its unpretentious beauty, offers precisely that. In today's fast-paced world, places like Jihar remind us of the beauty of simplicity. It's not just a destination; it's an experience—a chance to slow down, breathe, and reconnect with what truly matters. Whether you're a nature lover, an adventure seeker, or simply someone looking to escape the crowds, Jihar promises memories you'll treasure for a lifetime.

HOW TO GET TO JIHAR

Reaching Jihar is part of the adventure. The nearest airport is Pantnagar, about 140 km away, while Kathgodam railway station is 100 km from the village. From these points, the scenic drive to Jihar is best enjoyed in a private cab or local bus.



YOUR WEEK AHEAD

MADHU KOTIYA



ARIES March 21-April 19
This week holds significant promise, particularly in financial matters. You may find yourself receiving substantial gains early in the week. Celebrations are in order, with joyful gatherings that underscore your recent successes in your professional life. Happiness permeates the home front as well, with key contributions from the women in your life, who display remarkable health, creativity, and energy. Their nurturing roles enhance the joy and unity of those around them. The week may also feature meaningful family events such as the joyous arrival of a new family member or the initiation of a lucrative opportunity, bringing loved ones together to share in the collective joy. As the week closes, expect a shift in perspective that could profoundly reshape your approach to life, setting the stage for enduring benefits.

Lucky number 3 | Lucky colour Amber
Lucky day Tuesday



LEO July 23-Aug 22
This week calls for measured actions and a calm demeanor. Embracing moderation rather than giving in to impulsive reactions will serve you well. Opportunities that could significantly improve your circumstances may arise, yet there's a risk of undermining these prospects through unchecked pride or a dismissive attitude. While self-respect is crucial, maintaining a balance with how others perceive you is equally important. You might find that new beginnings in your endeavors could stir envy among competitors. Stay vigilant as you could become the target of negative intentions. It's wise to be observant and understand the motivations of those around you. Secure your valuable possessions and keep a close eye on those who have access to your personal space or property.

Lucky number 9 | Lucky colour Magenta
Lucky day Thursday



SAGITTARIUS Nov 22-Dec 21
This week, you'll find yourself feeling invigorated and full of life, ready to tackle any obstacles that come your way. There's a sense of cosmic alignment that seems to enhance your efforts, steering you towards successful outcomes. Your energy is well-placed, boosting areas of your life that need the most attention. With a clear vision and unwavering resolve, you're set to conquer your highest aspirations. At home, the atmosphere buzzes with the promise of significant events that bring joy and fulfillment. A deep-seated wish of yours may finally come to fruition, possibly linked to family growth or children's achievements, which might include academic successes or securing opportunities they've eagerly sought. Your belief in your abilities and a higher power greatly shapes your reality, fostering a positive environment that encourages you to achieve remarkable things.

Lucky number 5 | Lucky colour Turquoise
Lucky day Monday



TAURUS April 20-May 20
This week is heavily influenced by your emotional and sentimental nature. You may find yourself in a nurturing role, eager to care for those close to you. Your compassionate demeanor makes you a source of solace and advice for many, although this could distract you from your professional responsibilities. Be mindful of those around you, as there's a risk that your straightforward approach might be exploited. It's essential to strategize and act decisively to ensure stability and financial security. Without active efforts and concrete plans, mere wishful thinking won't yield the desired results. Stay focused on your objectives and manage your emotions effectively to navigate through the week successfully.

Lucky number 15 | Lucky colour Crimson
Lucky day Sunday



VIRGO Aug 23-Sep 22
This week, individuals born under Virgo may experience a sense of isolation and a disconnection from everyday activities. Challenges in personal relationships, such as a break-up or a marital strain, could be impacting your emotional well-being. You might also find obstacles in your professional life; despite diligent efforts, progress seems stalled. This period requires patience and resilience. Stay prepared to counter any resistance you face as this may be the final test before you achieve your objectives. An influential figure may emerge to assist you, providing the support needed to overcome your current challenges. Expect a shift towards spiritual growth and a surge of new ideas. This fresh perspective will infuse your endeavors with innovation and a stronger sense of self-assurance.

Lucky number 6 | Lucky colour Olive
Lucky day Saturday



CAPRICORN Dec 22-Jan 19
This week, you may find yourself navigating a mix of emotions and detachment in your personal relationships. Minor irritants could lead to disagreements, but ultimately, decisions will be reached mutually. In your professional life, your kindness and generosity will shine, enhancing your reputation. Unexpected financial gains could provide a sense of security, bolstering your ability to handle both personal and professional challenges with skill and efficiency. Your reliable and devoted nature will make you a trusted figure at work. A natural curiosity will drive your desire to acquire new knowledge, fueling your success and making you a source of inspiration for others. You will uphold strong ethical standards, advocating for your beliefs and demonstrating integrity in all your endeavors.

Lucky number 13 | Lucky colour Maroon
Lucky day Friday



GEMINI May 21-June 20
This week, you demonstrate a compelling sense of authority and determination. Your strength lies not in physical prowess but in your ability to lead and inspire others to action. Your charismatic yet firm approach garners respect, although it leaves little room for emotional considerations. This could lead to some challenges in personal relationships, possibly causing strain or even separation. Family tensions may arise, particularly with maternal figures possibly opposing your choices in personal partnerships, leading to disagreements. Midweek, you might find yourself overwhelmed, struggling to make autonomous decisions due to these pressures. However, by week's end, you will find both financial and emotional enrichment as a respected elder, possibly a paternal figure, steps in to support you. Their fair and generous actions will lay the groundwork for your future achievements.

Lucky number 7 | Lucky colour Indigo
Lucky day Wednesday



LIBRA Sep 23-Oct 22
In the coming period, you may encounter situations that test the strength of your relationships, potentially leading to deep emotional impacts. Embrace these challenges as they arise; they are opportunities for personal growth and resilience. Fear of not meeting expectations or achieving success might loom large, yet remember that true bravery emerges from confronting and mastering these fears. Should a new opportunity present itself, seize it with confidence and move decisively toward your aspirations. Let go of any reservations and clear any obstacles from your path. If recent achievements seem less significant than anticipated, take time to reassess and refresh your strategies. By week's end, you could find yourself in a more prosperous position, with increased financial prospects or an attractive proposal coming your way.

Lucky number 1 | Lucky colour Lavender
Lucky day Wednesday



AQUARIUS Jan 20-Feb 18
This week presents a dynamic and steady phase for you, marked by significant authority and confidence. You find yourself in a scenario where confronting and engaging with influential individuals is not only possible but likely. This period allows you to relish a surge of energy and maintain strong connections with those around you. You may find yourself acting as a guiding figure, providing advice, setting goals, and fostering a sense of security for others. There's a harmonious alignment of your physical, mental, and emotional states, enhancing your decision-making prowess. Your presence demands respect, as you consistently uphold your principles, make fair judgments, and speak honestly. Your ability to maintain a clear vision ensures that emotions do not cloud your decisions, positioning you as a leader who views the broader context of any situation.

Lucky number 4 | Lucky colour Fuchsia
Lucky day Sunday



CANCER June 21-July 22
This week is a time for rejuvenation. Step away from the whirlwind of your daily activities and allow yourself some moments of relaxation. Embrace self-care by engaging in activities that refresh both your physical and mental well-being—consider routine health screenings, engage in mindful exercises, take leisurely strolls, and ensure you are getting ample rest. Such practices will equip you to navigate the energetic pace of life that lies ahead. Your professional life may soon pulsate with new opportunities and potential advancements such as raises or promotions. At home, expect to be more involved with family duties, especially in attending to children's needs, which could increase your expenditures. Additionally, consider planning a getaway that promises romantic undertones and quality family time.

Lucky number 10 | Lucky colour Teal
Lucky day Saturday



SCORPIO Oct 23-Nov 21
Currently, you possess a significant intensity and strength, which enhances your ability to understand the core of any situation distinctly. Your sharp insights and deep perceptiveness are at their peak, simplifying the process of achieving your objectives. This period is optimal for dispelling any confusion that has obscured your inner truths and for releasing the constraints of your past that have impeded your progress. Focus is now essential on your aspirations, accompanied by a profound spiritual enlightenment. Dedicate your time to harmonizing with the natural world—engage in morning or evening walks, embrace practices like yoga and meditation, or even consider participating in sports at a professional level. Embrace the flow of life's currents, allowing them to guide you forward naturally.

Lucky number 14 | Lucky colour Coral
Lucky day Sunday



PISCES Feb 19-March 20
Individuals born under this sign possess boundless potential, enabling them to transform and craft their reality as they see fit. While it is not feasible for everyone to uncover every mystery, these individuals often lead others to explore and tap into their own depths to unveil untapped capabilities. Known for their deep spiritual focus, they wield considerable power to enrich and fundamentally change lives. They adhere to a strong belief in balance and fairness, understanding that every action triggers a corresponding reaction, echoing the principles of cause and effect. To cultivate positive outcomes, they maintain a mindset geared toward making decisions that align with their desired results. This clarity of thought facilitates the full realization of their goals and alleviates many of life's challenges. Anticipate a significant journey or change in the near future.

Lucky number 17 | Lucky colour Purple
Lucky day Friday

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The Power of a Thought

THE TUNING FORK



CV Srikanth

"Cogito, ergo sum" ... I Think therefore I am. ... René Descartes
If you have decided to read this. Stop. Think what you are thinking now. Because ... Whether you think you can or you think you can't, you're right! The only thing absolutely in our power is our Thought. It shapes our reality. Influences our emotions. Translates to actions. And ultimately defines the quality of our lives. This concept is deeply embedded in various philosophical and spiritual traditions, including ancient Indian wisdom, emphasizing the profound impact of our mental processes, manifesting into our experiences. In the realm of Vedic philosophy, the Nature of thoughts is not just merely a fleeting phenomenon. They are powerful forces that can create or destroy. The idea that "you become what you think" resonates with many ancient texts, highlighting the significance of cultivating positive thoughts.

"यथा संकल्पते मनः तदनुसम्यद्यते"
"As the mind thinks, so it becomes."

The quality of our thoughts directly influences our reality. A positive mindset attracts positive experiences. Positive Thinking is not merely wishful thinking. It is a conscious effort to reshape our cognitive patterns. This idea is echoed in various scriptures that advocate for a mindset centred on optimism and well-being.

"असतो मासद्गमय"
"Lead me from the unreal to the real."

This shloka from the Brihadaranyaka Upanishad encourages individuals to move from ignorance to knowledge. By focusing on positive and truthful thoughts, we navigate through the complexities of life towards clarity, peace and Holistic wellbeing. A thought is energy. Almost impossible to stop from flowing in. Having a sizeable impact effect on every facet of our life. What however is possible and should be the goal is to regulate them conscientiously so as to have them supportively influence and nourish our present moment. How we nurture our thoughts is in our control. Thereby we can manage how they impact us. If we



allow the negative to nest within for a long period, we create a cyclic trap which is detrimental. It is important to emphasize here that when we stay on and nourish thoughts, we become what we think. Yet ... we must recognise that and understand that we are not our thoughts. We

have the ability to rise above them. Meditation and mindfulness practices are vital in harnessing the power of our thoughts. They help in cultivating consciousness, allowing us to observe our thoughts without attachment. This detachment is crucial in

understanding the transient nature of thoughts. "शान्ताकारं भुजगशयनं नृपशुपतियोगिनाम्" "Peaceful in form, resting on a serpent, Lord of all beings, O yogis..." This shloka refers to Lord Shiva, symbolising inner peace and

mastery over the mind. Through practices that promote mindfulness, we can align our thoughts with tranquillity and purpose. The power of thoughts extends beyond the individual. It influences our ecosystem. The teachings of the Upanishads highlight the interconnectedness of life and the importance of collective positivity. The power of our thoughts is a profound truth recognised in ancient Indian philosophy. By cultivating positive, constructive thoughts, we can transform our reality, contribute to our well-being, and enhance our connections with ourselves, others and the Universe. As we navigate through life's challenges, our thoughts hold the key to our experiences, shaping our destinies with each conscious choice we make. As Raman Maharishi said - The degree of freedom from unwanted thoughts and the degree of concentration on a single thought are the measures to gauge spiritual progress. We are the seat of limitless Power - through our thought. Just One Thought can make all the difference!! I Think therefore I am.