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NEWS CONFERENCE

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## Sensex sinks below 80k

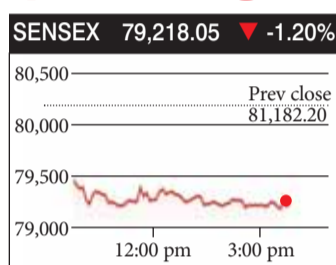


PTI ■ MUMBAI

Equity benchmark Sensex on Thursday plunged about 965 points to crash below the 80,000 level due to heavy selling in global equities after the US Federal Reserve signalled fewer rate cuts next year. Besides, deep losses in consumer durables, banking and IT stocks amid foreign fund outflows added to the gloom, analysts said. Falling for the fourth day running, the 30-share BSE benchmark Sensex tanked 964.15 points or 1.20 per cent to settle at 79,218.05. During the day, the blue-chip index cracked 1,162.12 points or 1.44 per cent to 79,020.08. As many as 2,315 stocks declined while 1,680 advanced and 100 remained unchanged on the BSE. The NSE Nifty tumbled 247.15 points or 1.02 per cent to sink

below the 24,000 mark at 23,951.70. In the past four days, the BSE benchmark tanked 2,915.07 points or 3.54 per cent and the Nifty declined 816.6 points or 3.29 per cent. "The Indian market saw a widespread decline following a global sell-off driven by the US Fed's hawkish stance on interest rates. Sectors sensitive to interest rates, such as banking and real estate, significantly bore the brunt. "However, the BoJ's decision to keep its interest rate steady, which surprised economists, aided in reducing the selling pressure. Despite this, investor caution persisted amid ongoing FII selling, with a strategic shift towards defensive sectors like pharma as evidenced by their outperformance," Vinod Nair, Head of Research, Geojit Financial Services, said.

### MARKETS



From the 30 blue-chip pack, Infosys, Bajaj Finserv, JSW Steel, Bajaj Finance, Asian Paints, ICICI Bank, Reliance Industries, Tata Consultancy Services, Infosys, Tata Motors and Mahindra & Mahindra were the biggest laggards. On the other hand, Sun Pharma, Power Grid and Hindustan Unilever were the gainers. Markets were plundered,

tracking negative global cues as benchmark indices slipped below their psychological levels on broad-based selling after the US Fed's hawkish stance raised concerns over further rate cuts next year. Rising US bond yields have pushed global currencies, including the rupee to new lows, while renewed foreign fund outflows from domestic equities could prompt investors to turn risk averse," Prashanth Tapse, Senior VP (Research), Mehta Equities Ltd, said. The rupee dropped 14 paise and breached the crucial 85 level to close at an all-time low of 85.08 (provisional) against the US dollar on Thursday. The BSE midcap gauge declined 0.30 per cent and smallcap index dipped 0.28 per cent. Among sectoral indices, BSE Focused IT tanked 1.20 per cent, consumer durables (1.15 per cent), IT (1.13 per cent), capital goods (1.07 per cent), teck (1.05 per cent) and financial services (1.05 per cent). BSE Healthcare emerged as the only gainer. In Asian markets, Seoul, Tokyo, Shanghai and Hong Kong settled lower. European markets were trading in the negative territory. Wall Street ended sharply lower on Wednesday. Foreign Institutional Investors (FIIs) offloaded equities worth Rs 1,316.81 crore on Wednesday, according to exchange data. Global oil benchmark Brent crude dipped 0.08 per cent to USD 73.33 a barrel. The BSE benchmark Sensex tumbled 502.25 points or 0.62 per cent to settle at 80,182.20, taking its downtrend to the third day on Wednesday. The Nifty declined 137.15 points or 0.56 per cent to 24,198.85.



## Uttar Pradesh, Haryana Govts must impose complete ban on firecrackers: SC

RAJESH KUMAR ■ NEW DELHI

### WEATHER

AQI	451
MAX	23°C (+1)
MIN	5°C (-3)

The Supreme Court on Thursday directed the Uttar Pradesh and Haryana Governments to impose a complete ban on firecrackers until further orders. The Delhi Government has also imposed a round-the-year ban on firecrackers in the National Capital. The SC has also ordered the states falling in the National Capital Region (NCR) to constitute teams of various officials to ensure strict compliance with the anti-pollution measures under Stage IV of the Graded Response Action Plan (GRAP). During the hearing, Senior advocate Shadaan Farasat, appearing for the Government, conveyed this to a Bench of Justices AS Oka and AG Masih hearing the question of air pollution in the National Capital. He emphasised that for this measure to be effective, neighbouring NCR states must adopt similar bans, as firecrackers could still be brought into Delhi from those states. "We are of the view that this ban will be effective only when other states forming part of the NCR region impose similar measures. Even the state of Rajasthan has

imposed a similar ban in that part of State of Rajasthan which falls in NCR regions. For the time being we direct the states of Uttar Pradesh and Haryana to impose a similar ban which is imposed by the state of Delhi", the Bench said. The Bench was informed that while Haryana had permitted the use of green crackers, Rajasthan had imposed a complete ban on firecrackers in the areas falling within the NCR. The Bench further stated that such a ban would be effective only if other NCR states imposed similar restrictions. The matter has been listed for further hearing on January 15, 2025, to consider additional directions on the firecracker ban. The Supreme Court had earlier expressed concerns over inadequate enforcement of firecracker bans in Delhi-NCR. On December 12, the Supreme Court directed the Delhi Government and NCR states to decide on a complete

year-round ban on firecrackers, including their manufacture, storage, sale, distribution, and use. "We direct NCR states to constitute the teams of members of police, revenue officials to monitor the implementation of GRAP IV measures. We say this that the members so created in this team will work as officers of this court. They will regularly submit reports of compliance and breaches to CAQM [Commission for Air Quality Management] so that immediate action be taken by all concerned," it directed. The Bench was hearing the case concerning the Delhi air pollution crisis. The Court has been monitoring action taken by authorities in the adjoining States to curb stubble-burning incidents, among other things. Meanwhile, in a notification issued by the Delhi government's environment department on Thursday, there shall be a complete ban on manufacturing, storage, selling (including online delivery through online marketing platforms) and bursting of all kinds of firecrackers in NCT of Delhi throughout the year with immediate effect."

## "Will run a nationwide movement on Ambedkar issue"



Congress on Thursday accused the BJP of diverting attention from the issue of Home Minister Amit Shah's "insult" to BR Ambedkar and said Shah must resign and apologise for his remarks. Addressing a joint Press conference at the AICC headquarters, Congress chief Mallikarjun Kharge and former party chief Rahul Gandhi condemned Shah's remarks on Ambedkar and said they would continue to protest across the country.

"The BJP wants to divert attention from Shah's remarks on Ambedkar and that is why they are raising other issues," Kharge stated. He said they (Congress leaders) were only demanding the resignation of Home Minister Shah and were protesting "in support of our demands, but the BJP MPs blocked us from entering Parliament." "They pushed me, I lost my balance and sat down," the Congress chief said, adding that he condemns Shah's remarks

on Ambedkar. Kharge said they will run a nationwide movement on Ambedkar issue. Rahul said the Bharatiya Janata Party-Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh thinking is "anti-Constitution" and "anti-Ambedkar". "The BJP is indulging in distraction. We want the apology and resignation of home minister over his remarks on Ambedkar," Gandhi said, adding that they would continue to raise their demand and the Adani issue.

## "Will physical strength be used in Parliament?"



Accusing Rahul Gandhi of "pushing and shoving" its Members of Parliament at the Parliament premises, Bharatiya Janata Party said he does not deserve to be the Leader of Opposition after an "indecent and shameful" conduct. Addressing a press conference at the BJP headquarters hours after fracas unfolded during protests by the ruling, and Opposition parties, Union Minister Shivraj Singh Chouhan put the blame on

Rahul for bedlam which left two MPs injured. "Rahul Gandhi does not deserve to hold the post of the Leader of Opposition," he said. Chouhan said that the party was also pained at the treatment meted out to its tribal MP from Nagaland, S Phangnon Konyak, who alleged in the Rajya Sabha that Rahul shouted at her after coming in "close proximity" that made her feel uncomfortable during a demonstration outside the Parliament's Makar Dwar.

"Will physical strength be used in Parliament? Will musclemen and goondas come to Parliament? In which direction is the Congress taking the country's democracy?" said the BJP leader, who was flanked by Union Minister Piyush Goyal and party MPs Anurag Thakur and Anil Baluni. The Agriculture Minister said people elect their leaders to Parliament hoping they will put forth issues "with facts and logic. But the Congress is changing it."

## Odisha MPs meet Civil Aviation Min

Seek development of State's airports

PNS ■ BHUBANESWAR

A delegation of Odisha BJP MPs led by Union Education Minister Dharmendra Pradhan met Union Civil Aviation Minister K Rammoan Naidu on Thursday in New Delhi and submitted a memorandum regarding construction of new airports, airports' expansion, construction of new terminals and developing facilities for passengers in Odisha. In the memorandum, Naidu's intervention for con-



struction of a new terminal building of Biju Patnaik International Airport, Bhubaneswar, second-phase renovation of the Jharsuguda airport and setting up a new airport in Bhubaneswar and turning the Charbatana Air Force airport into a civil airport were sought. The MPs also sought the inclusion of Dhenkanal's Birsai, Sambalpur's Hirakud, Ganjam's Rangailunda, Jagatsinghpur's Paradip, Jajpur's Kalinganagar, Keonjhar's Raisuan and other airports of Odisha in the Prime Minister's visionary Udaan scheme.

## Job fraud in Cuttack

### Scammers pose as IAS officers, dupe aspirants

PNS ■ CUTTACK

A major job fraud racket which duped aspirants of crores of rupees by posing as IAS officers has been busted in Cuttack and one of the accused has been arrested. Interestingly, the main accused is a woman, who went absconding after a complaint was lodged in this connection. Based on a complaint by the victims, the Bidanasi police arrested one of the main accused. The arrested was identified as Daniel Raj from Subhadra Nagar. However, the woman, considered the mastermind of the racket, remains at large. As per police, the accused

posed as IAS officers of the Panchayati Raj and Drinking Water Department and promised job and paper leaks from unsuspecting job seekers. They later swindled money from the victims in installments and later changed their mobile numbers. Not just in Cuttack, the accused are said to have extended their fraudulent activities across multiple regions across the State and duped numerous victims. The matter came to the fore after a complaint was lodged at the Bidanasi police station, detailing deceptive activities costing victims crores of rupees under the false promise of employment though several recruitment examinations.

## Baitarani project completion by June 2025

Says CM during Keonjhar visit

PNS ■ BHUBANESWAR

Knowledge is power. The State Government is making efforts to strengthen the academic environment in the State, said Chief Minister Mohan Charan Majhi at the diamond jubilee celebration of the Mahtab High School at Champua in Keonjhar district on Thursday. Stating that education had been neglected during the previous government, Majhi said his government has detected the loopholes



and is taking steps to solve the issues. "After formation of our government, as many as 16,009 primary school teachers have been appointed to strengthen the education at the foundation level," he said. He further said the government is implementing several welfare projects for development of Keonjhar which has

remained underdeveloped despite having rich natural resources. Since the district reports high number of accidents, a trauma care centre would be set up in the medical college hospital. Besides, the government has constituted a taskforce on formation of a North Odisha Development Council to expedite economic progress of the region, including the district. The under-construction major irrigation project on Baitarani river in Keonjhar district would be completed by June 2025. School and Mass Education Minister Nityananda Gond also spoke.

# In Parliament MP Sarangi injured being 'pushed' by Rahul

**PNS ■ BHUBANESWAR**  
Amid protests over the Babasaheb Ambedkar row in Parliament on Thursday, Baleswar BJP MP Pratap Chandra Sarangi sustained injuries after being allegedly pushed by Leader of Opposition Rahul Gandhi.

On being asked about the incident, Sarangi said, "Rahul Gandhi pushed an MP who fell on me after which I fell down...I was standing near the stairs when Rahul Gandhi came and pushed an MP who then fell on me..."

Responding to the allega-



tions, Rahul Gandhi said, "This might be on your camera. I was trying to go inside through the Parliament entrance, BJP MPs were trying to stop me, push me and threaten me. So, this happened...Yes, this has happened when Mallikarjun Kharge (Congress) was also being pushed. But we do not get affected by jostling. But this is the entrance and we have the right to go in. BJP MPs were trying to stop us from going in...The central issue is that they are attacking the Constitution and insulting the memory of

Ambedkarji." However, Odisha BJP leaders slammed Rahul Gandhi for 'goondaism' in Parliament.

Meanwhile, protest in Parliament continues over the speech of Union Home Minister Amit Shah on BR Ambedkar.

While the MPs of INDI Alliance, led by Rahul Gandhi and Congress MP Priyanka Gandhi Vadra, held a protest at the Ambedkar statue in the Parliament premises, the BJP accused the Congress of distorting the Home Minister's speech to create negative publicity.

# Armed force for Similipal Tiger Reserve

**First in India**  
**PNS ■ BHUBANESWAR**  
A dedicated 131-member armed police company will be deployed for security of the Similipal Tiger Reserve in Mayurbhanj district.

According to a notification issued by Satyabrata Sahu, Additional Chief Secretary to Government, the company will be headquartered in Mayurbhanj and include one commandant, one inspector, three sub-inspectors, three assistant sub-inspectors, 30 havildars, three driver havildars, 87 constables and

three drivers with the administrative responsibility of this unit lying with the Mayurbhanj SP.

All expenses for this dedicated force will be borne by the Forest and Environment Department.

Although there exists a Special Rhino Protection Force (SRPF) that protects the one-horned rhinoceros in Kaziranga National Park in Assam, this Mayurbhanj unit is reportedly the first in the country where an armed police company is being deployed specifically for the protection of a wildlife sanc-

tuary.

Incidentally, on December 16, 2023, a dedicated Company of the Armed Police Reserve (APR) Force was sanctioned by the Governor.

The decision was made following meetings chaired by the Chief Secretary and the Additional Chief Secretary with further clarifications from the Forest, Environment & Climate Change Department.

As such, the operational control of this unit will be in consultation with the Field Director of Similipal Tiger Reserve and the Joint Task

Force (JTF).

The establishment of this force aims to bolster anti-poaching efforts, protect wildlife and forest resources and maintain law and order within the reserve.

News of this armed force formation comes just days after several cases of leopard poaching were reported in November and December from across the State and not long after tigresses Zeenat and Jamuna were released into the core area of the Similipal Tiger Reserve on separate days within the last two months.

# Odisha man flees from UP hotel without paying bill

**PNS ■ BHUBANESWAR**  
A man from Odisha allegedly fled without paying a hotel bill amounting to over Rs 2 lakh at the Taj Ganges Hotel at Varanasi in Uttar Pradesh.

He stayed at the 5-star hotel, had food and drinks for four days before fleeing without paying the bill, police said.

The accused has been identified as Sarthak Sanjay. The matter came to the fore after a complaint was lodged with the Varanasi police in this connection. As per the complaint, the hotel management demanded that Sanjay be arrested and the bills be paid as soon as possible.

According to the hotel's manager, Sanjay was a guest at the hotel from October 14 to 18 and feasted on the food

served at the restaurant, accruing room charges of Rs 1.7 lakh and an additional Rs 36,000 in food expenses, totalling Rs 2,04,521.

Hotel staffs discovered Sanjay's abrupt departure after failing to reach him on his mobile phone, which was found to be switched off. Attempts to contact him remained futile with only some of his belongings left behind in his hotel room. Hotel staffs searched his room only to find nothing more than a few clothes.

Following the incident, the hotel management has lodged a First Information Report (FIR) with local authorities, who are now probing the case.

The hotel manager has shared Sanjay's full address and mobile numbers as provided to them by the accused.

# ECoR approves 170 road over-bridges

**As Special Railway Projects**  
**PNS ■ BHUBANESWAR**  
The General Manager of East Coast Railway (ECoR) has approved as many as 170 road over-bridge (ROB) constructions as Special Railway Projects under the provisions of the Railway (Amendment) Act, 2008.

This decision is set to accelerate the execution of these vital infrastructure projects, which will help streamline the land acquisition process and enable faster approvals. By designating these projects as Special Railway Projects, the ECoR aims to facilitate smoother coordination with State authorities, ensuring timely completion and enhancing overall operational efficiency.

Out of the 170 projects, 110 will be located in Odisha while 60 will be in Andhra Pradesh. The ROB's will not only im-



prove rail infrastructure but also significantly enhance the safety and convenience of both road and rail users. The elimination of manned level crossings will reduce the risk of accidents, contribute to smoother traffic flow and allow for better mobility of train operations.

# 'Let there be same pension in country'

**PNS ■ BHUBANESWAR**  
The Provident Fund employees current lowest pension of Rs 9,000 which other government employees are getting, demanded former MP and Indian National Trade Union Congress vice-president Rama Chandra Khuntia at a dharna before the Jantar Mantar in New Delhi on Wednesday.

Khuntia said that if the law is same and the civil courts are same for everybody in the country, then why same wages and pension should not be given?



During the time of former Prime Minister Narshima Rao, the pension for Provident Fund employees was decided. From then, there has been no hike in the pension amount, So, the minimum pension of Rs 9,000 paid to the government employees should be

paid to the 60 lakh Provident Fund beneficiaries, said Khuntia, who has written to the Prime Minister, Union Finance Minister, Leader of Opposition Rahul Gandhi and Congress president Mallikarjun Kharge in this regard.

# Thinkers' Club webinar

**'Vedas shed light on contented, blissful life'**  
**PNS ■ CUTTACK**  
The 'Thinkers' Club' organised its 108<sup>th</sup> webinar which relates to the ancient Hindu scriptures. The topic was "Mystery of the Upanishads in the Bhagabat Gita."

The meeting was presided over by club president Barada Prasanna Das. Retired doctor, Gopal Chandra Dash was the chief speaker.

Dash explained the participating audience in simpler and understandable words the intricate knowledge that is associated with the Vedas, Upanishadas, Puranas and other ancient texts.

Some people believe that, these ancient texts are filled

with the knowledge of renouncing the world and leading a life of an ascetic. Rather they cover almost all endeavors of a contented and satisfied life, he said.

According to Barada Das, our ancient scriptures are translated to most of the languages of world.

Priyanka Mohanty from New Delhi, Sukanta Sahoo from London, Balmiki Nayak, Binode Mohanty from Bangalore, Srikanta Mohanty, Surekha Swain, Prem Chand Mohanty, Retired Chief Engineer Sukadeb Patri among others participated in the discussion. Club secretary Professor Umasankar Misra concluded the meeting with his remarks and vote of thanks.

# In Ganjam AAP decries Amit Shah's Ambedkar remarks

**RAJEEV RATHAN ■ BRAHMAPUR**  
Outrage has erupted nationwide following Union Home Minister Amit Shah's alleged derogatory remarks against Dr Babasaheb Ambedkar in the Lok Sabha. The Aam Aadmi Party (AAP) and other opposition parties staged a protest outside the Ganjam Collector's office here on Thursday and presented a demand note addressed to the Prime Minister through the Collector, calling for Shah's immediate resignation.

Critics have accused the BJP government of continuously undermining Constitutional values and democratic principles since assuming power. According to AAP leaders, Shah's comments represent a grave insult to Dr Ambedkar, the



Dalit community and the nation at large.

AAP Ganjam district general secretary Aditya Narayan Rath and district convenor Subash Raut condemned Shah's remarks during the protest. "Dr Ambedkar laid the foundation of our parliamentary democracy and governance system. It is unacceptable that the Home Minister would make statements undermining his legacy," Rath asserted.

The demonstration drew significant participation from local representatives and activists, including Kailash Sethi, Ramesh Behera, Ajambil Biswal, Sudarshan Mallik, Manoj Mishra, advocate Bishnu Rana, Hakim Khan, Satyaprakash Sethi, Ranjan Kumar Raut, Niranjan Patra, Debaraj Sethi and Chitta Ranjan Sahu.

# Temperatures to fall again in State

**PNS ■ BHUBANESWAR**  
Even though there is a slight respite from the cold wave prevailing in the State, temperatures may drop further in the coming days.

The Regional Office of the India Meteorological Department (IMD) here on Thursday said that owing to a low-pressure system over the southern Andaman Sea and the Bay of Bengal, the temperatures rose by a few degrees under its impact and cloudy weather now prevails over several places in many districts.

For the past few days, the sun has remained hidden until 9 am with heavy haze covering the skies, disrupting daily routines. On Wednesday night, the twin cities of Bhubaneswar and Cuttack had recorded a minimum temperature of about 19 degrees Celsius, a rise of over 5 degrees in less than four days.

Similarly, the mercury rose in Rourkela to nearly 14 degree Celsius from a chilling low of 6.8 degree. The latest forecast by the IMD expects this pattern to continue as it is stated that the temperature is very likely to rise further by 2 to 3 degrees Celsius over the next two to three days.

Meanwhile, places like Koida in Sundargarh district continue to reel under the cool wave while hill stations like G Udayagiri also face similar conditions of frost and chill.

In the next five days, light rain or thundershower over scattered locations in Puri, Ganjam, Rayagada and Gajapati districts along with a few more southern districts may happen while a majority of the places in the State will experience dry conditions.

Thereafter, temperature might even drop by two to three degrees in some places, said the IMD forecast.

# SOCIAL CANVAS

# Mentor of rights-based campaigns, Chitababu no more

Chitta Behera, a public intellectual and activist, former president of Ravenshaw College Students' Union and lawyer, Orissa High Court, died due to heart attack on December 11 at the age of 72 at a hospital in Cuttack. He was popular among many of us involved in Left student politics in the early eighties and later associated with him in the coastal environment movement to save horseshoe crab, Olive Ridley sea turtle, besides fighting for a number of other issues affecting common people in Odisha.

He was in the forefront of the campaign as a mentor to activists and community leaders for implementation of NFSA, RTI, FRA, POA Act and PESA in Odisha. He was one of the rare personalities who bonded activism with intellectual passion to interpret law and rights-based work with emotion and great commitment. As an individual he was most accessible



**MANAS JENA**

without arrogance and attitude in dealing with juniors like many us in matter of debate over any subject or issues from Marx to OSHA-Rajneesh and love poetry of Marx to anti-liquor movement or any contemporary public policy such

as LokPal or RTI. He is the most well-read person among the very countable few in Odisha who are considered to have mastered tests and classics.

He had chosen to live a non-traditional path of public life and joined students movement to become the vanguards of the proletariat to see a socialist society. He lived differently and was most active in public life till his last breath and contributed in many ways to empower common man. Many of his Ravenshaw friends of those day are also otherwise well-placed in public life.

He hailed from a freedom fighters' family in Dasipur of Mahakalapada block in Kendrapara district. His father Narottam Behera participated in freedom struggles and progressive social movements. Young Chitta Behera was attracted to SUCI's founder Comrade Sibdas Ghose's thought in his early student days.

His commitment took him to the height of becoming the general secretary of All India Democratic students Organization (AIDSO) but later, he disassociated him from the party. Even to day SUCI is still an inspiration for many but his departure from the party made many committed student leaders of eighties and nineties to leave the organisation on ideological line. However, many of the left-out did not continue with the Left ideology; rather some of them made a U turn by joining the extreme rightist political wing.

His departure from the party did not stop him from continuing in public life. He did not pursue the Marxist line of class struggle to bring social transformation which still is valid for many in the Left movement. Rather, he choose non-government organization as a safe zone with government and foreign funding for environmental advocacy, drug addiction correction and

finally a rights based approach to empower the marginalized.

It may have encouraged him further to pursue more legal matters as he devoted much of his last part of life as a lawyer in the High Court. He was laborious, most articulate in his argument and perfectly conversant with subjects he handled, with a good command over language.

The post nineties witnessed a visible all-India trend that many student leaders of eighties found a place in rights based work mostly engaged in activities of political nature to raise issues of the marginalized sections in particular and people in general. The campaign-based movements have in many ways blocked the space of progressive political parties and in some ways also complimented them differently by expanding scope of political activism without party. As he said quoting Lenin that 'there can be revolution with po-

litical consciousness which is more important than party.'

Chitta Behera's political understanding may have been influenced by the political turmoil of the nineties with Perestroika and Glasnost by Gorbachev that advocated for openness, restructuring and more freedom from regimentation by the State and political parties, especially communist parties. The economic liberalisation and reducing role of the State paved the way for non-government actors in peoples policy matters, to get engagement by IMF and World Bank as civil society actors. The same period bucked up reservation centrist identity politics with the entry of Mandal Commission and social justice as a discourse of political mobilization that was somehow a major departure from classical class politics. Social movements and campaigns on issues of social development, environment, displacement, human rights, atrocities

against Dalits, violence against women, land rights and anti-liquor etc have been visible in public activities and political parties are becoming passive participants in the events of public interest.

Chitta Behera's departure from Left politics and discontinuity from larger political discourses was a discomfort for many of his admirers who did not want to see him in a non-political role. But still he was most inspiring among a section of the civil society activists of Odisha and his name was very often visible in RTI, FRA and PESA campaigns in Odisha. With the passing away of Chitta Behera, Odisha lost a public intellectual, a passionate activist and a mentor of many rights based campaigns. He will be missed in consultations of public policy making and fondly remembered for his depth of knowledge and social commitment.

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# Row among BeMC BJD Corporators resolved

After Naveen Patnaik's intervention  
RAJEEV RATHAN  
BHUBANESWAR



Reddy, 34 Corporators and two former MLAs from Brahmapur had first been called to the Shankh Bhawan for a meeting held under the leadership of Chairman of the Coordination Committee Debi Prasad Mishra. The meeting, which also included senior leaders like former Brahmapur MLA Bikram Panda and BJD district president Ramesh Chandra Chyau Patnaik, spoke about the

organisational challenges and coordination strategies. Post the meeting, the Brahmapur delegation met party president Naveen Patnaik at his residence, where key issues were discussed. Debi Prasad Mishra noted that Naveen was briefed about the internal challenges and future development plans. The discussions centered on ensuring smooth development work and enhancing member collec-

tion within the corporation. Bikram Panda said, "All internal matters will now be resolved within the corporation meetings, and everyone will work together for the city's development. The issue with the Ramalingeswara Water Park has also been addressed." Corporators expressed satisfaction after meeting Naveen and pledged to prioritize collective efforts to ensure the success of BeMC projects.

## Oil refinery worker dies in road accident

Tension erupts at colony in Paradip  
PRASANT ROUT ■ PARADIP

A road accident claimed the life of a worker from Bihar employed at the Paradip Oil Refinery, sparking unrest in the IOCL Metal Craft Workers' Colony on Thursday. The deceased, identified as Rajendra Prasad Yadav, hailed from Kashiadi village under the Sridala police station in Nawada district, Bihar. Rajendra, who worked as a supervisor at the IOCL Metal Craft Company, was on his way to work on the evening of December 18 when he was struck by an unidentified vehicle. He was rushed to the Atharabanki Community Health Centre, but doctors declared him dead upon arrival. Following his death, tensions rose in the workers' colony. Colleagues of the de-

ceased alleged that the doctor refused to show them Rajendra's body, which aggravated the situation. In protest, workers halted operations, demanding compensation for the deceased's family. The Abhaychandpur police intervened, attempting to mediate with the agitated workers and inviting them to the police station for discussions. Negotiations were ongoing at the police station, involving Rajendra's cousin Upendra Yadav, representatives of the workers, the company manager and police officials. Upendra Yadav stated that the protest would continue until adequate compensation is provided. Workers demanded justice and support for Rajendra's family. This incident highlights the ongoing safety concerns for workers and the need for swift action to address their grievances to prevent further unrest.

## IN BRIEF

### Utkal Sammilani honoured at book fair

Bhubaneswar: The Utkal Sammilani was felicitated by Culture Minister Suryabhanji Suraj at the valedictory function of Odisha State Pushtak Mahotsav-2024 held here on Wednesday.



day. On behalf of the Utkal Sammilani, its general secretary and Mancheswar branch president Dillip Dashsharma was present. Dashsharma expressed his obligation to the Culture Department as he was felicitated in the march of former Utkal Sammilani advisor Satakadi Hota;

### Section Officer held taking bribe

Cuttack: The Vigilance police on Tuesday caught Ranjit Kumar Sadangi, Section Officer, office of Block Education Officer (BEO), Papdahandi in Nabrangpur district, while he was taking a bribe of Rs 10,000. Sadangi had demanded the bribe from a former school headmaster to process his pension papers, which were pending with him since 2011. Following the trap, simultaneous searches were launched on the residential house of Sadangi at RajuSahi, Nabrangpur and his office room.

### Tehsildar gets 3-yr RI in graft case

Cuttack: Subrat Kumar Behera, former Tehsildar and Sub-Registrar, Tarva in Subarnapur, was on Thursday convicted in a trap case by the Balangir Special Judge, Vigilance and awarded three years' rigorous imprisonment (RI). The court also directed Behera to pay a fine of Rs 30,000. On January 19, 2018, Behera had been caught while taking a bribe of Rs 20,000 from a person for registration of sale deed towards sale of his land. The Vigilance would now move the competent authority for dismissal of Behera, at present Tehasildar, Kodinga in Nabarangpur district, from service following his conviction.

### Dist level Yuba Utsav held n JSpur

Jagatsinghpur: The Nehru Yuba Kendra in collaboration with the district administration organised the district-level Yuva Utsav 2024 here on Tuesday. The Utsav featured a variety of compositions, including cultural programmes, painting, po-



etry, speeches, photography, science exhibitions, and creative writings, and provided a vibrant platform for young talents to showcase their creativity and initiatives. Speakers attending the event expressed pride in the youth of the nation, highlighting the crucial role of students in the nation's development and importance of shaping a bright future for the country. Zilla Parishad President Manoj Bhoi, Municipality Chairperson Archana Singh, ADM Sambit Routray, DIPRO Pratchi Tanaya Mohanty, and Culture Officer Dilip Jena, among others, spoke.

### Children's park opens in Brahmapur

Brahmapur: A children's park and gymnasium was inaugurated at Dashibehera Street in Ward No. 7 by Brahmapur



MLA K Anil Kumar, BeMC Mayor Sanghamitra Dalai and Deputy Mayor E Bibek Reddy and Urban Bank President R Murali Mohan along with many Corporators and local residents were present.

## In Kalahandi Class-XI girl found hanging in hostel

PNS ■ BHAWANIPATNA

A body of a Class-XI girl student was found hanging in her hostel bathroom in Bhawanipatna town of Kalahandi district on Thursday.

The deceased was identified as Tofali Naik, a native of Birikote village under Thumal Rampur block of the district, police said.

Tofali was studying in Commerce stream and staying in Indravati girl's hostel in the campus of the Maa Manikeswari University here.

When her hostel inmates found the bathroom locked from inside in the morning and no one was responding, they informed the hostel au-

thorities. Later, with the help of police, the door was broken open and Tofali's body was found hanging from the shower pipe tied with a towel. Police recovered the body and sent it for postmortem. A forensic team was sent to the spot for further investigation.

Police suspected that it was a suicide case. The university Vice-Chancellor said the police were conducting the investigation and the exact reason behind her death would be known from the postmortem report.

Tofali's father said he and his wife talked to her on Wednesday night and she was a little depressed. But he was ignorant about why she has taken such an extreme step.

## Mission to be migrant workers-free NREGA: Nuapada one of top performing dists

Gets good ranks in several parameters  
AJIT PANDA ■ NUAPADA

Nuapada district has emerged as one of the top-performing districts in Odisha under the Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act (scheme), achieving significant milestones across various parameters set by the State and Central governments.

The district has secured the second position in providing work to workers holding active job cards and also ranks



second in the State for generating work days, as recognized by the Union Ministry of Rural Development. Additionally, it holds the third position in creating work days through various State government departments.

Nuapada has further excelled in providing 100 days of work, securing the fourth po-

sition in the State. In terms of timely wage payments, the district ranks seventh for disbursing wages through Aadhaar-linked accounts. Notably, Nuapada district stands first in the State for ensuring wage payments within the stipulated time limit of seven days and for the effective use of the MNREGA Area

Officer App by officials. District Magistrate Madhusudan Dash and District Chief Development Officer Lambadar Dharua expressed their gratitude to all departmental officers and MGNRES workers for their collective efforts that contributed to these achievements. Acknowledging the district's impressive performance, the District Magistrate highlighted the potential to transform Nuapada into a migrant worker-free district with continued dedication and cooperation from all stakeholders.

## JSpur scribe's book on cybercrime released



PNS ■ JAGATSingHPUR

Chief Minister Mohan Charan Majhi released a cyber awareness book titled 'Saibar Aparadha', written by scribe Subha Kanta Padhihary in Odia, last week in his official chamber at the Odisha Assembly building in Bhubaneswar.

The book contains guidelines and advisories for creating public awareness and defence against various cyber-crime and frauds in society.

The book depicts tackling online financial crimes in banks, financial institutions, and telecom companies and highlights several significant initiatives to enhance cyber security in Odisha. "After digi-

tal upshot our youth masses, school and college students including smartphone users fall prey to cyber fraud. As a consequence the book will help them with cyber defence knowledge," said compiler of book scribe Padhihary.

The book release event was held in the presence of dignitaries such as MLAs Jaya Narayan Mishra, Amarendra Das, Sanat Kumar Gadatia, former legislator Kusum Teta, Government Deputy Chief Whip Govinda Chandra Das and English translator Rakesh Roshan Sahoo. It is the first Odia book on cyber awareness education, claims book author Padhihary, who hails from Jagatsinghpur district.

## 11th Mayurbhanj Book Fair from today



Publishers from State and outside to join  
PNS ■ BARIPADA

Preparations are presently going on here in full swing for the 11th "Mayurbhanj Pustak Mela." The annual book fair, which has earned fame and popularity among the book-lovers of northern Odisha in the last few years, is going to be held at the local Chhow Padia from December 20 to December 29.

With a view to making it an all-round success, the last preparatory meeting of the

Pustak Mela Committee, in the meantime, has been held, with a good number of litterateurs participating in it. While committee president Padmanabh Sahu presided over the meeting, secretary Manoj Dalbehera shared with the members the details of the plans and preparations for the year-end event.

Book publishers from different parts of the State and beyond are going to participate in the book fair, he disclosed.

To add colour and vigour to the Mela, different types of shops, sweet stalls and restaurants will be there, he added.

## KIIT, KISS to host inter-univ sports events



From Dec 24 to 30  
PNS ■ BHUBANESWAR

KIIT-Deemed to be University and KISS-Deemed to be University, Bhubaneswar, are all set to host the All India Inter-University Archery (Men & Women), Yogasana (Men & Women), and Athletics (Men & Women) Championships 2024-25 from December 24 to 30.

To be held under the aegis of the Association of Indian Universities (AIU), New Delhi, the grand event will bring together around 15,000 student athletes from universities across India, making it one of the most significant gatherings of sports talent in

the country. The main focus of the event is the participation of renowned Olympians, athletes from the Asian Games and Commonwealth Games, as well as several international players, making it a truly global mega sports celebration.

The event expected to be inaugurated by president of AIU Prof Vinay Kumar Pathak. Joint Secretary Sports, AIU, New Delhi Prof Baljit Singh Sekhon and Hockey legend Parattu Raveendran Sreejesh will also be gracing the occasion in the presence of KIIT, KISS founder Prof Achyuta Samanta and other dignitaries of KIIT, KISS and KIMS.

## In Kakatpur Bombs hurled at trader; 1 held



PNS ■ KAKATPUR

The Kakatpur police arrested a person in connection with hurling two crude bombs on a person on Monday. The victim who was sitting on a bike at that time got injury in a leg while the bike was completely damaged.

According to sources, the incident occurred at evening at Katakana Chhack. The injured SK Saddam has a chicken counter and the bombs were thrown at him by accused Sheikh Junaid alias Gora and his aide over past

enmity.

While one bomb hit a wall, the second one fell on the bike on which Saddam was sitting. Kakatpur police immediately reached the spot and managed to arrest one of the culprits, while another accused is absconding. On the other hand, a team led by Forensic Officer Aditya Ranjan Nayak of Puri District Forensic Science Laboratory reached the spot and conducted an investigation.

The locals have demanded immediate arrest of the other culprit.

# India's first: Human gene therapy for haemophilia

'To be very useful against some blood disorders'

PNS ■ BHUBANESWAR

In a noteworthy medical breakthrough, India's first human gene therapy with a lentiviral vector for severe haemophilia-A has been found to be successful with zero bleeding rate in a group of patients.

Haemophilia is a serious bleeding disorder caused by blood deficiency of clotting factors (factor VIII and factor IX proteins). It can lead to spontaneous bleeding episodes, joint damage and a reduced quality of life for patients and their families.

The newly designed gene therapy has shown promising results during the first phase trial on five patients, aged between 22 years and 41 years. The annualised bleeding rate

has been observed to be zero for all five patients over a cumulative follow-up of 81 months.

As part of the human gene therapy, stem cells were extracted from the blood of the patients and after certain gene corrections, the cells were again transplanted with a lentiviral vector in the respective patients.

A distinctively prepared lentiviral vector having no capacity for new infection and self-replication was used in the gene therapy. The therapy provided the body with the ability to produce factor VIII, ensuring that there is no need for repeated infusions.

Supported by the Department of Biotechnology, the first-in-human gene therapy for haemophilia-A patients has been developed by the Centre for Stem Cell Research (CSCR) at CMC, Vellore. Results of a study conducted on

the patients, who had undergone the therapy, have been published in the recent edition of the prestigious peer-reviewed New England Journal of Medicine.

Lead author of the study and head of the haematology research unit at St Johns Research Institute, Bengaluru Dr Alok Srivastava said excellent outcomes were observed in median factor-VIII levels, which were assessed during the treatment, and follow-up for a period of around two years.

"No spontaneous bleeding events occurred in any patient during or after the gene therapy. Before the therapy, all patients had reported an annualised bleeding rate of at least 20 events. The results of the clinical study reveal a new opportunity for gene therapy for haemophilia-A that can be offered to all patients, possibly at an early age," Dr

Srivastava said.

Even though haemophilia is a rare disorder, India has the world's second largest burden with a case load of 1.36 lakh. Severe haemophilia-A is usually managed with factor-VIII protein replacement or hemostatic products that prevent bleeding.

A senior scientist from Institute of Life Sciences (ILS) Bhubaneswar, Dr Rajeeb Swain said the available procedures have few takers due to the high cost of treatment and difficulty in gaining access to a patient's bloodstream through their veins, especially in children. "The gene therapy will be very useful against some blood disorders that were incurable earlier," he said.

The study was conducted at CMC and the Centre for Stem Cell Research, a unit of in stem in Bengaluru. The therapy will soon go under a second phase human trial at selected centres.

# SC questions WB on creating excess posts in teachers recruitment scam

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

The Supreme Court on Thursday questioned the West Bengal Government why it had created supernumerary posts of teachers and non-teaching staffs instead of weeding out persons who were allegedly appointed illegally. "Why did you create supernumerary posts? What was the purpose of creating that?" a bench comprising Chief Justice Sanjay Khanna and Justice Sanjay Kumar asked the West Bengal counsel. Senior advocate Rakesh Dwivedi, appearing for the West Bengal Government, informed the bench about a report by committee appointed for a thorough investigation into the selection process. The bench observed the committee's report and noted some irregularities but not as extensive as the CBI's report. "So, they found there were irregularities committed. So, in order to deal with that situation, instead of weeding out the persons who have been appointed illegally, you say,

okay create supernumerary posts?" asked the bench. "Mr Dwivedi, tell me one thing, if you find the irregularity committed, will you not throw them out first?" the CJI asked further. Dwivedi said the order had specifically mentioned it was for the appointment from the wait-listed candidates. "Correct. The reason is this, that you don't want to throw out the tainted candidates," the CJI said. The top court was hearing arguments on a batch of pleas challenging the Calcutta High Court's April 22 decision invalidating the appointment of 25,753 teachers and non-teaching staff in state-run and state-aided schools of West Bengal. On May 7, the apex court stayed the high court's order over the appointments made by the state's School Service Commission (SSC). The top court, however, permitted the CBI to continue with its probe in the matter. In its May 7 order, the apex court noted that on May 19, 2022, the state government issued an order creating 6,861 supernumerary posts of teachers and non-teaching staff for



absorbing the wait-listed candidates. The top court further noted it was directed that appointment letters to such wait-listed candidates should be issued in terms of the recommendation of the SSC subject to the outcome of the pending litigation before the high court. During the hearing on Thursday, the bench asked, "Is the state of West Bengal supporting the proposition that it is not possible to segregate the tainted from the untainted?" Dwivedi however said the state was supporting the segregation. He argued the division bench of the high court "went too far ahead" and passed a "blanket direction" that the CBI should investigate everybody and undertake custodial interrogation, if necessary. The bench also wondered why the original OMR sheets were not available. "The original paper is the OMR sheet. That is the primary evidence. If any manipulation is done on the main evidence or the main paper, it will be only visible in the OMR sheets," it said. "The issue would be, because the originals are not available, so there is no way we can authenticate whether the original OMR sheets were identical to the scanned OMR sheets which are available on the server," the bench said.

Supreme Court asked the CBI's counsel whether the probe agency was able to ascertain the date on which the OMR data was captured. "One thing is very strange that people who are not even recommended and who have not qualified... They were issued letters," the bench observed, "it was a very serious thing". During the day-long hearing, the bench heard submissions from senior advocates Kapil Sibal, Abhishek Manu Singhvi, Shyam Divan, Jaideep Gupta, Sanjay Hegde and others. The hearing would continue in January, 2025. On May 7, the apex court had said the CBI's investigation, which was ordered by the High Court, would continue but no coercive steps would be taken. The top court, however, had made it clear that the teachers and non-teaching staff of the state, whose appointments were cancelled by the high court, will have to refund the salaries and other emoluments if their recruitment was found illegal. Over 23 lakh candidates had appeared for the state level selection test-2016 for 24,640 vacant posts. A total of 25,753 appointment letters were issued against 24,640 vacancies.

# CBSE busts 29 dummy schools enrolling non-attending students

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

The Central Board of Secondary Education (CBSE) conducted a series of surprise inspections at 29 schools in Delhi, Bengaluru, Varanasi, Bihar, Gujarat and Chhattisgarh to check enrolment of 'dummy' students, officials said on Thursday. According to CBSE Secretary Himanshu Gupta, a total of 29 teams, comprising a CBSE officer and a principal from an affiliated school, conducted the inspections. "Majority of the inspected schools were found to have violated the Board's Affiliation Bye-Laws by enrolling stu-

dents beyond their actual attendance records, effectively creating 'non-attending' enrolments. Additionally, schools were found to be flouting infrastructural norms of the board," Gupta said. "CBSE has taken these violations seriously and is in the process of issuing show-cause notices to the schools found in breach of regulations. The Board is also considering legal action against the defaulting institutions," he added. The inspections were conducted on Wednesday and Thursday. Eighteen of the violating schools are in the national capital, while there are three in Varanasi, two each in Bengaluru, Patna, Ahmedabad,

Bilaspur, and Chhattisgarh. Scores of students preparing for engineering and medical entrance exams prefer to take admission to dummy schools so that they can focus solely on their preparations for the competitive exams. They do not attend classes and straight-away appear in the board examinations. Aspirants also choose dummy schools keeping in mind the quota in medical and engineering institutes available for the students from certain states. For example, the candidates who have completed classes 11 and 12 in Delhi are considered for admission to the medical colleges of the national capital under the Delhi State Quota.



# Impeachment notice against Dhankhar rejected by RS deputy chair Harivansh

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

Rajya Sabha Deputy Chairman Harivansh on Thursday dismissed the impeachment notice given by the Opposition seeking the removal of Vice President Jagdeep Dhankhar while ruling it as an act of impropriety, being severely flawed and drawn in haste to mar his reputation. In his ruling, which was tabled in the House by Rajya Sabha secretary general P C Mody, the deputy chairman said the impeachment notice is part of a design to denigrate the nation's constitutional institutions and malign the incumbent Vice President, the sources said. Deputy chairman Harivansh was entrusted to deal with the notice after Chairman Dhankhar recused himself from it. At least 60 opposition members had signed the notice for removal of Dhankhar from his post on December 10, alleging that they did not have trust in him and that he was "biased". The notice was moved by the opposition members under Article 67(b) of the Constitution as intention of a no-confidence motion against the Vice President of India. The deputy chairman ruled that the gravity of this "personally targeted" notice which is bereft of facts and aimed at securing publicity. He also held that the notice was a "misadventure" in "deliberate trivialising and demeaning" of the high constitutional office of

the Vice President of the largest democracy. Worryingly for the prestige of Parliament and its members, the notice is replete with assertions only to malign the incumbent Vice President, the deputy chairman ruled, the sources added. The deputy chairman in his ruling said the notice invoked Article 67(b) peremptorily mandates at least 14 days' prior notice for any resolution contemplating the Vice President's removal. Thus the December 10, 2024 notice of intention could permit such a resolution only after December 24, 2024, he noted, adding that the current 266th session of the Council of States, as notified on November 6, 2024, commenced on November 25 and is scheduled to conclude on December 20, 2024, as known to all signatories. In full knowledge of the situation that the resolution cannot be brought during this session, this was initiated only to set a narrative against second highest constitutional office and the Vice President, the deputy chairman said in his ruling. Harivansh also said the notice's "lack of bona fides", and subsequent events unfolding revealed "it being a calculated unwholesome attempt to tarnish publicity; run down the constitutional institution; insinuate the the personal image of the incumbent Vice President— notably, the first from the agricultural community to hold this office in the history of inde-

pendent India". Sources said the deputy chairman has also ruled that the prejudicial intent manifested through orchestration of a coordinated media campaign, including a televised press conference initiated by the LoP and Chief whip of the Indian National Congress, main opposition party, on December 12, 2024. They added that the impeachment notice was "an attempt to set afloat a narrative as if the authority was sitting over the notice of intention and thereby not discharging expectedly". The deputy chairman ruled that constitutionally after the intention of the notice to bring a resolution seeking removal of Vice President has been initiated, those taking such step had to move the resolution after 14 days, with no step called for from any quarter. Sources said Harivansh also ruled that this coupled with the Leader of Opposition's subsequent 10-point social media input on December 12, 2024, apart from being distanced from institutional decorum, "forces a conclusion to be part of a design to denigrate nation's constitutional institutions and malign the incumbent Vice President". He also cited past precedent when on September 21, 2020, then then-Chairman Venkaiah Naidu rejected a similar removal notice against the Deputy Chairman, citing procedural impropriety under a provision pari materia to Article 67(b).

# Kejriwal Questions Nitish, Naidu on Amit Shah's Ambedkar Remarks

STAFF REPORTER ■ NEW DELHI

The Aam Aadmi Party (AAP) national convener and former Delhi Chief Minister Arvind Kejriwal on Thursday wrote to key allies of the BJP, Bihar Chief Minister Nitish Kumar and Andhra Chief Minister Chandrababu Naidu, questioning their stance on home minister Amit Shah's recent remarks about architect of Constitution, Dr BR Ambedkar. In a post on X in Hindi, Kejriwal said, "The people of the country want to ask Honorable Nitish Ji and Chandrababu Naidu Ji - "Do you support the insult of

Baba Saheb done by Amit Shah Ji?" In his letter to Naidu and Kumar, Kejriwal voiced his concern over Shah's statement in Parliament over Ambedkar. "Recently in Parliament, a statement made by the home minister of the country, Amit Shah Ji, regarding Babasaheb has left the entire nation stunned," he wrote. AAP supremo referred to Shah's remark, which claimed that "chanting Ambedkar-Ambedkar has become a fashion these days," as deeply disrespectful. He said that it is "not only disrespectful but also reveals the BJP's perspective towards Babasaheb and our Constitution."

He further added, "Babasaheb Ambedkar was honoured with a 'Doctor of Laws' degree by Columbia University, he authored the Indian Constitution, and he championed equal rights for the most marginalised sections of society—how did the BJP have the audacity to make such a comment about him?" "This has hurt the sentiments of millions of people across the country. Instead of apologising for his statement, Amit Shah Ji justified it. The Prime Minister publicly supported Amit Shah Ji's remark, which added insult to injury," former Delhi CM said in his letter.

# MHA reimposed Protected Area Permit in Manipur

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ IMPHAL

The Union Ministry of Home Affairs has reimposed the Protected Area Permit in Manipur in view of security concerns arising out of influx from neighbouring countries, a state government statement said. The statement issued late on Wednesday night said, "With this reimposition, the movement of foreigners visiting Manipur will be closely monitored, and they are required to obtain the necessary Protected Area Permit (PAP) in accordance with the Foreigners (Protected Areas) Order, 1958. It said the Centre has reimposed the Protected Area Permit in Manipur, Nagaland and Mizoram. The statement also said that the state government has taken notice of the warning issued by an organisation which asked Chief Minister N Biren Singh not to travel to Senapati district to attend a cultural programme by passing through Kangpokpi district by road. It stated "Upon investigation, it has been found that no such organization (Kuki Zo Council) exists in Manipur. The origin and authenticity of this group are highly questionable." The statement said that police are actively looking into this matter and an FIR will be lodged to ascertain the true nature and intent behind such misleading activities. The government also advised the people "to exercise caution and not to pay heed to state-ments or claims from organisations of dubious origins, which have been surfacing recently with the apparent intention of creating confusion and unrest."

# Plate cutting ceremony for new ICG vessels held in Mumbai

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

Plate Cutting Ceremony for the first of the 14 Fast Patrol Vessels (FPV) and first of the six Next-Gen Offshore Patrol Vessels (NGOPV) being constructed by Mazagon Dock Shipbuilders Ltd. (MDL) for the Indian Coast Guard (ICG) took place in Mumbai on Thursday, defence ministry said here. Giving details, officials said MDL was awarded a Rs 2,684 crore contract under the 'Buy (Indian-IDDMM)' category to build these vessels which will feature advanced technologies like drones for surveillance, AI for decision-making, an Integrated Bridge System for maneuverability, and an Integrated Machinery Control System for efficient operations. These state-of-the-art vessels are being indigenously designed, developed and constructed and will be delivered over the next few years, reinforcing the Government's vision of 'Aatmanirbhar Bharat' and enhancing the nation's defence production capabilities.

# Omar Abdullah meets Amit Shah, discusses restoration of Statehood, anti-terrorism efforts

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

Jammu and Kashmir Chief Minister Omar Abdullah on Thursday met with Union Home Minister Amit Shah here and discussed various key issues, including an early restoration of statehood and involving the elected government in the fight against terrorism. Meeting Shah for the second time after taking over as the chief minister of the Union territory on October 16, Abdullah said the talks took place in a "cordial manner". "We hope to always work in a better environment so that the people of Jammu and Kashmir are benefited from this," he added. After the meeting that lasted 30 minutes, the chief minister told reporters that he briefed the Union home minister about the situation in the Union territory and the experience of his government in the last two months. "Yes, I raised the issue of early restoration of statehood with the home minister," Abdullah said, adding that "we hope that Jammu and Kashmir gets its statehood restored soon". On whether the talks included the militancy situation in the Union territory, he said secu-



J&K CM Omar Abdullah arrives to meet Union Home Minister Amit Shah. PTI

urity and law and order are the responsibility of the lieutenant governor. "I have always said and I told the home minister that 'you cannot fight militancy and terrorism in a vacuum, you will have to take the public of Jammu and Kashmir in confidence...They will also have to be brought into this battle, and for that, you will have to take into confidence their elected representatives and their elected government,'" Abdullah said. The chief minister said the talks did not include the framing of business rules for the division of powers between the elected government and the lieutenant governor's office and made it clear that the Centre had no role in it. "Business rules have nothing to do with the government of India. We have to decide it and the Cabinet has to approve it. The Cabinet sub-committee will finalise it and then, we will send it to the LG for approval," he said. Abdullah will be attending the GST meeting in Rajasthan's Jaipur on December 20. To a question about the proposed hike of 28 per cent on handloom products, he said, "I have not seen such a proposal. If it comes, we will contest it. Not only us, other states will be affected too."

# India reiterates concerns over violence against minorities in Bangladesh

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

India on Thursday said it is concerned over incidents of violence against Hindus and other minorities in Bangladesh and asserted that the primary responsibility to protect their life and liberty rests with the interim government in Dhaka. These remarks by Minister of State for External Affairs Kirti Vardhan Singh in Rajya Sabha came days after Foreign Secretary Vikram Misri travelled to Dhaka and conveyed New Delhi's concerns on the matter to the top political brass of Bangladesh's interim government. India continues to monitor the situation related to the minorities in Bangladesh closely, he said, adding, the government in that country has reportedly arrested 70 people and filed 88 cases in connection with violence involving minorities. "India's concerns regarding the need to ensure safety and protection of Hindus and all other minority communities in Bangladesh have been conveyed and reiterated to the authorities of the Interim gov-

ernment of Bangladesh on various occasions, including at the highest level," Singh said. The minister made the remarks responding to separate questions on the situation in Bangladesh. "The high commission of India in Dhaka also continues to be in regular touch with the authorities of Bangladesh with regard to the welfare of minorities," he said. "The primary responsibility for the protection of life and liberty of all citizens of Bangladesh, including minorities, rests with the government of Bangladesh," he added. Singh also cited instances of attacks on Hindus and other minorities, and at their homes, businesses, and temples across Bangladesh. "Reports of attacks on temples and puja mandaps also came to light during the recent Durga Puja festival in Bangladesh," he said. "The government had expressed its serious concerns regarding the attack on a Puja mandap in Tantibazar, Dhaka and theft at

the Jeshoreshwari Kali temple at Satkhira during Durga Puja," Singh said. Following these attacks, the Bangladesh government issued instructions for providing special security, including deployment of army and Border Guards, to ensure peaceful celebrations of Durga Puja, he said. The minister said Bangladesh is expected to take all necessary measures to ensure safety and welfare of Hindus and other minorities. "The same has also been reiterated during the visit of the foreign secretary to Bangladesh on December 9," Singh said. Ties between India and Bangladesh came under strain after deposed prime minister Sheikh Hasina was forced to leave the country in the face of a massive anti-government protest in August. Nobel Peace laureate Muhammad Yunus came to power days after Hasina took shelter in India. The relations deteriorated further in recent weeks over attacks on the Hindus and the arrest of Hindu monk Chinmoy Krishna Das.

# Nadda drags ruckus over Ambedkar in Lok Sabha after Opposition corners Shah

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

The Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) on Thursday launched a fresh attack on the Congress over its treatment of Dr BR Ambedkar as the ruling party's president JP Nadda asked the opposition party to "stop lying". Nadda reiterated his party's accusations against the Congress for insulting and ignoring Ambedkar and his legacy, and cited the work undertaken by the Narendra Modi government to honour his legacy. His social media posts came amid the Opposition's attack on home minister Amit Shah for allegedly insulting Ambedkar during his Rajya Sabha speech. He told the Congress and its "rotten ecosystem" that they lost Lok Sabha polls for a third consecutive time in June and performed badly in a number of assembly polls. "In November, you lost badly in Maharashtra. At least now stop lying. Because your lies will not go unchecked. The truth will always win. Jai Bhim," he

said. Shah has in turn accused the Congress of distorting his remarks and has received strong support from the ruling party, including Prime Minister Modi. Nadda claimed the Congress and its rotten ecosystem have been exposed since Wednesday by all those who believe in truth, democracy and social justice. He said, "So, I thought of sharing some facts to illustrate the deep Congress hate towards Dr Ambedkar. Pandit Nehru hated Dr Ambedkar. Yes, it was unfiltered hate. That is why Pandit Nehru got Dr. Ambedkar defeated twice." Nehru, he alleged, was proudly writing to people overseas, expressing joy that Ambedkar was no longer in the Cabinet. Referring to the house in Alipur Road in the national Capital where he breathed his last, Nadda said it should have been converted into a grand memorial that would inspire people long back. But "Ambedkar-hating Congress" did nothing and it was the BJP-led National Democratic Alliance government which

developed it into an "iconic place". The "self-proclaimed custodians" of social justice in the Congress made empty promises of making a grand memorial at "Chaitya Bhoomi", where he was cremated, in Mumbai, but it was the Modi government which ensured in 2015 that the land transfer was done. Modi prayed there twice in recent years, Nadda added. The BJP president also shared a post, now deleted, allegedly of Congress leader Sam Pitroda in which he had rated Nehru's contribution to the Constitution bigger than Ambedkar. Nadda said, "The most loyal courtier of the Dynasty spelt out what the Congress really thinks of Dr. Ambedkar - ?that he had no role in the making of our Constitution. Some screenshots indeed speak a thousand words." The post can be deleted but their real feelings will never go, he added. He also highlighted the Modi government's development of the Ambedkar International Centre against the Congress' alleged neglect to make his point.

# Mahayuti pays tributes to Hegdewar amidst internal disquiet over RSS legacy



Maharashtra CM Devendra Fadnis, Deputy CM Ajit Pawar and Eknath Shinde during a group photo session in Nagpur on Thursday.

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ MUMBAI

BJP leader Chitra Wagh on Thursday said there should not be any objection if Maharashtra Deputy Chief Minister Ajit Pawar visits the RSS founder's memorial as the Sangh had contributed to the victory of all Mahayuti allies. The Mahayuti, comprising the BJP, Eknath Shinde-led Shiv Sena and Ajit Pawar's NCP, secured a landslide victory in the Maharashtra assembly elections last month by securing 230 of the 288 seats. On Thursday, Chief Minister Devendra Fadnis, Deputy CM Shinde, several other BJP and Shiv Sena leaders as well as some NCP legislators visited the memorial of RSS founder Dr K B Hegdewar at Reshimbagh in Nagpur during the legislature session underway in the city. After visiting the memorial, Shinde said no one can ignore the Rashtriya

Swayamsevak Sangh's (RSS) contribution to nation-building and that the ideologies of the Sangh Parivar and Shiv Sena are same. Ajit Pawar did not visit the memorial, though two legislators of his party went there. Speaking to reporters during her visit to Hegdewar's memorial, BJP MLC Chitra Wagh said there should not be any problem with NCP leaders, including Ajit Pawar, visiting Reshimbagh. "They (RSS) indeed have played a crucial role. Nobody can deny the contribution of the RSS in winning so many seats. The RSS not only helped the BJP candidates to win but even worked in support of its allies during the assembly polls," she said. Wagh also said it was important to embrace positive ideologies. "It is a good thing to embrace a good school of thought. Hence, I feel they (NCP leaders) will visit the RSS headquarters. The RSS worked for the

Mahayuti and made a significant contribution. Neither the NCP nor Shiv Sena can ever deny the contribution of the RSS," she added. When Shiv Sena leader Dada Bhuse was asked about Pawar skipping the visit, he said, "I am a junior party worker; I cannot comment on his decision." Everybody has the right to decide whether to visit such places or not, he said. "But it is true that the RSS definitely played a key role and helped the Mahayuti in the state polls," Bhuse added. NCP MLA Raju Karemore, who visited Hegdewar's memorial, said he went there on his own and not on the instruction of his party. "The chief whip of the BJP in the legislative assembly had circulated messages encouraging visits to the place, which prompted me to go there," he said.

## Shinde claims RSS teaches selfless service and unity

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ MUMBAI

Maharashtra Deputy Chief Minister Eknath Shinde paid tributes at the memorial of RSS founder Dr KB Hegdewar here on Thursday and said no one can ignore the Sangh's contribution to nation-building. The ideologies of the Sangh Parivar and Shiv Sena are same, Shinde told reporters after visiting the Dr Hegdewar Smruti Mandir at Reshimbagh in Nagpur, where Chief Minister Devendra Fadnis and other leaders of the ruling allies BJP and Shiv Sena also paid respects. NCP leader and Deputy CM Ajit Pawar, who outfit is also a constituent of the ruling Mahayuti, was not present, while two of his party legislators visited the memorial. The winter session of the state legislature is currently underway in Nagpur. As an organisation, the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS) works selflessly, Shinde said. The Shiv Sena head further said that he earlier also visited Hegdewar's memorial and had a relation with the Sangh Parivar since childhood. "I started with a Sangh shakha and then with a Shiv Sena shakha, Shiv Sena chief Balasaheb Thackeray's ideology and Anand Dighe sahab's teachings.

# Police bust call center in Gurugram for cheating US nationals, 18 arrested

STAFF REPORTER ■ GURUGRAM

Cyber crime team of the Gurugram police busted an illegal call centre operating at Plot No 270 Udyog Vihar Phase-2 in Gurugram on Wednesday. The call centre mostly used to cheat US nationals on the pretext of technical support by creating a fake website of an accounting company, police said on Thursday. According to the police, a team of the cyber crime police station led by ACP (cybercrime) Priyanshu Diwan raided the call centre following a tip-off. During the raid, the police arrested 18 people, including 8 women and the call centre operator, in connection with the matter and seized 17 CPUs along with other electronic gadgets. The arrested accused have been identified as Gaurav Bakshi, Debashish Chatterjee, Anmol, Kanishk, Ajeesh Mathew, Kunal, Devender Devgan, Hitesh Malik, Rohit Singh, Aryaman Thakur, Nidhi, Sita, Muskan Rajput, Bhavana, Shivani, Lahinganhath Haikip Sharon and Nagmathingcho. The police team registered a case against the accused under sections 318 (4), 319 BNS and IT Act in Police Station Cyber Crime South, Gurugram and arrested the accused as per the rules in the case. During interrogation, it was found that the accused, Gaurav Bakshi, is the operator of this call centre, and he runs this call centre along with his companions at the behest of his other partner. Bakshi used to get a salary of about Rs 1.5 lakh and his other employees used to get a salary of about Rs 30,000 per month.

"We received specific inputs that a fake call centre had cheated several US nationals on the pretext of technical support. The youths were employed at the call centre, which was being operated without a license issued by the Department of Telecommunications (DOT)," said Priyanshu Diwan, ACP (Cyber Crime). The accused was allegedly running this illegal call centre with his fellow accused since February 2024. The accused were cheating foreign nationals in the name of providing customer care service of Software Support/Accounting Support. The accused used to run ads on Google from the customer care helpline number of a famous company. When foreign nationals call on the toll-free number, the call comes to their call centre through VCL Dialer, 3CX Dialer. "The accused introduced themselves as representatives of a famous company and got remote access to the computer system of foreign nationals by getting them to download screen-sharing applications in their system. In the name of solving their problem, they used to get 200-1000 dollars from them through a payment gateway. The accused used to commit the fraud by creating a phishing website of an accounting company named Quick Books," Diwan added. "The matter is under investigation. How the accused was operating the fake call centre is part of an investigation. The involvement of other people cannot be ruled out. The culprits are on police remand for further questioning," the officer said. An FIR under relevant sections of the Indian Penal Code (IPC) and the IT Act has been registered at the Cyber Crime South police station..

## CM Himanta calls for stronger ties with Bhutan during visit

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ GUWAHATI

Assam Chief Minister Himanta Biswa Sarma on Thursday reiterated the commitment of ensuring that the northeastern state plays a pivotal role in strengthening the bond between India and Bhutan. Sarma made the remarks as he concluded his four-day trip to the neighbouring country on Thursday. "As Riniki and I conclude our unforgettable visit to Bhutan, we extend our heartfelt gratitude to His Majesty Jigme Khesar Namgyel Wangchuck and the wonderful people of Bhutan for their warmth and generosity," Sarma wrote on X. "We return home with cherished memories, invaluable learnings and a renewed commitment to ensuring that Assam plays a pivotal role in strengthening the deep bond between Bharat and Bhutan," he added. Sarma, who was accompanied by his wife Riniki Bhuyan Sharma, was bid farewell at the airport by Bhutan's Foreign Minister DN Dhungyel.

# Longest surviving Hizbul Mujahideen commander killed in Kashmir encounter

MOHIT KANDHARI ■ JAMMU

A joint team of security forces Thursday killed one of the longest surviving terrorist commanders belonging to the Pro-Pakistan Hizbul Mujahideen terrorist outfit along with four others during a six-hour-long fierce gunfight in the Kadder village of Behibagh area in South Kashmir's Kulgam district. Two army jawans also received injuries during the successful operation as no other collateral damage was reported from the ground zero of the encounter site. To prevent any civilian from getting trapped during the gunfight the security forces had safely evacuated local villagers to safety before killing the group of terrorists holed up inside a safe hideout. Five AK-47 rifles, 20 magazines, two grenades and other arms and ammunition have been recovered from the encounter site. Confirming the killing of a top Hizbul Mujahideen Commander Inspector General of Police, Kashmir range, VK Birdi said Hizbul Commander Farooq Ahmed Bhat, also known as Farooq Nali, a resident of Yaripora in Kulgam, was among those killed in the encounter in the Kadder area of the district. According to police records, Farooq Nali had been active since 2015 and was one of the longest-surviving terrorists. He was categorised as "A++". He played a key role in radicalizing local youth and reviving terrorist activities in South Kashmir. Addressing a press briefing after the encounter was called off Brigadier Anirudh Chauhan, Commander of 2 Sector RR said, "Five top active terrorists



Different identity documents seized from terrorists killed during the encounter on Thursday.

of Hizbul Mujahideen were neutralized in the Kadder area of Kulgam. All five terrorists were involved in many criminal and terrorist activities. The Army officer claimed Hizbul Mujahideen commander Farooq Bhat played a big role in reviving terrorism in South Kashmir. With the neutralization of these 5 terrorists, we will gain speed in eliminating terrorism in J&K. The army officer said during this operation, our two security personnel suffered bullet injuries. They are being treated at 92 Base Hospital. The army officer also acknowledged the role of the

people of Kulgam for the success of this operation..." According to police records, Farooq Bhat took control of the HM outfit after the death of Hizbul Mujahideen operational commander Saifullah in a 2020 gunbattle in Srinagar. Four other slain terrorists have been identified as Mushtaq Itoo, active since March 2020, from Mohamad Pora, Kulgam, Adil Hussain, active since August 2023, from Khandipora, Mohd Irfan, active since June 2022 from Hawoorah and Yassir Javaid Bhat from Yaripora.



SP MLAs holding portraits of BR Ambedkar arrive to attend the Winter Session of UP Assembly on Thursday.

# Opposition protests force abrupt end to UP Assembly Winter Session

BISWAJEET BANERJEE ■ LUCKNOW

For the first time since the formation of the Yogi Adityanath-led Uttar Pradesh government, the winter session of the state assembly was adjourned without the Chief Minister's customary address. The abrupt conclusion came amid continuous disruptions led by Samajwadi Party (SP) and Congress MLAs. The five-day session, which began with high expectations, was marked by persistent protests from the opposition. On the first two days, CM Yogi Adityanath addressed the House despite the commotion. However, on the third day, as he was scheduled to speak again, opposition legislators intensified their protests, forcing Assembly Speaker

Satish Mahana to adjourn proceedings till 11 a.m. on Thursday. The session resumed on Thursday morning but soon descended into chaos as SP MLAs staged a sit-in, raising slogans and holding placards. Despite the protests, Finance Minister Suresh Khanna presented the supplementary budget proposal. With the opposition refusing to engage in discussions, the budget was passed unanimously without debate. "The opposition came with the sole intention of disrupting the House," Khanna remarked, accusing the SP and Congress of stalling crucial discussions, including those on the upcoming Maha Kumbh. Adding fuel to the fire, opposition members protested against Union Home Minister Amit Shah's remarks in the

Rajya Sabha, which they termed disrespectful toward Dr. B.R. Ambedkar. Shah had stated, "It has become a fashion to repeatedly invoke Ambedkar's name... Had you taken God's name as often, you would have attained heaven for seven lives." This comment triggered demands from the opposition for Shah's resignation. During the protests, Speaker Mahana admonished SP legislators for holding an inverted portrait of Ambedkar, questioning their sincerity toward respecting the Dalit icon. "If you cannot even hold Baba Saheb's photo straight, what respect will you show him?" he asked. With no end to the disruptions in sight, Parliamentary Affairs Minister Suresh Khanna urged the Speaker to adjourn the session indefinitely.

# Navy and Coast Guard continue search and rescue efforts in Mumbai boat collision, two still missing

TN RAGHUNATHA ■ MUMBAI

A day after the boat disaster off the Gateway of India that claimed 13 lives, the ships and aircraft of the Indian Navy and Indian Coast Guard on Thursday continued their search for two persons - an adult male and a male child - who went missing after a Navy speed boat collided with a passenger ferry in the Arabian Sea. Within hours after the boat tragedy, the Indian Navy set up a Board of Inquiry into the mishap to establish the circumstances leading to the mid-sea collision and to fix the responsibility. Of the 113 persons on board both the vessels, 13 persons drowned while 98 others, including two injured, were rescued, after a Navy speed boat undergoing engine trials lost control and collided with a passenger ferry Neel Kamal off Karanja, Mumbai at 4 pm on Thursday. The ferry was carrying passengers from Gateway of India to Elephanta Island at the time of mishap.

The two missing passengers have been identified as 43-year-old Hansraj Bhati and seven-year-old Johan Mohammad Nisar Ahmed Pathan. A defence official said that Indian Navy and the Coast Guard deployed their vessels and their helicopters to search the two persons who were thrown into the waters after the mid-sea collision between a naval speed boat and a ferry in the water channel near the tiny Butcher Island oil terminal, 5 km from the Gateway of India. "Search and rescue efforts have continued throughout the intervening night of Wednesday and Thursday in the vicinity of the accident. Search and rescue operations are in progress by eight Navy craft, a naval helicopter and a Coast Guard vessel to search for the two missing persons," a defence spokesperson said. The rescued persons are still in different hospitals of Mumbai and Raigad district. While the condition of 100 is now stable. Official sources said that 57 survivors are currently in JNPA Hospital, 24 in Naval

Dockyard medical facility, 13 in INHS Sanghani (Karanja), 10 in St. George Hospital, 12 in a hospital on the mainland at Karanja and one in INHS Ashvini Hospital. Eight survivors who recovered have been discharged from different hospitals. All the persons killed in the boat disaster have been identified. Of those 13 killed in the boat tragedy, there were two minors Nidhish Rakesh Ahire (8 year-old boy from Nashik), Mahi Sairam Pavra (3-year-old girl from Dhule), five women -- Harshada Rakesh Ahire (31 years, Nashik), Shafina Ashraf Pathan (34 years from Goa), Rama Ratidevi Gupta (50 years from Palghar) and Pragnya Vinod Kamble (39 years from Navi Mumbai). Meanwhile, acting on a complaint lodged by survivor Natharam Chaudhary, the Colaba police have registered an FIR under sections 106(1), 125 (a) (b), 282, 324 (3)(5) of Bharatiya Nyay Sanhita has been registered in Colaba police station against people responsible for the tragedy.

# Sawant defends self, government of graft charges in Goa Liberation Day address

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ PANAJI

Chief Minister Pramod Sawant greeted people on Goa's Liberation Day on Thursday and said his government was progressing personal criticism, while overcoming personal criticism, prejudices and "tool kit of jealousy". Sawant's remarks come in the wake of a personal attack on him and his wife by the opposition leaders in connection with a cash-for-jobs scam in the state. Addressing the Goa Liberation Day function in Panaji, Sawant also said his government was working towards making the dream of the freedom fighters a reality through an all-inclusive growth. The Goa Liberation Day is celebrated on December 19

every year to mark the success of 'Operation Vijay' undertaken by the armed forces to liberate the state from the Portuguese in 1961. "We are providing a positive governance surpassing personal criticism, preconceived notions, and tool kit of jealousy," Sawant said. Notably, Pramod Sawant's wife Sulakshana Sawant filed a defamation suit against AAP leader Sanjay Singh on Tuesday in a court in North Goa. She has sought Rs 100 crore in damages from the AAP politician for allegedly naming her in the cash-for-jobs scam. The CM said, "Sabka saath, sabka vikas, sabka vishwas and sabka prayas" are the hallmark of the Bharatiya Janata Party's rule in the coastal state, as he addressed a gathering comprising state

ministers, people from various sections of the society and students. Sawant further said his government was working proactively so that the state gets justice on the issue of the Mhadei river diversion through the central government authority PRAWAH. The Centre constituted the Progressive River Authority for Water and Harmony (PRAWAH) last year to enable the compliance and implementation of the award and decisions of the Mahadayi Water Disputes Tribunal. The Mhadei River originates in Karnataka and runs through Maharashtra into Goa, meeting the Arabian Sea near Panaji. Goa and Karnataka are locked in a dispute over the diversion of the river water.

Sawant said steps have also been taken to ensure resumption of the iron ore mining in Goa through sustainable and environment-friendly way, which will provide employment opportunities to thousands of youth living in the mineral rich belt of the state, he said. "We have also focussed on the ease of doing business, encouraging the new businesses and existing industries," the chief minister said. He said the state government was working towards women empowerment by undertaking various initiatives under the Centre's Goa State Rural Livelihood Mission and Deen Dayal Antodaya Yojana, under which the self-help groups are provided assistance for self-employment.



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PAPER WITH PASSION

## Clamour for caste census

While the exercise is fraught with challenges, its potential to uplift marginalised communities cannot be ignored

The demand for a caste census in India has been a recurring topic of debate, reflecting the country's complex socio-political fabric. While proponents emphasise its importance for targeted development and policy-making, critics raise concerns about its potential to exacerbate social divisions. The nuanced arguments surrounding this issue highlight both its necessity and its challenges. The caste census refers to the systematic collection of data on the caste composition of the population. India has not conducted such a comprehensive exercise since 1931, even though caste remains a significant determinant of socio-economic status in the country. Proponents of the caste census argue that it is essential for ensuring equitable development, especially for historically marginalised communities. As Lok Janshakti Party (Ram Vilas) leader Chirag Paswan points out, specific data on caste populations is critical for designing and allocating funds for community-based development schemes. Paswan's endorsement of the caste census is pragmatic. However, he also issues a cautionary note: while the government should collect such data, making it public might deepen societal divisions by reinforcing caste identities.

A caste census would provide granular data on the socio-economic conditions of various communities. This information is crucial for crafting effective affirmative action policies and welfare programmes. Historical injustices and systemic exclusion of certain communities require targeted interventions. A caste census would help identify the actual beneficiaries of reservation policies and assess whether they are achieving the intended outcomes. The Opposition, including Congress leader Rahul Gandhi, has emphasised that a caste census is a step toward realising the promise of social justice. By understanding the precise demographic composition, governments can ensure proportional representation and resource allocation. But having said that, making caste census data public could lead to heightened caste consciousness and further fragment society. India's socio-political landscape is already fraught with identity-based divisions, and the misuse of such data could deepen these fault lines. There is a legitimate fear that caste census findings might be weaponised for political gain. Instead of addressing inequities, the data could fuel caste-based mobilisations, electoral strategies and even conflicts. This aspect must be looked into and safeguarded before taking up this mammoth exercise. Besides, conducting a caste census is a massive logistical challenge. The accuracy of data collection and classification would be critical, as any errors could lead to disputes and undermine the credibility of the exercise. The caste census is essential and must be conducted, but it requires careful attention to ensure its accuracy and to address potential repercussions.

### PICTALK



A person dressed as Santa Claus rows a boat as seagulls fly past, near Causeway of Tapi River in Surat. PTI

## Vipul Nautiyal: Chandan Mitra's calamity reporter

Whether it was crafting flawless editorial pages or recounting tales of his newsroom days, Vipul Nautiyal's legacy is one of dedication, warmth and passion for his craft

He flaunted the title "calamity reporter" with pride as he vividly narrated the story behind how Dr Chandan Mitra, editor-in-chief of The Pioneer, gave him the name. Known to friends as Nauty (that's how he spelled it) and to juniors as Vipul Sir, or Nauty Sir, I was introduced to him in August 2021, while writing a test for an editorial role at The Pioneer. I hadn't met him before, but had heard things about him — his co-workers respected him, but they feared him even more. It was my first stint in the media and I was nervous.

I was supposed to join his team and work on the Edit and Oped pages. By the time I was almost done with the test, I was looking around wondering who Mr Nautiyal could be. That was when an old-looking fellow, who was humbly dressed and had uncombed hair and a grey beard, looked at me and said: "Cheating kara du"? I laughed it off. This couldn't have been the Vipul Nautiyal I had been told about. But then an HR executive arrived and my paper was handed over to him. I was interviewed and



more attention, they had to be perfectly symmetric — a habit that I picked involuntarily. This was the Vipul effect. He once recounted an incident from his days at The Times of India, when Dr Mitra had asked him to return to The Pioneer. Later, during the exit interview at TOI, when Mr Nautiyal was asked "TOI chhod kar Pioneer kaun jata hai?" (Who leaves TOI to join Pioneer) he replied with lit-up eyes: "Jisko Chandan Mitra bulata hai." He knew how to efficiently run a desk and bring the team up to speed with some flair. A senior editor at TOI says, "Vipul Sir could beat you in a game of table tennis single-handedly, with his favourite drink in his other hand." Mr Nautiyal often mentioned that he received job offers from almost all leading media houses, except for The Indian Express, for which, he said, he waited for quite some time. In my five months of working with him, I never saw him snap at anybody — unless somebody caught him on the phone during work hours. He was known to be unpredictable at times. But he was there for his colleagues —

those who worked with him will agree. His way of getting his point across was his own. When I had to negotiate my salary while joining TOI — where he had referred me — he told me to ask for a massive raise, saying: "Purse bhaley hi HR ke paas hai, but tu journalist hai, boli tu lagayega" (Even though the purse is with HR, you are a journalist, so you will call the shots). He had more confidence in me than I had in myself. Those who teamed up with him absorbed a great deal of wisdom in all walks of life. That's how Vipul Nautiyal was. Besides being an exceptional storyteller, he had a song, a sher or an anecdote for almost every occasion. He was a fanboy when it came to Dev Anand. He often wrote an editorial piece on Dev Sahab's birth anniversary. He was proud of the fact that he had seen Guide several times. He would often play Mohammed Rafi songs or Mehdi Hassan ghazals, lower the volume, and write the edit columns.

(The writer is a former staffer of The Pioneer; views are personal)

## Victory Day: Bangladesh's legacy of liberation

Victory Day serves as both a celebration of freedom and a reminder of the challenges ahead in safeguarding its democratic and inclusive aspirations



SANTHOSH MATHEW

Victory Day holds profound significance for Bangladesh, marking its liberation and the triumph over the Pakistan Armed Forces in the Bangladesh Liberation War of 1971. Celebrated annually on December 16, the day symbolises the birth of a sovereign state and the culmination of a long struggle for self-determination, where India played the pivotal role of midwife in the creation of the newest state in South Asia. The Bangladesh Liberation War was not merely a conflict confined to its borders but a defining moment in the geopolitics of the region. The roots of this war were entrenched in the systemic neglect and exploitation of East Pakistan by the ruling elite of West Pakistan.



Decades of economic disparity, cultural suppression, and political disenfranchisement laid the foundation for a movement demanding autonomy, which was catalyzed by the brutal military crackdown on March 25, 1971. Operation Searchlight unleashed a reign of terror that sought to silence the aspirations of millions but instead ignited a people's resistance. Sheikh Mujibur Rahman, the towering leader of the Awami League, became the symbol of this resistance. His leadership united the Bengali population, and his call for independence resonated with millions who yearned for freedom. As the conflict escalated, millions of refugees poured into India, creating a humanitarian crisis of unparalleled magnitude. India's intervention under the leadership of Prime Minister Indira Gandhi was both a strategic and moral decision. The Indian Armed Forces, working in coordination with the Mukti Bahini, mounted a joint operation that decisively defeated the Pakistani forces within a mere 13 days. The surrender of the Pakistani military on December 16, 1971, in Dhaka is one of the most iconic moments in modern history. The image of General AAK Niazi signing the Instrument of Surrender in the presence of Lieutenant General Jagjit Singh Aurora remains etched in the collective memory of both nations. This marked not

only the liberation of Bangladesh but also a significant blow to the two-nation theory that had led to the partition of the Indian subcontinent in 1947. The emergence of Bangladesh was hailed globally, but it also underscored the complexities of international politics. The then-US President Richard Nixon and his National Security Advisor Henry Kissinger, who had been staunch supporters of Pakistan due to Cold War dynamics, were caught off guard. Nixon's infamous remark about South Asia becoming an "international basket case" was a harsh reflection of the scepticism with which the new nation was viewed. Yet, Bangladesh defied the odds and began its journey toward self-reliance and growth. Over the past five decades, Bangladesh has transformed remarkably, earning the moniker "the garment factory of the world." Despite initial challenges, including political instability, natural disasters, and infrastructural deficits, Bangladesh has managed to sustain an impressive growth trajectory. Today, Bangladesh stands as a significant player in South Asia, with a GDP growth rate that often outpaces its neighbours. The country's success in achieving many of the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals, particularly in areas such as gender

**BANGLADESH DEFIED THE ODDS AND BEGAN ITS JOURNEY TOWARD SELF-RELIANCE AND GROWTH. OVER THE PAST FIVE DECADES, BANGLADESH HAS TRANSFORMED REMARKABLY, EARNING THE MONIKER "THE GARMENT FACTORY OF THE WORLD"**

equality, education and healthcare, is commendable. It has become a model for other developing nations, showcasing how strategic planning and a focus on human development can lead to sustained progress. Victory Day is not just a celebration of past triumphs but also a moment to reflect on the challenges and opportunities ahead. The geopolitical landscape of South Asia has evolved significantly since 1971. While the ties with India remain strong, underpinned by historical bonds and mutual interests, Bangladesh has also embraced China's Belt and Road Initiative, balancing its foreign policy to maximise economic benefits. Victory Day also underscores the importance of remembering the sacrifices that led to Bangladesh's independence. The war claimed the lives of countless freedom fighters and civilians, whose bravery and resilience paved the way for a new nation. The liberation struggle also left deep scars, including the atrocities committed by the Pakistani military, which continue to evoke strong emotions. Efforts to bring justice through war crimes tribunals and to preserve the memory of the Liberation War are vital in honouring this legacy. As Bangladesh celebrates another Victory Day, it does so as a nation that has defied expectations and charted its path to

progress. The dreams of Sheikh Mujibur Rahman and the Mukti Bahini have been realised in many ways, with a vibrant democracy, a thriving economy, and a resilient population. However, recent political instability has cast a shadow over Bangladesh's progress. The fall of Sheikh Hasina's Awami League, after years of dominance, has left a power vacuum, fueling uncertainty and unrest. Political polarisation has deepened, and concerns over democratic backsliding have surfaced. The status of minorities, particularly Hindus and indigenous groups, remains precarious, with reports of rising communal tensions and targeted violence. Ensuring minority rights and fostering inclusivity will be critical for Bangladesh to maintain its social fabric and democratic principles. The anniversary of Victory Day is a reminder of the enduring spirit of a people who fought for their right to self-determination and emerged victorious against overwhelming odds. It is a celebration of freedom, a tribute to those who made the ultimate sacrifice, and a pledge to build a future worthy of their dreams. Bangladesh's story, from a war-torn newborn state to a thriving economy, stands as a beacon of hope and inspiration, not just for South Asia but for the world. (The writer is an associate professor; views are personal)

### LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

#### G7 FACES CRISES

Madam — The 'Group of Seven' or G7 countries are considered to be the group of the richest countries in the world. But after the Covid pandemic, their economic condition also seems to be almost in shambles. Especially three of those countries can be named here, in which political turmoil has been seen within the last 10 days. Those countries are Germany, the biggest economic power in Europe. France, the third biggest economy there, and the North American country Canada. In France, four prime ministers have been sworn in within the last one year. Emmanuel Macron's government can fall at any time. German Chancellor Olaf Scholz had announced the dismissal of Finance Minister Christian Lindner, citing breach of trust and economic policy differences. Now he himself has lost the vote of confidence. Due to which elections will be held again there in the coming February. On the other hand, Canada's Finance Minister Chrystia Freeland, has resigned from her post, citing disagreement with Prime Minister Justin Trudeau. She has expressed disagreement on how to respond to the tariff threat of incoming President Donald Trump. Meaning, here too the main reason for instability is 'economic and financial' problems. France has been affected by Europe's energy crisis and high interest rates, which have weakened the country. In 2024, Europe's largest economy will be stuck in recession for the second consecutive year. More and more businesses are under pressure and are suffering from falling sales, high energy costs and taxes, and Germany's overly cumbersome bureaucracy. Starting from 2022, per capita production in Canada has declined in six of the last seven quarters. Unemployment has also increased by a full percentage point compared to last year. Jang Bahadur Singh | Jamshedpur

#### R Ashwin retires from international cricket



Ravichandran Ashwin, India's second-highest Test wicket-taker (only behind Anil Kumble's 619 wickets), announced his retirement from international cricket at the age of 38. He expressed gratitude to his teammates and the BCCI, highlighting his fulfilling career. While he feels he still has more to offer, he'll focus on club-level cricket. Ashwin concluded his international career with 537 Test wickets, 156 ODI wickets and 72 T20I wickets. His crick-

et journey, from a fringe player in the 2011 World Cup to one of India's greatest match-winners, has been marked by trials, triumphs, and unwavering dedication. Despite overseas challenges and controversies, his innovative approach and analytical mind have solidified his place in cricketing history. The 38-year-old Ashwin, with 537 Test wickets and six centuries, will continue playing franchise cricket, notably for Chennai Super Kings in the next edition of the IPL in 2025. We should not forget that Ashwin is the man who played his cricket all through with cleverness and dignity and decided to retire cleverly and in a dignified manner too. We should not be ungrateful and miss recognising and saluting him for his immense contribution to Indian cricket after Anil Kumble hung up his boots. Love you, champion! Cricket lovers will miss you for sure! Bidyut Kumar Chatterjee | Faridabad

has proposed a "Reciprocal Tariff" policy, signalling a new direction in global trade. Criticising the high tariff policies of countries, including India, he highlighted them as a source of inequity. Trump stated that if any country imposes tariffs on American products, the US will respond with equivalent tariffs. He specifically pointed to developing countries like India, which levy high tariffs to protect domestic industries. Using bicycles as an example, he alleged that India imposes over 100 per cent duty on American bicycles, while the US does not charge such high tariffs on Indian products. This policy, claimed to be based on reciprocity and fairness, is likely to promote protectionism, potentially destabilising the global trade system. It raises concerns about increasing trade tensions between India and the US. Higher product prices could add economic burdens on consumers and strain bilateral relations. For India, it is crucial to engage in dialogue with the US administration to maintain trade balance. This tariff

conflict will not be limited to economic impacts; it will also have far-reaching diplomatic and social consequences. R K Jain | Barwani

#### TABLA MAESTRO'S LEGACY

Madam — Zakir Hussain's music was intertwined with his all-encompassing love for everyone without an iota of bias or prejudice. In fact, it reminds one of a popular Kishore Kumar number, "Pyaar Baantne Chalo" (Keep spreading love), from the 1965 Hindi movie "Hum sab ustaad hain." Apart from his divine renditions on the tabla, what endeared him most to his audiences was the halo of love and humility that surrounded him. In an interview with the BBC, he once said that all his shows were sold out well in advance, not because of him, but because of the power and attraction of music. Avinash Godbole | Dewas

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## FIRST COLUMN

### SRI LANKA-INDIA: ON THE SAME PAGE

Both nations reiterate commitment to defence collaboration and regional stability



KUMARDEEP BANARJEE

India strengthened its ties with its closest maritime neighbor, Sri Lanka, this week, countering the growing influence of China in the island nation. Sri Lanka's President, H.E. Mr. Anura Kumara Disanayaka, made his first bilateral visit to New Delhi following the recent presidential and parliamentary elections. Earlier this year, President Disanayaka had also visited Delhi at a time when Sri Lanka's political future, including the timing of its elections, was still uncertain. The new President came to power riding on the left-leaning party, which is known to have harboured some Anti-Indian sentiments in the past. However, New Delhi chose to bet on the relatively young Marxist leader, hoping for a sense of prudence in future. Disanayaka in the past, has managed to maintain a fine balance in Sri Lanka's bilateral relations with India and China, not trying to get caught in any crossfire. Meanwhile, while India's military tensions with China have de-escalated in the recent past, it still chooses to be cautious. Special Representatives from India and China also met this week in Beijing, to discuss their mutual bilateral relations. It seems that with the Trump administration back in the Oval Office in January, China wants to de-escalate military tensions with countries it considers as rivals. China is aware that Trump is likely to impose tariffs on many of its exports to the US, and perhaps further tighten the transfer of high-end technology from America. It is acutely aware that, India would not join an economic dialogue unless the overarching military issues are sorted. It is against this background, that Sri Lanka President's visit to India assumes significance. It may be recalled that China had in the past, sent spy ships



(which it calls maritime research vehicles) to Sri Lankan waters, which have raised many red flags for the Indian security agencies. China also controls critical ports in Sri Lanka, which during any military conflict could be used for strategic purposes. Sri Lanka's President is aware of his country's dependence on China to keep its economy afloat, while, also not trying to disturb the deep bilateral partnership with India. It was heartening for policy watchers in India to note that the Sri Lankan President chose Delhi to be his port of call after getting elected and came out with some emphatic statements, regarding not allowing, their national territory to be used for any anti-India activities. The joint statement released after the President and Indian PM's meeting read "Recognising shared security interests of India and Sri Lanka, both leaders acknowledged the importance of regular dialogue based on mutual trust and transparency and giving primacy to each other's security concerns. India is Sri Lanka's closest maritime neighbour. President Disanayaka reiterated Sri Lanka's stated position of not permitting its territory to be used in any manner inimical to the security of India and towards regional stability."

Taking cognisance of India's security concerns the two nations further reiterated to "Explore the possibility of concluding a framework Agreement on Defence Cooperation; Foster cooperation in hydrography; Provision of defence platforms and assets to augment Sri Lanka's defence capabilities; Intensify collaboration through joint exercises, maritime surveillance, and defence dialogue and exchanges; Extend assistance to strengthen capabilities of Sri Lanka on disaster mitigation, relief and rehabilitation, including through training, joint exercises and sharing of best practices; and Enhance capacity building and training for Sri Lankan defence forces and conduct tailor-made training programmes, wherever required." The bedrock of this relationship is India's generous economic support to Sri Lanka without putting it through non-transparent, self-serving infrastructure loans, which has led to the loss of strategic ports for the island nation.

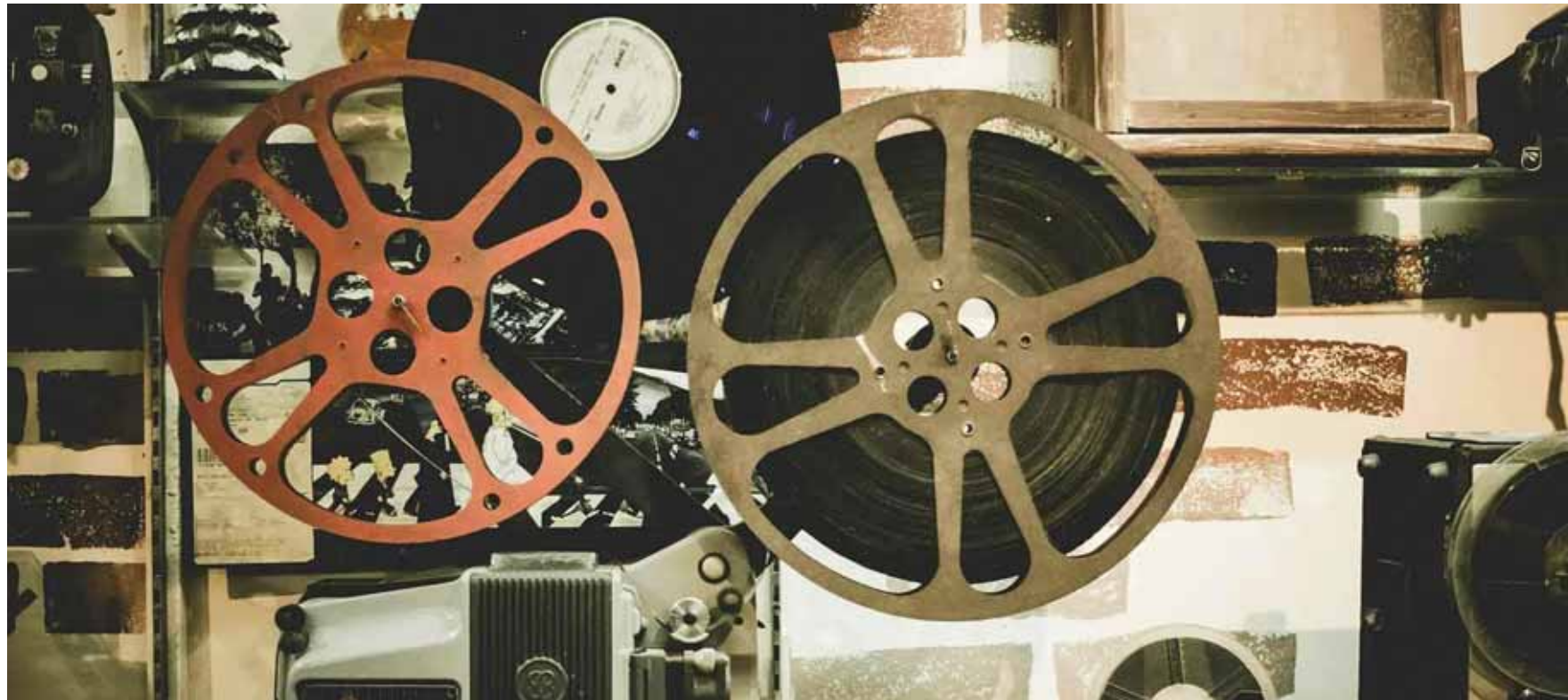
(The writer is a policy analyst; views are personal)

# The evolution of cinema through technology

Whether through sound, colour, digital effects, or immersive technology, filmmakers have always sought to expand the boundaries of what is possible



CHAITANYA K PRASAD



Beneath the flickering lights of an old projector, cinema was born—a dance of shadows and light, whispering stories into the dark. From silent dreams projected on silver screens to the roaring worlds of colour and sound, cinema has always been a magician, conjuring entire universes with the stroke of a reel. As technology sprinkled its magic dust over time, the cinematic world transformed, evolving from simple moving pictures into immersive journeys that now wrap us in their digital embrace, where imagination knows no bounds. In the late 19th century, cinema was a purely visual experience. Films like Raja Harishchandra (1913), India's first feature film, relied entirely on visuals, as sound was not yet a part of cinematic storytelling. Globally, the Lumière brothers' early works, such as L'Arrivée d'un train en gare de La Ciotat (1895), left audiences mesmerised. The technology was simple—manual cameras, mechanical projectors, and natural light. But this early era laid the foundation for the visual storytelling techniques that filmmakers would continue to refine for decades to come. The advent of sound in cinema was a game-changer. Alam Ara (1931) became India's first talkie, marking the beginning of an era where dialogue and music played a crucial role in storytelling. Globally, The Jazz Singer (1927) made similar waves, showcasing the transformative power of synchronized sound. Colour, too, began to seep into cinema's world. While Kisan Kanya (1937) was India's first colour film, it wasn't until Mughal-e-Azam (1960) and Hum Dono (1961) that colour became a truly artistic element, bringing emotional depth and grandeur to the screen. The partially coloured Mughal-e-Azam in particular stunned audiences, giving the larger-than-life historical drama a visual vibrancy that was previously unimaginable. Ramesh Sippy's Sholay (1975) was a groundbreaking film, being the first Indian movie shot on a 70mm screen. Indian theatres were not initially equipped to accommodate this scale, but the format gave Sholay's action sequences a larger-than-life feel, adding to its epic narrative. The film also introduced enhanced stereophonic sound, a novelty in Indian cinema.



THE TECHNOLOGY WAS SIMPLE—MANUAL CAMERAS, MECHANICAL PROJECTORS, AND NATURAL LIGHT. BUT THIS EARLY ERA LAID THE FOUNDATION FOR THE VISUAL STORYTELLING TECHNIQUES THAT FILMMAKERS WOULD CONTINUE TO REFINE FOR DECADES TO COME

ema. Shan (1980) followed, introducing impressive special effects such as explosions, action choreography, and stunt sequences, drawing comparisons to Western films like James Bond, with a blend of spectacle and style that had rarely been seen in India. The onset of digital technology and CGI changed the landscape of Indian cinema in the 2000s. Films like Krishna (2006) and Ra. One (2011) ushered in a new era of superhero films and futuristic themes, using advanced CGI and motion capture. Robot (2010), featuring a humanoid robot protagonist, combined impressive VFX with engaging storytelling, marking a turning point in Indian cinema's relationship with technology. As CGI became increasingly prevalent, Hollywood and Indian cinema both embraced digital effects as a core component of storytelling. Hollywood's Jurassic Park (1993) and The Matrix (1999) showcased the immense potential of CGI. Indian films like Baahubali (2015-2017) set new standards with their breathtaking visual effects, making Indian cinema a global player in the visual effects arena. R (2022) followed suit, pushing the envelope with dynamic CGI-enhanced action scenes. Cinema is now becoming more immersive than ever. James Cameron's Avatar (2009) brought 3D to the forefront of mainstream cinema, while Indian cinema explored immersive experiences with films like Kaala (2018), which offered a 360-degree VR experience. Technologies like VR and AI are now beginning to merge with traditional filmmaking, pushing the boundaries of storytelling even further. Technological advancements have transformed both the creative and commercial aspects of cinema, allowing films to evolve into multifaceted brands. Innovations like high-definition cameras, VFX, and animation have significantly elevated

the quality of filmmaking, enabling large-scale productions such as RRR and Baahubali to create immersive experiences that attract global audiences. These technological tools have expanded the branding potential of films, positioning them as not just stories, but as global entertainment products. Furthermore, the media and entertainment sector's growth, particularly in India, reflects this shift, with theatrical revenues reaching an all-time high of INR 120 billion in 2023? The business model of cinema has expanded beyond traditional box-office revenue, thanks to digital platforms like OTT services, which offer new avenues for distribution and monetisation. These platforms provide filmmakers with the opportunity to market their films globally, turning local content into international brands. Films now capitalise on multiple revenue streams, including merchandising, digital rights, and exclusive streaming deals. Additionally, high-end multiplexes have begun focusing on premium cinematic experiences, creating "experience zones" that cater to affluent audiences and further enhance the brand identity of films? Cinema has also become a significant platform for advertising and brand collaborations. FMCG, e-commerce, and tech companies increasingly use films for product placements and promotions, contributing to the industry's revenue. Meanwhile, Indian films are reaching wider audiences across 160 countries, thanks to advancements in content production and global distribution. This expanded global reach is turning Indian cinema into a formidable international brand, with films frequently topping global streaming charts, further proving that technological advancements are integral to both the branding and business of cinema? Recently released films like

Kalki 2898 AD and Stree 2 have pushed the envelope for Indian cinema by leveraging advanced CGI and innovative storytelling techniques. Kalki 2898 AD embraced futuristic narratives, with its visually rich depiction of a dystopian future made possible through cutting-edge visual effects, similar to global sci-fi films. Stree 2 blended horror, comedy, and CGI to craft a unique, immersive experience, further proving that Indian filmmakers are increasingly adept at balancing narrative depth with technological prowess, placing them on the global stage. From the early days of silent films to today's CGI-driven spectacles, cinema has continuously evolved with technological advancements. Whether through sound, colour, digital effects, or immersive technology, filmmakers have always sought to expand the boundaries of what's possible. The future of cinema technology promises exciting advancements. Virtual reality (VR) and augmented reality (AR) are set to provide even more immersive storytelling experiences, allowing audiences to interact with cinematic worlds in unprecedented ways. Artificial intelligence (AI) is also emerging in post-production, helping streamline visual effects and editing processes. Additionally, innovations in 3D and holographic projections could redefine how we experience films in theatres and at home. Advances in sound technology, like spatial audio, will make the viewing experience more immersive, ensuring cinema continues to evolve. The cinematic journey, it seems, is far from over—technology is pushing the boundaries further, transforming both the art of storytelling and the audience. (The writer is a former additional DG, DFF and Festival Director, IFFI; views are personal. Inputs by Zoya Ahmad and Vaishnavi Srinivasan)

# Rajasthan's Golden Horizon: From cultural marvel to investment powerhouse

With the success of 'Rising Rajasthan Investment Summit 2024,' the state is poised for an economic transformation

Some ri dharti jathe-ar chandi ro aasman - translates to "Where the earth is made of gold and the sky is built with silver." This cherished folk song beautifully captures the essence of Rajasthan's Thar Desert. Today, these words remain as relevant as ever, reflecting the state's unique charm and its emergence as a hub of global investment opportunities. Rajasthan, India's largest state, is rich in minerals, endowed with vast solar and wind energy resources, and brimming with potential for investors worldwide. The Rajasthan Government has successfully hosted the 'Rising Rajasthan Investment Summit 2024' in Jaipur this week. Throughout the event,



MOHIT TANTIA

memorandums of understanding (MOUs) totalling over Rs 35 lakh crore were signed, highlighting the immense investment potential of the state. Actually, very few places can match Rajasthan's allure. It boasts nine UNESCO World Heritage Sites, iconic palaces and forts, 320 sunny days a year, powerful winds, and expansive land. Combined with excellent law

and order and robust rail connectivity, these factors place Rajasthan in a league of its own as a destination for investment. Currently, the state is undergoing an economic transformation. The government aims to propel Rajasthan's economy from \$180 billion to \$350 billion by enhancing the Ease of Doing Business and creating employment opportunities for the youth. Over the next five years, the administration seeks to generate one million jobs across private and public sectors, with a focus on attracting significant investments. Chief Minister Bhajan Lal Sharma envisions Rajasthan as a pivotal player in India's economic growth. His administration is fostering a

pro-business environment across industries, recognising that Rajasthan's development is integral to achieving the vision of a "Developed India" by 2047. Rajasthan's rich natural resources, skilled workforce, and outstanding connectivity make it a magnet for investments. Over 58 per cent of the Delhi-Mumbai Industrial Corridor (DMIC) and 39 per cent of the Dedicated Freight Corridor (DFC) pass through the state. This infrastructure connects Rajasthan to domestic and export markets, while its proximity to northern states and western ports ensures seamless trade access. With the third-largest national highway network and second-largest rail network in India, along with



nine inland container depots, seven airports, and an air cargo complex, Rajasthan is a logistical powerhouse. Rajasthan's investment prospects span diverse sectors: petroleum infrastructure, food processing, education, chemicals, electronic systems, automotive, electric vehicles, and renewable

energy. Traditional industries like tourism, and emerging fields like startups, also offer immense potential. For instance, in agriculture and agro-processing, Rajasthan is a top producer of mustard, millet, guar gum, fenugreek, Isabgol, and medicinal crops. The sector contributed 29 per cent to the state's Gross State Value Added (GSVA) in 2022-23. The state also ranks second in livestock population and is a leader in spices, organic farming, and coarse wool. With these advantages, the agriculture sector presents vast opportunities in agri-food parks, warehousing, and cold chain facilities. Rajasthan's journey from a

cultural and historical treasure to a thriving investment hub reflects its unparalleled potential and forward-looking vision. The state's abundant natural resources, excellent infrastructure, and strategic location make it an ideal destination for investors across various sectors, from renewable energy and agriculture to manufacturing and technology. With an ambitious economic transformation underway, Rajasthan's government is committed to creating a pro-business environment that will not only attract global investments but also create employment opportunities for its youth. As the state continues to capitalise on its diverse strengths, the "Rising

Rajasthan" initiative stands as a testament to its growing prominence on the global stage. The government's efforts, backed by strategic partnerships and forward-thinking policies, position Rajasthan as a key player in India's economic future, driving growth, prosperity, and development. The initiative seeks to bolster Rajasthan's industries, create jobs, and amplify its economic potential, ensuring the timeless folk song "Some ri dharti jathe-ar chandi ro aasman" resonates on a global stage. (The writer is Executive Member, National Institute for Locomotor Disabilities, Kolkata. Views expressed are personal)

# Israeli airstrikes hit Yemen's capital and port city

AP ■ DUBAI

A series of intense Israeli airstrikes shook Yemen's rebel-held capital and a port city early Thursday and killed at least nine people, officials said, shortly after a Houthi missile targeted central Israel. Thursday's strikes risk further escalating conflict with the Iranian-backed Houthis, whose attacks on the Red Sea corridor have drastically impacted global shipping. The rebels have so far avoided the same level of intense military strikes that have targeted Palestinian militant group Hamas and Lebanon's Hezbollah, fellow members of Tehran's self-described "Axis of Resistance." Israel's military said that it conducted two waves of strikes in a pre-planned operation that began early Thursday and involved 14 fighter jets. The military said the first wave of strikes targeted Houthi infra-

structure at the ports of Hodeida, Salif and the Ras Isa oil terminal on the Red Sea. Then, in a second wave of strikes, the military said its fighter jets targeted Houthi energy infrastructure in Sanaa. The Houthi-controlled satellite channel al-Masirah said that some of the strikes targeted power stations in the capital, posting videos of flames engulfing one structure, as civil defense workers doused it in water, trying to extinguish the fire. The channel, citing its correspondent in the port city of Hodeida, said that at least seven people had been killed at Salif, while another two had been killed at the Ras Isa oil terminal. Others suffered wounds at the Hodeida port as well, it said. An Israeli military statement offered no damage assessment. Rear Adm Daniel Hagari, an Israeli military spokesman, said the strikes hit energy and port infrastructure, which he alleged

the rebels "have been using in ways that effectively contributed to their military action." "I suggest the leaders of the Houthis to see, to understand and remember: Whoever raises a hand against the state of Israel, his hand will be cut off, whoever harms us — will be harmed sevenfold," Israeli Defense Minister Israel Katz said. Rebel-held Hodeida, about 145 kilometres southwest of Sanaa, has been key for food shipments into Yemen as its decade-long war has gone on. There's also longstanding suspicion that weapons from Iran have been transferred through the port. The strikes happened just after Israel's military said that its air force intercepted a missile launched from Yemen before it entered the country's territory. The waves of strikes on Yemen early Thursday weren't a direct response to the missile hit, said a military official, but rather a preplanned response to

months of Houthi aggression. Israel's fighter jets were already in the air when the missile was launched. "Rocket and missile sirens were sounded following the possibility of falling debris from the interception," the Israeli military said. Sirens sounded near Tel Aviv and the surrounding areas, and a large explosion was heard overhead at the time. In Ramat Gan, a suburb of Tel Aviv, a large piece of shrapnel from the missile collapsed a school building there, without causing any injuries. The military official said that the Houthis have fired more than 200 missiles and UAVs, or unmanned aerial vehicles, at Israel since October 7, 2023. Brig Gen Yahya Saree, a Houthi military spokesman, claimed the attack hours later in a pre-recorded video statement, saying the rebels fired two of its "Palestine" ballistic missiles at Israel.

# 'Israel's restriction of water supply in Gaza amounts to acts of genocide'

AP ■ NEW YORK

Human Rights Watch on Thursday accused Israel of causing the deaths of thousands of Palestinians by systematically restricting and targeting Gaza's water supply in a campaign that amounted to "acts of genocide." The rights group was the latest among a growing number of critics to accuse Israel of genocidal acts in its war in Gaza. Israel vehemently denies the allegations, saying its war is directed at Hamas militants, not Gaza's civilians. In Thursday's report, HRW alleged that countless infants, children and adults have died from malnutrition, dehydration and illness as a result of actions by Israeli authorities over more than a year of war to deliberately cut the flow of water and electricity to Gaza, destroy infrastructure and prevent the distribution of critical supplies. "As a state policy, these acts constitute a widespread or sys-

tematic attack directed against a civilian population. Israeli officials are therefore committing the crime against humanity of extermination," the New York-based group said. The rights group said that the "pattern of conduct" outlined in its report and statements from Israeli officials "may indicate" genocidal intent, but it did not come down definitively on one side. Under international law, proving intent is key in concluding whether the crime of genocide has been committed. Israel, founded as a refuge for Jews in the wake of the Nazi Holocaust, strenuously denies such allegations. It says Hamas is responsible for the destruction in Gaza because the group hides and operates in schools, hospitals and residential areas. It says the October 2023 Hamas attack that triggered the war — the deadliest attack on Jews since the Holocaust — amounts to genocide. "Human Rights Watch is once more spreading

its blood libels in order to promote its anti-Israel propaganda," Israel's Foreign Ministry said. It claimed Israel has worked to facilitate the flow of water and humanitarian aid into Gaza throughout the war. "Israel will continue to ensure humanitarian aid enters Gaza, in full compliance with international law," the statement said. The new report by Human Rights Watch outlined what the organisation described as an extended, methodical campaign by Israeli officials to deprive Palestinians in Gaza of water. That has drastically reduced the water supply in Gaza, from about 83 litres per person each day before the war began to between two and nine litres in the months since, the human rights group says. The World Health Organisation says people require 50 to 100 litres per day to meet basic needs and keep sickness in check. Human Rights Watch said Israeli forces deliberately razed

the solar panels that powered four of Gaza's six wastewater treatment plants and destroyed a key reservoir. The group alleged Israel also cut off electricity required to run desalination plants and other infrastructure and restricted fuel for backup generators. When the International Court of Justice issued orders in January that Israel provide Palestinians with basic services and assistance, officials ignored them, the group alleged. Human Rights Watch said its findings were based on interviews with more than 60 Palestinians, accounts from utility employees, doctors and other healthcare workers and aid workers, and analysis of satellite images, photos and video. "Doctors and nurses told Human Rights Watch that they had seen numerous infants, children, and adults die from a combination of malnutrition, dehydration, and disease," the group said.

# Wisconsin school shooter had two guns, got texts from attack plot suspect

Madison (AP): The shooter who killed a student and teacher at a religious school in Wisconsin brought two guns to the school and was in contact with a man in California who authorities say was planning to attack a government building, according to authorities and court documents that became public Wednesday. Police were still investigating why the 15-year-old student at Abundant Life Christian School in Madison shot and killed a fellow student and teacher on Monday before shooting herself, Madison Police Chief Shon Barnes said. Two other students who were shot remained in critical condition on Wednesday. "We may never know what she was thinking that day, but we'll do our best to try to add or give as much information to our public as possible," Barnes said. A California judge, meanwhile, issued a restraining order Tuesday under California's gun red flag law against a 20-year-old Carlsbad man. The order requires the man to turn his guns and ammunition into police within 48 hours unless an officer asks for them sooner because he poses an immediate danger to himself and others. According to the order, the man told FBI agents that he had been messaging Natalie Rupnow, the Wisconsin shooter, about attacking a government building with a gun and explosives. The order doesn't say what building he had targeted or when he planned to launch his attack. It also doesn't detail his interactions with Rupnow except to state that the man was plotting a mass shooting with her. The student who was killed in Monday's school shooting was identified in an obituary released Wednesday as Rubi Patricia Vergara, 14, of Madison. She was a freshman at the school and "an avid reader, loved art, singing and playing keyboard in the family worship band," according to the obituary.

# Gisele Pelicot speaks after ex-husband found guilty of rapes, sentenced to 20 yrs in France

AP ■ AVIGNON

Gisele Pelicot said after 51 men were all found guilty Thursday in the drugging-and-rape trial that turned her into a feminist hero that the ordeal had been "very difficult" and expressed support for other victims of sexual violence. "We share the same fight," Gisele Pelicot, 72, said in her first words after the court in the southern French city of Avignon handed down prison sentences ranging from three to 20 years in the shocking case that stunned France and spurred a national reckoning about the blight of rape culture. Gisele Pelicot — whose courage and stoicism have turned her into an internationally recognised figure and an icon for many women — said she was thinking of her grandchildren after enduring more than three months of court hearings that dealt with the nearly decade of rapes and

other abuse inflicted on her by her now ex-husband and his accomplices. "It's also for them that I led this fight," she said of her grandchildren. The court sentenced her ex-husband, Dominique Pelicot, to 20 years in prison for drugging and raping her and allowing other men to rape her while she was unconscious. The sentence was the maximum possible under French law. He was declared guilty of all charges against him. At age 72, it could mean that he spends the rest of his life in prison. He won't be eligible to ask for early release until at least two-thirds of the sentence has been served. Roger Arata, the lead judge of the court in the southern French city Avignon, told Pelicot to stand for the sentencing. After it was delivered, he sat back down and cried. Arata read out verdicts one after the other against Pelicot

and the 50 other men tried in the case. "You are therefore declared guilty of aggravated rape on the person of Gisele Pelicot," the judge said as he worked his way through names on the long list of defendants. Gisele Pelicot was seated on one side of the courtroom, facing the defendants and sometimes nodding her head as verdicts were announced. Delivering the guilty verdicts and sentences took Arata just over an hour. Dominique Pelicot's lawyer, Beatrice Zavarro, said that she would weigh a possible appeal, but also expressed hope that Gisele Pelicot would find solace in the court's rulings. "I wanted Mrs Pelicot to be able to emerge from these hearings in peace, and I think that the verdicts will contribute to this relief for Mrs Pelicot," she said. Of the 50 accused of rape, just one was acquitted but was found guilty of aggravated sexual assault.

Another man was also found guilty on the sexual assault charge that he was tried for — meaning all 51 of the defendants were found guilty in one way or another. In a side room where defendants' family members watched the proceedings on television screens, some burst into tears and gasped as the sentences were revealed. Protesters gathered outside the courthouse followed the proceedings on their phones. Some read out the verdicts and applauded as they were announced inside. Some were carrying oranges as symbolic gifts for the defendants heading to prison. Prosecutors had asked that Dominique Pelicot get the maximum penalty of 20 years and for sentences of 10 to 18 years for the others tried for rape. But the court was more lenient than prosecutors had hoped, with many sentenced to less than a decade in prison.

# Macron in Mayotte to survey Cyclone Chido damage

Mamoudzou (AP): France's President Emmanuel Macron arrived Thursday to the Indian Ocean archipelago of Mayotte to survey the devastation that Cyclone Chido wrought across the French territory as thousands of people tried cope without the bare essentials such as water or electricity. "Mayotte is demolished," an airport security agent told Macron as soon as he stepped of the plane. The security agent, Assane Halo, said small children are without water or electricity and have nowhere to go because "everything is demolished." "There's no roof, there's nothing. No water, no food, no electricity. We can't even shelter, we are all wet with our children covering ourselves with whatever we have so that we can sleep," she said, asking for emergency aid. Macron went on an helicopter for an aerial appraisal of the damage. He then headed to the hospital in Mamoudzou, Mayotte's



A boy stands amidst debris in the Kaweni slum on the outskirts of Mamoudzou in the French Indian Ocean island of Mayotte, Thursday, after Cyclone Chido. AP/PTI

capital, to meet with medical staff and patients. He will then visit a destroyed neighbourhood. French authorities said at least 31 people have died and more than 1,500 people were injured, more than 200 criti-

cally. But it's feared hundreds or even thousands of people have died after the strongest cyclone in nearly a century ripped through the French territory of Mayotte off the coast of Africa on Saturday.

# Trump's demands derail govt funding plan ahead of shutdown

AP ■ WASHINGTON

President-elect Donald Trump abruptly rejected a bipartisan plan on Wednesday to prevent a Christmastime government shutdown, instead telling House Speaker Mike Johnson and Republicans to essentially renegotiate — days before a deadline when federal funding runs out. Trump's sudden entrance into the debate and new demands sent Congress spiralling as lawmakers are trying to wrap up work and head home for the holidays. It leaves Johnson scrambling to engineer a new plan before Friday's deadline to keep government open. "Republicans must GET SMART and TOUGH," Trump and Vice President-elect JD Vance said in a statement. The president-elect made an almost unrealistic proposal that combined some continuation of government funds along with a much more controversial provision to raise

the nation's debt limit — something his own party routinely rejects. "Anything else is a betrayal of our country," they wrote. Democrats decried the GOP revolt over the stopgap measure, which would have also provided some USD 100.4 billion in disaster aid to states hammered by Hurricanes Helene and Milton and other natural disasters. "House Republicans have been ordered to shut down the government and hurt everyday Americans all across this country," said House Democratic Leader Hakeem Jeffries. Jeffries said "an agreement is an agreement," and by backing out of it, "the House Republicans "will now own any harm that is visited upon the American people". Already, the massive 1,500-page bill was on the verge of collapse, as hard right conservatives rejected the increased spending, egged on by Trump's billionaire ally Elon Musk who



rejected the plan almost as soon as it was released late on Tuesday night. Rank-and-file lawmakers complained about the extras, which included their first pay-raises in more than a decade — a shock after one of the most unproductive chaotic sessions in modern times. Even the addition of much-needed disaster aid, some USD

100.4 billion in the aftermath of hurricanes and other natural calamities that ravaged states this year, plus USD 10 billion in economic assistance for farmers failed to win over the budget-slashing GOP. A number of Republicans had been waiting for Trump to signal whether they should vote yes or no. "This should not pass," Musk posted on his social media site X in the wee hours of Wednesday. One lawmaker said office phone lines were flooded with calls from constituents. "My phone was ringing off the hook," said Rep. Andy Barr, R-Ky. "The people who elected us are listening to Elon Musk." The outcome comes as no surprise for Johnson, who like other Republican House speakers before him, has been unable to convince his majority to go along with the routine needs of federal government operations, which they would prefer to slash.

It all shows just how hard it will be for Republicans next year, as they seize control of the House, Senate and White House, to unify and lead the nation. And it underscores how much Johnson and the GOP leaders must depend on Trump's blessing to see any legislative package over the finish line. Musk, who is heading Trump's new Department of Government Efficiency, warned that "Any member of the House or Senate who votes for this outrageous spending bill deserves to be voted out in 2 years!" It is not an idle threat coming from Musk, the world's richest man, who helped bankroll Trump's victory and can easily use his America PAC to make or break political careers. Democratic Rep. Jamie Raskin of Maryland said this is the problem with "an oligarchy, a handful of wealthy people run everything and everyone is supposed to live in fear of them".

Senators from both parties were watching from across the Capitol with dismay. "Is this going to be the norm? Is this going to be how we operate?" said Sen. Josh Hawley, R-Mo., putting the blame on Johnson. Democrats, who negotiated the final product with Johnson and Senate GOP leadership, will be expected to provide enough support to help ensure passage, as is often the case on big, bipartisan bills. "Republicans need to stop playing politics," said White House Press Secretary Karine Jean-Pierre. However, Trump's new demands on the debt limit pose a daunting test for Johnson, who has worked hard to stay close to the president-elect — even texting with Musk and DOGE co-chair Vivek Ramaswamy — only to have him turn against his hard-fought plan. Trump posted later that he was insisting on the debt ceiling: "I

will fight till the end." The nation's debt limit expires in 2025 and Trump appears to want the issue off the table before he returns to the White House, a reasonable idea but one that typically is tough to negotiate. The last House speaker, Kevin McCarthy, worked for months with President Joe Biden to raise the debt limit. Even though they struck a bipartisan deal that cut spending in exchange for additional borrowing capacity, House Republicans said it did not go far enough, and it ended up costing McCarthy his job. Now, Trump is looking for Johnson to pass a debt ceiling extension some 48 hours before a partial government shutdown. Meanwhile, the bipartisan package that Trump rejected extended existing government programmes and services at their current operating levels for a few more months, through March 14, 2025.

# Indian, US officials meet to chart next steps in space collaboration

PTI ■ WASHINGTON

Officials from India and the United States have charted next steps in space collaboration, including human spaceflight, joint space exploration and a commitment to facilitating commercial partnerships between space companies to advance the shared interests in the growing space economy, the White House said on Wednesday. A meeting in this regard was held in Houston on December 17. The participants in the meeting were US Principal Deputy National Security Advisor Jon Finer, Deputy Secretary of State Kurt Campbell and Indian Ambassador to the United States Vinay Kwatra. "Following President (Joe)

Biden and Prime Minister (Narendra) Modi's June 2023 commitment to work together to 'reach new frontiers across all sectors of space cooperation' and India's signing of the Artemis Accords, our two nations reached an inflection point on collaboration across civil, security and commercial space sectors," the White House said in a fact-sheet. "This includes human spaceflight, joint space exploration and a commitment to facilitating commercial partnerships between US and Indian space companies to advance our shared interests in the growing space economy," it said. As part of their visit to Houston, Finer and Campbell met with representatives from the National Aeronautics and Space Administration (NASA),

Indian Space Research Organisation (ISRO) and space industry leaders to identify new opportunities to further strengthen the two countries' burgeoning space partnership. They also reflected on the accomplishments of the past few months and charted next steps to take the India-US partnership to the next level, including selecting two ISRO astronauts to train at the NASA's Johnson Space Centre for the first-ever joint effort between American and Indian astronauts at the International Space Station, with Axiom Space serving as the provider of the mission. The launch of the Axiom-4 mission as soon as spring 2025 will mark a significant milestone in the US-India space partnership and space exploration.

# UK PM hosts Indian business chiefs to boost investments

PTI ■ LONDON

Prime Minister Keir Starmer hosted a delegation of 13 Indian companies at 10 Downing Street in London on what the British government described as a "curated visit" to enhance the bilateral partnership and boost investment flows. The visit on Wednesday follows Starmer's meeting with Prime Minister Narendra Modi on the sidelines of the G20 Summit last month, when the leaders committed to take forward an "ambitious" UK-India Comprehensive Strategic Partnership with collaboration opportunities on economic growth, security and defence, technology, climate, health, and education. According to a readout from the British High Commission in New Delhi, the Indian investors and CEOs also met



Britain's Prime Minister Keir Starmer, left, shakes hands with the Sultan of Brunei Hajji Hassanali Bolkhiah ahead of a meeting at 10 Downing Street, London, Thursday. AP/PTI

senior Cabinet ministers to discuss job creation and growth opportunities under a proposed India-UK trade deal after Starmer had confirmed the launch of Free Trade Agreement (FTA) negotiations early in the new year. "India is a vital partner for the UK and we have huge ambition to unlock more opportunities together, building on our already strong relationship," said Starmer, with reference to the business meeting. "I'm delighted to welcome some of India's most senior business leaders to Downing Street and to outline the UK's ambitious focus on economic growth and innovation," he said. The delegation, supported by the Confederation of Indian Industry (CII), discussed deepening ties with Chancellor of the Exchequer Rachel Reeves and Foreign Secretary David Lammy. Meanwhile, Business

and Trade Secretary Jonathan Reynolds and minister for trade policy Douglas Alexander discussed bilateral trade, worth GBP 42 billion a year and supporting over 600,000 jobs across both economies as per UK government statistics. "As one of the most globally connected economies in the G20, the UK provides unmatched opportunities for Indian businesses to thrive. India already accounts for the second highest number of FDI projects into the UK, and this government is committed to deepening our trade and investment links with India even further," said Reynolds. "Boosting investment is a mission at the heart of this government. It was great to hear firsthand from Indian business leaders on why so many of them have given us a vote of confidence and chosen to invest here," he said.



# Putin boasts of gains in Ukraine at annual news conference

AP ■ MOSCOW

President Vladimir Putin boasted that his military operation in Ukraine has strengthened Russia and denied that the downfall of a key ally in Syria had dented Moscow's prestige, as he sought to project strength and ease at his annual news conference and call-in show Thursday. As is typical, the Russian leader used the tightly choreographed event, which usually lasts hours, to reinforce his authority and demonstrate a sweeping command of everything from consumer prices to military hardware.

He claimed that nearly three years of fighting in Ukraine has hardened the Russian economy and the country's military and hailed his troops' gains there.

"Russia has become much stronger over the past two or three years because it has become a truly sovereign country," he said. "We are standing firm in terms of economy, we are strengthening our defence potential and our military capability now is the strongest in the world."

Putin, who has held power for nearly a quarter-century, said the military was "advancing toward achieving our goals" in what he calls the special military operation in Ukraine. In response to a question about a new hypersonic intermediate-range ballistic missile that Russia used for the first



Men hold a replica of the banner of the 155th Marine Brigade of the Pacific Fleet, participating in a special military operation in Ukraine during Russian President Vladimir Putin's annual news conference and call-in show at Gostinny Dvor in Moscow, Russia, Thursday. AP/PTI

time last month to strike Ukraine, Putin scoffed at claims by some Western experts that it could be intercepted by NATO's air defences.

He mockingly challenged Ukraine's Western allies to a "high-tech duel," suggesting that Moscow could give advance notice of a strike on Kyiv with the Oreshnik missile — and see if the West could protect the city. "Let them select a target, possibly in Kyiv, put their air defense assets there and we shall strike it with Oreshnik," he said with a dry smile. "Let's see what happens." Russian troops are making steady, if slow, advances in Ukraine — and the Kremlin has also suffered some embarrassing setbacks. Just this week, a senior Russian gener-

al was killed by a bomb outside his apartment building in Moscow. The brazen killing of Lt Gen Igor Kirillov, claimed by Ukraine, brought the conflict once again to the streets of the Russian capital. Moscow's troops are also battling Ukrainian forces in the Russian region of Kursk, where they have launched an incursion. Asked when they would drive the Ukrainians out, Putin responded that "we will certainly kick them out" but wouldn't say how long it will take.

In past years, the show, which is broadcast live by state-controlled TV stations across Russia's 11 time zones, has been heavily dominated by domestic issues, with journalists and ordinary people calling in to ask about road repairs, utility prices and gov-

ernment subsidies. But the Russian leader is particularly watched for his answers on foreign affairs. In a flourish typical of the marathon news conferences, he asked people in the audience to unfurl a banner presented to him by marines fighting in Kursk as he answered questions about Ukraine.

Putin said that he was open to possible talks with US President-elect Donald Trump, who has pledged to negotiate a deal to end the hostilities in Ukraine. "If we meet with Mr Trump, we will have things to discuss," he said, without offer-

ing specifics. Putin has previously demanded that Ukraine renounce its bid to join NATO and recognize Russia's gains. Ukraine and the West have rejected those demands.

In his first comments on Assad's demise, Putin said that he hadn't yet met the former Syrian ruler, whom he has given asylum in Moscow. He said that he plans to and will ask him about Austin Tice, an American journalist who went missing in Syria 12 years ago. "We also can pose the question to people who control the situation on the ground in Syria,"

Putin said, in response to a question from NBC's Keir Simmons, who cited a letter he said Tice's mother wrote to the Russian leader seeking assistance. Moscow has quickly sought to establish contacts with the rebels who ousted Assad to secure its diplomatic and military personnel in the country and try to extend the lease on its air and naval bases in the country. But it's unclear how much influence Russia will have in Syria going forward. Assad's demise has dealt it a painful blow since Russia has fought for nine years to prop up the Syrian leader in the

country's civil war. Still, Putin denied that the events had weakened Moscow, arguing that it has achieved the goal of destroying "terrorist" groups in the country set when it launched an air campaign in support of Assad in 2015. He claimed that rebel groups that were fighting against Assad have changed and the West is now ready to establish ties with them. "That means that our goals have been achieved," Putin said. Putin added that Russia may keep its military outposts, saying that Moscow has offered the new rulers use of the air and naval bases for

humanitarian aid deliveries. Putin began the session by saying that Russia's economy is on track to grow by nearly 4% this year. He acknowledged that consumer prices are high, with inflation at 9.3%, but insisted that the economic situation remains "stable." The annual show is as much spectacle as news conference. Journalists in the hall near the Kremlin wave colourful signs and placards as they desperately try to attract Putin's attention. Russian state media reported that ordinary citizens submitted more than 2 million questions ahead of the show.

**PUBLIC NOTICE**  
Loss of Allotment Letter (original) issued by Unitech Ltd for Flat No.501 Block No. 44 Heritage City MG Road Gurgaon Haryana 122002 India. Founder May Inform Suchindra Misra on above address within 7 days.

**PUBLIC NOTICE**  
I, SUDESH KUMARI Wife of Shri RANBIR SINGH Resident of 18, Goodwill Apartment, Sector-13, Rohini, North West Delhi-110085, hereby declare that name of mine and my husband has been wrongly written as Sudesh Kumari and Shri Ranbir Singh in driving licence. The actual name of mine and my husband Sudesh and Shri Ranvir Singh respectively which may be amended accordingly.

**PUBLIC NOTICE**  
The Public at large is hereby notified that, I, Raj Kumar Gupta S/o Late Raghunandan Kumar Gupta is the owner of Property Flat No.31-A, land measuring area 80 sq. yds., Size 24 feet x 30 feet alongwith its whole of structures therein, fitted with electricity and water connections, built on Plot No.31-32, out of Khasra No.45/8, situated at the abadi of East Guru Angad Nagar, Laxmi Nagar, in the area of Village Khureji Khas, Ilaqa Shahdara, Delhi-110082. It is to inform the General Public that I am selling the aforesaid property to Mr. Chirayu Garg S/o Shri Vipam Kumar. If anyone have objection in this regard then contact to the undersigned within 10 days of this Notice. Thereafter no body have any right on the said property. Raj Kumar Gupta

**NOTICE OF LOSS OF SHARE CERTIFICATES**  
Notice is hereby given that the Certificates for the under mentioned 1000 Equity shares (Physical) of the Company Name: Fluidomat Limited 215IN No.INE4580C1016 in the name of Vanita Kumari Kukreja, R/o 10/44 First Floor, Subhash Nagar New Delhi 110027 have been reported as lost / misplaced. Any person who has claim in respect of said Equity Shares should lodge the same with the company at its Registered office within 21 days from the date else the company will proceed to issue duplicate share certificates to the forensic applicants without any further intimation.

Certificates No.	Distinctive No.	Folio No.	No. of Shares
8563	65174-65273	101537	100
8564	65274-65373	101537	100
8567	65974-65973	101537	100
8572	66074-66173	101537	100
8573	66174-66273	101537	100
22146	2130401-2130500	101537	100
22149	2130701-2130800	101537	100
37710	3698801-3698900	101537	100
37711	3698901-3699000	101537	100
37714	3687201-3687300	101537	100

Name and Registered office of the company : Fluidomat Limited Registered office :117, 1st Floor, Navnet Darshan, 16/2 Old Palasia, Indore-452018, India  
Place: New Delhi  
Date: 20-12-2024  
Name of Share Holder (s)  
VANITA KUMARI KUKREJA/VANITA RANDHAWA

**PUBLIC NOTICE**  
To be known to all, AJIT KUMAR/S/O SH. RADHA RAMAN DINESH R/O MIG FLAT NO. 442, SECOND FLOOR, POCKET-C-8, SECTOR-8, ROHINI, DELHI, have applied for certified copies & free hold in DDA. The original documents i.e. DEN AND CUM-ALLOTMENT LETTER, POSSESSION LETTER, NOC FOR WATER AND ELECTRICITY CONNECTION, SITE POSSESSION SLIP & OTHER DOCUMENTS of the above said flat has been lost. An LR No.23/2023/5024 dated 05/12/2024 to this effect has been lodged in P.S.Crime Branch, Delhi. Any person(s) claiming any right, interest, having any objection or found in possession of original documents, may write/contact with above named person at above Address/Phone No. 9872330000 within 07 days from the date of publication of this notice. The person claiming any right, interest, objection with respect to this property, can personally inform or write to Deputy Director (Housing) or Director (Housing), Delhi Development Authority, Vikas Sadan, New Delhi-110023.

**PUBLIC NOTICE**  
Known to all that my client SH. RAJ KUMAR owner of the FIRST FLOOR FLAT NO.104, PROPERTY BEARING NO. 136 AND 137, AREA 75 SQ. YDS., KHASRA NO. 816, VILLAGENAWA DA, OM VIHAR PHASE-1, UTTAM NAGAR NEW DELHI-110029 and SH. RAJ KUMAR purchase property from Smt. Sangita vide Notarized G.P.A.Ts and will date 01.10.2024 NOW SH. RAJ KUMAR wants to sell the said property. And it is informed that any deal with said documents by any person except my said client and said institution regarding said property, at above Address/Phone No. 9872330000, will be deemed as null and void. If any person having any claim, right in said property then he may contact and handover the same and appoint his claim to undersigned within 15 days of this Publication. AD REM LEGAL SOLUTION Ch. No. 760 - Dwarka Court Sector 10, Dwarka, New Delhi-75 Mobile - 99990413918

**PUBLIC NOTICE**  
The general public is hereby informed and put to notice that the scheduled property is owned jointly by Kumud Vaid, Sunil Vaid, Neha Vaid and Samir Vaid, and they are the legal and absolute owner and in physical possession of the said property. General Public and all concerned are hereby cautioned not to deal with the said property and enter in to any kind of agreement, deed, understanding or contract with any third party and/or any person, entity in any manner whatsoever in regard to scheduled property without the consent of the owners named above as the same may be in nullity. Any person dealing with or undertaking any transaction with respect to the above scheduled property shall be deemed as at his/her own risk, costs, and consequences.  
Schedule of Property  
Immovable property bearing Plot No. 104, measuring 98 sq yards, out of Khasra no. 458, situated at Village Nasipur, Delhi colony known as Mahavir Enclave, Part II, New Delhi.  
Shanker Chhabra (Advocate) Enrol. No. D1804/2008 A-298, Basement, Shivalki, New Delhi - 110017

**NOTICE INVITING E-TENDER**  
No. E-593357/5  
The Mission Director, Samagra Shiksha, Assam, invites bids from registered appropriate class of contractor for 6 group of building works in different schools as per the detailed notice inviting tender which can be downloaded from the website <https://www.assamtenders.gov.in>.  
The last date of submission of tender is 02-01-2025 upto 2:00 PM.  
Sd/-Mission Director, Samagra Shiksha Assam, Samagra Shiksha Axom, Kahilipara, Guwahati-19  
Janasanyog/CF/2862/24/20-Dec-24

## EU leaders insist no decisions can be taken about Ukraine without Ukraine

Brussels (AP): European Union leaders insisted on Thursday that no decisions can be taken about the future of war-ravaged Ukraine without its consent or behind the backs of its partners in Europe, barely a month before US President-elect Donald Trump takes office. Ukraine's position is precarious more than 1,000 days into the war. Russia continues to make gains on the battlefield, pushing the front line gradually westward despite suffering heavy casualties. Ukraine's energy network is in tatters and military recruits are hard to find.

In a show of solidarity at a summit in Brussels with Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy, many EU leaders repeated a variation of what has become a common mantra — nothing about Ukraine without Ukraine, nothing about security in Europe without Europeans.

Trump returns to the White House on Jan. 20 having promised to end the war in Ukraine quickly and talked up his relationship with Russian President Vladimir Putin. Many Europeans are concerned that it might result in a poor deal for Ukraine. The other big worry is that Putin will just use any interregnum to rearm and cause more strife. Rumors are swirling in Europe about possible peace talks in early 2025, and whether European peacekeepers might be needed to enforce any settlement, but the leaders are trying to keep a lid on speculation about what they are prepared to do, so as not to tip their hand to Russia. The priority now, they say, must be to strengthen Ukraine's hand, should Zelenskyy decide it's time to negotiate. German Chancellor Olaf Scholz said that it's

important to "ensure long-term aid to Ukraine — it must be clear that we are prepared to enable support as long as it is needed". Air defence, artillery and ammunition are high on the list, he told reporters. Asked about Trump, Scholz said that his impression from talking to the president-elect "is that good cooperation between Europe and the US is possible." He said that "the principle is always: no decisions over Ukrainians' heads, and that of course means over those of the European states."

Luxembourg Prime Minister Luc Frieden had a similar message. "We need to stand with Ukraine, and every step... needs to be taken with Ukraine and in the presence of the European Union. The future of Ukraine is decided in Europe and not elsewhere," he said.

Dutch Prime Minister Dick Schoof underlined that Ukraine must be the country that "determines under what conditions talks can possibly take place. And it is not for us to talk about that. At the moment, Ukraine has not yet indicated that they are prepared to do so". It's difficult to predict what Trump might do, and whether history might be a reliable guide. Under his previous presidency, in 2020, the United States inked a deal on a military withdrawal from Afghanistan directly with the strongest player — the Taliban insurgents — mostly playing down the concerns of the Afghan government and president. The chaotic exit in 2021, finally ordered by US President Joe Biden, humiliated Washington and its allies in NATO as the Afghan security forces they had trained for years and invested billions in collapsed and the Taliban swept to power.

**PUBLIC NOTICE**  
This is to inform the public at large that my client CBI Bank is attaching a loan to Mrs. Iresha Laminates Private Ltd. for purchasing the Flat / Dwelling Unit bearing the address Third Floor with roof rights of Property No. G-19, (138 1/2 Sq. Yds.), D.E. Colony, Krishna Nagar, Village Ghochi, Ilaqa Shahdara, Delhi. (Subjog Property) from Navneet Kumar Gupta and Mr. Vineet Kumar Gupta (collectively referred as "Sellers") It has been represented by the Sellers that they acquired the above said property by way of Gift Deed dated 26.05.2017, executed by Mrs. Krishna Gupta, who inherited the Subject Property from Mrs. Ram Pyari Goe vide Will dated 30.10.2012. If anybody has any claim or objection upon the said property by way of inheritance, share, sale, agreement, lease, license, gift, possession, legal heirs, partners, encumbrance however or otherwise is required to intimate in writing to the undersigned within 07 days from the date of publication of this notice with supporting documents. After the expiration of notice period, the claim(s), if any of such person shall be treated as null and void and will be treated as waived.  
IRAN RAGHAY (Advocate) G-220, Karakooda Court, Delhi-110032. Email: raghay.legal@gmail.com Ph. No. +91 80000 96522

**PUBLIC NOTICE**  
To be known to all, URMILA RANI W/O LATE SH. ASHOK KUMAR R/O LIG FLAT NO.22-B, FIRST FLOOR, RAJOURI GARDEN, NEW DELHI-110027, have applied for certified copies & freehold in DDA. The original documents i.e. POSSESSION LETTER of the above said flat have been lost. An LR No. 23862/82/2024 dated 10/12/2024 to this effect has been lodged in P.S.Crime Branch, Delhi. Any person(s) claiming any right, interest, having any objection or found in possession of original documents, may write/contact with above named person at above Address/Phone No. 7011328780 within 15 days from the date of publication of this notice. The person claiming any right, interest, objection with respect to this property, can personally inform or write to Deputy Director (Housing) or Director (Housing), Delhi Development Authority, Vikas Sadan, New Delhi-110023.

**BSES BSES Rajdhani Power Limited, New Delhi**  
**TENDER NOTICE** Date: 20.12.2024  
Sealed tenders under two Bid System (Unpriced & Priced) is invited for following job from all bidders.  

NIT No.	Brief Tender Description	Cost of EMD (₹)	Due Date & Time of Submission	Date & Time of Opening
CMC/BR/24-25/FK/CR/SS/1232	CIVIL RETROFITTING WORKS OF OFFICE BUILDINGS & GRID BUILDINGS IN BRPL	5.00 Lakhs	10.01.2025 15:30 HRS	10.01.2025 15:45 HRS

Cost of each Tender Document: ₹ 1180/- (Including GST)  
For details in respect of Equipment/BOM/Services, Qualifying requirements, Terms & conditions, purchase/supplier selection of tender documents etc. please visit our website [www.bssedelhi.com](http://www.bssedelhi.com)  
Head (Contracts & Materials)  
Regd. Off.: BSES Rajdhani Power Limited, BSES Bhawan, Nehru Place, New Delhi-110019 | Corporate Identification No.: U40109DL2001PLC111527 Telephone No.: +91 11 4910 7235 | Website: [www.bssedelhi.com](http://www.bssedelhi.com)

**CHANGE OF NAME**  
I, Priyanka, D/o- JC-734254W Sub Rati Bhan, R/o- Vill- Ratanapur, PO- Pali, Distt- Hardoi, U.P.- 241123, have changed my name from Priyanka to Priyanka Singh, vide affidavit dated 19/12/2024 before Notary Public Delhi. PD(1109)C I, No.16017748A Hav Dharmender, R/o- Vill+Po- Sulkhia, Teh- Bawal, Dist- Rewari, Haryana- 123401, have changed my son's name from Punit Katariya to Punit Kataria, vide affidavit dated 19/12/2024 before Notary Public Delhi. PD(1110)C I, Raj Pati Devi Mother of No.16020466M Hav Somvir Singh, R/o- VTC- Saharwa(3), Dist- Hisar, Haryana- 125001, have changed my name from Raj Pati Devi to Rajpati, vide affidavit dated 19/12/2024 before Notary Public Delhi. PD(1111)C I, Khushbu Kumari W/o- JC- 733883F Sub Kunal Kumar, R/o- Usha Kunj, Ayodhya Nagar, Church Road, PO+PS- Barh, Dist- Patna, Bihar- 803213, have changed my name from Khushbu Kumari to Khushbu Singh, vide affidavit dated 19/12/2024 before Notary Public Delhi. PD(1112)C I, DAKSH S/o PARDEEP R/o VPO ROHNA, Teh. Kharkhoda, district Sonipat (Haryana)- 131402, have changed my Name to DAKSH DAHIYA. PD(1114)C I, NATASHA D/o PARDEEP R/o VPO ROHNA, Teh. Kharkhoda, district Sonipat (Haryana)- 131402, have changed my Name to NATASHA DAHIYA. PD(1115)C

**Public Notice**  
Public in General is hereby notified that my client Late Smt. Manju Aggarwal W/o Shri Mohan Lal Aggarwal R/o House No. 56 Akashneem Marg DLF Phase 2 Gurgaon, has agreed to purchase house No. 56 Akashneem Marg DLF Phase 2 Gurgaon. From its Owner Shri Mohan Lal Aggarwal S/o Ram Bilas Aggarwal R/o House No. 56 Akashneem Marg DLF Phase 2 Gurgaon. And an agreement has also been arrived at in this behalf. The parties to this transaction are in process of execution & registration of the sale deed. If any person, financial institution or Govt. authority has any claim or interest or right over house No. 56 Akashneem Marg DLF 2 Gurgaon, he/she/it, may file objections/claim in writing with my client at his address house No. 56 Akashneem Marg DLF 2 Gurgaon. And also to contact him in person with proof of claim, if any, within 3 days from publication of this notice between 10.00 a.m. to 7.00 p.m. Any person, having interest in the property must submit his/her/it claim with my client as above, otherwise claim will be entertained. Narender Singh, Advocate

**PUBLIC NOTICE**  
I, GEORGE KUTTY S/O THOMAS R/O 60D, B-100A, UDAIGIRI-1, SECTOR-3A BIODIST BUDDHA GAUTAM NAGAR U.P. 201301, which is the Power of attorney registered in my name from the above flat/house/M/s NAVNEET ENGINEERING (P) LTD Now I want to transfer this flat/house/Power of attorney/authority in the name of my wife Mrs. LEELEAMMA GEORGE. No other legal criminal case of the above persons is pending in any state/state. Now I want to declare to the general public that any person who has any right, ownership or interest against the said property/shares or documents. So he can come to our Noida office with valid documentary evidence within 15th days and submit his claim. If anyone does not do so, then he will be considered non-owner and unrestricted. And it will be taken forward accordingly.

**LADY TATA MEMORIAL TRUST**  
Founded 1932  
Bombay House, Homi Mody Street Mumbai 400 001.  
Applications are invited for the below Scientific Research Awards Junior Research Fellowship 2025-26  

LTMT Research Grant 2025-26
Teacher's Training Program 2025-26
Young Researcher Award - 2025

Young Researcher Award is instituted by the Lady Tata Memorial Trust (LTMT) to annually recognize and reward Young Indian scientists with outstanding track record in biological sciences and potential for high quality research with a deep commitment to find innovative solutions to major problems related to human diseases, blood disorder with special references to leukaemia and for scientific research towards alleviation of human suffering from diseases.  
Applications are also invited for Junior Research Fellowship, LTMT Research Grant and Teacher's Training Program for the year 2025-2026. For Detailed Information and online application process, please access our website [www.ladytatatrust.tatatrusts.org](http://www.ladytatatrust.tatatrusts.org)  
Program Officer

## Five Pakistanis killed, 35 missing in Greece boat sinking

Islamabad (PTI): Five Pakistani nationals have been killed and 35 others presumed dead after a boat carrying migrants sank off of Greece's Gavdos island over the weekend, according to a media report on Thursday.

While at least seven people died and over 150 were rescued from the sinking overcrowded vessel carrying over 200 migrants, dozens remain missing. The Greek authorities on Wednesday called off the rescue operation to find the survivors, including 35 missing Pakistanis, the Dawn newspaper reported. Pakistani authorities on Tuesday confirmed the death of five people belonging to the Punjab province. The 35 other missing citizens were presumed dead on Wednesday, the report said.

Of the five dead, two belonged to Pasrur, a tehsil of Sialkot; while one each hailed from the Gujrat, Narowal, and Mandi Bahauddin districts. Meanwhile, the Federal Investigation Agency (FIA) has registered cases against suspects allegedly involved in transporting the victims from Punjab to Libya from where they were sent off on boats to Greece.

**MANIBHAVNAM HOME FINANCE INDIA PRIVATE LIMITED**  
**POSSESSION NOTICE (Appendix IV) Rule 8(3)**  
Whereas the Authorized officer of Manibhavnam Home Finance Pvt. Ltd., (hereinafter referred to as "MBHF"), MBHF, which has duly been Authorized by the Central Government, vide a notification dated 17.06.2021, to be treated as a Financial Institution, for the purposes of the "The Securitization and Reconstruction of Financial Assets and Enforcement of Security Interest Act, 2002, having its registered office at: 2nd Floor, N-2, South Extension Part-1, New Delhi- 110049, under the provisions of the Securitization and Reconstruction of Financial Assets and Enforcement of Security Interest Act, 2002 (SRA 2002) (hereinafter referred to as "Act") and in exercise of the powers conferred under Section 13(2) of the Act read with Rule 3 of the Security Interest (Enforcement) Rules, 2002 issued a Demand Notice to the following borrowers and co-borrowers to repay the amount mentioned in the notice within 60 days from the date of receipt of the said notice. The borrower/Guarantor having failed to repay the amount, notice is hereby given to the borrower and the public in general that the undersigned has taken possession of the property described herein below in exercise of powers conferred on him under sub-section (4) of Section 13 of Act read with Rule 8 of the Security Interest (Enforcement) Rules, 2002 as per mentioned Date. The borrower in particular and the public in general is hereby cautioned not to deal with the property and any dealings with the property will be subject to the charge of "MBHF" and interest other charges thereon. The attention of the Borrower is invited to provisions of sub-section (8) of section 13 of the Act, in respect of time available, to redeem the secured asset.  
Name & Address of Borrower/Co-Borrower: 1. ADESH S/O GYANCHAND, 2. ARTI W/O ADESH, 3. SUMANTRA W/O GYAN CHAND, 4. ANIL S/O PYARELAL, ALL R/O - HOUSE No.76, NEW VIKAS NAGAR, NEAR SANTOSH ENCLAVE COLLEGE, LONI DEHAT, GHAZIABAD, UTTAR PRADESH-201102, SR NO. 3 ALSO AT: AKPUR RIWANA, BILJANDSHAH, UTTAR PRADESH-245411  
Demand Notice Dated: 29.May.2023, Date of Possession: 14.12.2024  
Amount of Demand Notice: Rs. 5,41,801.26/- as on 17.May.2024  
Details of Property: "ALL THAT PIECES AND PARCEL FREEHOLD RESIDENTIAL PLOT NO. 83/1 AREA MEASURING 50 SQ. YDS. OUT OF KHASRA NO. 2303/1 SITUATED AT ADRESH NAGAR IN BLOCK E/11 VILLAGE LONI PRAGNA, LONI TEHSIL & DISTT. GHAZIABAD UP. BOUNDARIES EAST- PLOT NO. 80 WEST-ROAD 18 FT. NORTH-PLOT NO. 82 SOUTH PLOT NO. 83/2".  
Date: 14.12.2024, Place: Loni Authorized Officer, Manibhavnam Home Finance India Pvt. Ltd.

Government of Odisha.  
Directorate of Town Planning,  
Housing & Urban Development Department.  
Power House Square, Unit-V, Keshari Nagar,  
Bhubaneswar, Dist: Khurda, Odisha. PIN-751001.  
**Notice Inviting RFP**  
RFP No.: 02/DTP -HUDD/Bhubaneswar, Date: 18-12-2024  

1. Name of the Work:	Consultancy Services for Sub-Scheme on Formulation of GIS based CDP Master Plan for Class-7 Seven towns with Population of 50,000-99,999 under AMRUT 2.0 under Three Packages in Odisha State
2. Cost of Bid Documents:	Rs. 10,000/- (Rupees ten thousand) only.
3. Earnest Money Deposit (EMD):	Rs. 5,00,000/- (Rupees five lakh) only.
4. Period of Completion:	365 days
5. Date & Time of availability of bid documents in the portal:	From 10.00 Hrs. of 20.12.2024 to 17.00 Hrs. of 20.01.2025.
6. Last Date / Time for Receipt of Bids in the Portal:	17.00 Hrs. of 20.01.2025.
7. Name & Address of the Officer Inviting Bid:	Shri Subhanta Kumar Mishra, OAS (SAG), Director, Town Planning & Admin. Secretary to Govt. Housing & Urban Development Deptt. Govt. of Odisha. e-mail: dtpodisha@gmail.com

1. Subsequent corrigendum, if required shall appear in the e-procurement website only.  
2. Other details can be seen in the bidding documents, which is available in website [www.tendersodisha.gov.in](http://www.tendersodisha.gov.in).  
Director,  
Directorate of Town Planning,  
Housing & Urban Development Deptt.  
Govt. of Odisha

**LOST & FOUND**  
I, Ankur Mahalwala S/o. late Shri Virendra Kumar have lost the original papers (Agreement to sell, GPA Etc.) of flat 200/7, Garhi East of Kailash, New Delhi-110065 while traveling for personal work. Anybody Finder please contact 9810110087. PD(1113)C

**Office of the Superintending Engineer 1st Circle, Public Works Department, Almora**  
Phone/Fax: 05962-230295 Email: [sepdalm@rediffmail.com](mailto:sepdalm@rediffmail.com)  
Letter No. : 3734(I)/Nivida-01/2024-25 Dated : 18/12/2024  
**NATIONAL COMPETITIVE TENDERING (E-Tendering) E-TENDER NOTICE**  
The Superintending Engineer, 1st Circle, PWD Almora invites tender through E-Tendering (Two Bid System) on behalf of Honourable Governor of Uttarakhand for following works. All other information will be available from dated 21/12/2024 & onwards on website <http://www.uktenders.gov.in>

Sl. No.	Name of Work	Cost of Tender Form	Earnest Money (Rupee in lakh)	Validity of Tender	Time of Completion	Contractor's Category of Registration for tendering
1	CD PWD Kapkot Improvement and Strengthening work of MahruDI Pathkyuda Motor Road in Km. 1 to 3 in Kapkot Constituency of district Bageshwar under State Sector.	Rs. 5000.00 + 18% GST	₹ 3.62 Lakh	120 Days	09 Month (Including Rainy Season and Winter Season)	Class "B" & Higher in Road work in Central Govt./Any state Govt./Any Govt. Undertaking.

# India's EV market to reach ₹20 Lakh Crore, to create five Crore jobs by 2030

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

Union minister Nitin Gadkari on Thursday said the Indian electric vehicle market potential is likely to touch Rs 20 lakh crore and will create around 5 crore jobs across the entire EV ecosystem by 2030.

Addressing the 8th Catalyst Conference on Sustainability of E-Vehicle Industry - Evexpo 2024, Gadkari said estimated electric vehicles finance market size will be around Rs 4 lakh crore by 2030.

"The Indian electric vehicles market potential is of Rs 20 lakh crore by 2030, creating five crore jobs across the entire EV ecosystem," he said. The road transport and highways minister said 40 per cent of air pollution in India is



because of the transport sector.

"We import fossil fuels worth Rs 22 lakh crore, that is a big economic challenge. And this import of fossil fuels is creating a lot of problems in

our country," Gadkari said.

According to Gadkari, the government is concentrating on green energy as 44 per cent of India's power basket is solar power. "We are giving highest priority for development of

our hydro power, then solar power, green power, particularly from biomass.

And now solar power is one of the important sources for all of us," he said. The minister pointed out that

India is facing shortages of electric buses.

"Our country requires one lakh electric buses but our capacity is 50,000 buses. I request all of you that this is the appropriate time that you can expand your factory," he said.

Gadkari asked electric vehicle manufacturers not to compromise with the quality. He said the size of India's automobile industry was Rs 7 lakh crore when he took charge as transport minister in 2014.

"Today it (the size of the automobile sector) is Rs 22 lakh crore. Our number is third in the world. We just surpassed Japan," he said.

The size of the USA's automobile industry is Rs 78 lakh crore, followed by China (Rs 47 lakh crore) and India (Rs 22 lakh crore).

## Union Minister Nitin Gadkari urges sugar industry to diversify into ethanol, green hydrogen

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

Road, Transport and Highways Minister Nitin Gadkari on Thursday called upon the sugar industry to explore multiple avenues for diversification, including ethanol-diesel blending and green hydrogen production.

Addressing the annual general meeting of the Indian Sugar and Bio-Energy Manufacturers Association (ISMA) virtually, the minister emphasised the need for setting up ethanol and CNG pumps, including through private sector participation.

There is a huge potential for flex engines, ethanol-based engines, and bioCNG as alternatives to fossil fuels.

Five automakers including Tata, Suzuki, and Toyota are set to launch flex engine fuel cars in the market, he said and urged the tractor makers to start manufacturing tractors on alternative fuels. The minister suggested



examining possibilities of exporting ethanol to neighbouring countries like Bangladesh, Bhutan, Nepal and Sri Lanka to expand market opportunities.

Biobitumen production using lignin and biomass sources, along with green hydrogen generation from sugar industry infrastructure, were highlighted as potential areas for expansion. He emphasised the potential of green hydrogen as an alternative fuel source and suggested using existing infrastructure in the sugar and ethanol industries to

produce green hydrogen.

"I know that making sugar is not an attractive job, but at the same time, because of ethanol, CNG, hydrogen and other by-products, we can increase the productivity and profitability in the industry," he said.

"The industry must focus on increasing sugarcane productivity through modern techniques like nano-fertilizers and drone spraying," the minister said. The government will also consider the industry's request for sugar exports and minimum selling price (MSP), the minister said.

# Sebi introduces timelines for NFO fund deployment, eases AMC employee interest alignment rules

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

Markets regulator Sebi has decided to introduce timelines for deploying funds raised through New Fund Offers (NFOs) by asset management companies (AMCs) and relaxed regulatory framework regarding the alignment of AMC employees' interests with those of unitholders. Additionally, the regulator has mandated disclosure of stress testing for all mutual fund schemes to provide greater transparency to investors.



These proposals, approved Wednesday, aimed at enhancing operational

flexibility for mutual funds while ensuring greater accountability and trust among investors.

Regarding deployment timelines, Sebi said that fund managers must deploy funds collected during an NFO as per the specified asset allocation of the scheme, typically within 30 days.

If funds are not deployed within the specified timeline, investors will have the option to exit the scheme without paying an exit load, through regulator said in a statement. The framework discourages

AMCs from collecting excess funds during NFOs, as investors can invest in open-ended schemes later at the prevailing Net Asset Value (NAV).

"The new framework is aimed at encouraging AMCs to collect only as many funds in NFOs as can be deployed in a reasonable period of time (i.e. Ordinarily 30 days) since in the open-ended funds investors always have the option to enter the scheme at a later date at the prevailing NAV," Sebi said. "The framework provides an option to investors to

exit the scheme without exit load in case the fund manager is unable to deploy the fund within the specified timeline," it added.

To address the issue of possible mis-selling in NFOs, for switch transactions, the distributor shall be entitled to the lower of the two commissions offered under the two schemes of the switch transaction, Sebi said.

To facilitate ease of doing business for asset management companies' employees, Sebi has decided to relax the regulatory

framework pertaining to the 'Alignment of interest of AMC employees' with unitholders.

Under this, the regulator has decided to reduce the minimum investment amount required for designated employees, reduce the frequency of disclosures related to compliance relaxed requirements for employees managing liquid funds and simplified redemption norms.

Additionally, Sebi said that employees who resign will now have a reduced lock-in period for their

investments. The regulator has empowered the committee to oversee compliance by designated employees.

Sandeep Bagla, CEO, TRUST MF, said that Sebi having a relook at the 'Skin in the Game' regulation is a welcome step in the right direction.

The MF industry is expanding fast and needs to retain quality professionals to serve and safeguard the interests of unit holders. One needs to examine the relevance, context and effectiveness of regulations regularly," he added.

## Flyzy partners with Adani Digital Labs to enhance dutyfree, Pranaam Service

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

Flyzy on Wednesday announced a partnership with Adani Digital Labs, a subsidiary of the Adani Group. This strategic collaboration will enable Flyzy customers to conveniently purchase duty-free items and avail Adani Pranaam services directly through the Flyzy's dashboard. The integration is now live, offering Flyzy users the ease of accessing these premium Adani services from their devices.

The signature Pranaam meet and greet services by Adani Digital Labs are designed to ensure a seamless experience, addressing key pain points for modern travellers.

"We at Flyzy are always thinking of solutions that will streamline travel experience for our users.

This partnership with Adani Digital Labs is also a step in that direction. Airport travel is all about convenience today and not many companies address the pain points of the travellers.

By integrating Adani services with Flyzy dashboard we aim to make airport travel smoother for millions of our users," said Deepak Meena, Co-founder & CEO, Flyzy. Flyzy has disrupted the traditional B2B travel industry by redefining travel operations for its clients by ensuring transparency, profitability, and scalability.

## Rupee falls 14 paise to close at all-time low of 85.08 against US dollar



PTI ■ MUMBAI

The rupee dropped 14 paise and breached the crucial 85 level to close at an all-time low of 85.08 (provisional) against the US dollar on Thursday, as a hawkish stance from the US

Federal Reserve sparked a broad dollar rally.

Forex traders said the Indian rupee breached the 85-mark for the first time and fell to a new record low on Thursday, as the US Federal Reserve adjusted its projections for 2025, signalling a more cautious monetary policy stance, pressuring emerging market currencies, including the Indian rupee.

The US Federal Reserve cut interest rates by 25-bps to 4.5 per cent, in line with estimates. However, it signalled only two rate cuts in 2025 from its previous expectations of four rate cuts.

At the interbank foreign exchange, the rupee opened on a weak note and breached the crucial 85.00 level against the greenback.

It fell further to an all-time low of 85.08 against the American currency, registering a fall of 14 paise over its previous close, as dollar demand from importers, foreign fund outflows and a muted trend in domestic equities further dented investor sentiments. On Wednesday, the rupee dropped 3 paise to close at an all-time low of 84.94 against the US dollar.

"We expect the rupee to trade with a negative bias on global equities following a

hawkish Fed and a strong dollar. Concerns over slowdown in the economy may further weigh on the rupee," said Anuj Choudhary - Research Analyst at Mirae Asset Sharekhan.

Choudhary further noted that any intervention by the Reserve Bank of India (RBI) may also support the rupee. "Traders may take cues from final GDP, weekly unemployment claims, and existing home sales data from the US, USD-INR spot price is expected to trade in a range of 84.9 to 85.25," he said.

Meanwhile, the dollar index, which gauges the

greenback's strength against a basket of six currencies, was trading lower by 0.13 per cent at 107.88.

Brent crude, the global oil benchmark, fell 0.05 per cent to USD 73.35 per barrel in futures trade.

In the domestic equity market, the 30-share BSE Sensex closed 964.15 points, or 1.20 per cent, down at 79,218.05 points, while Nifty settled down 247.15 points, or 1.02 per cent to 23,951.70 points.

Foreign Institutional Investors (FIIs) offloaded Rs 1,316.81 crore in the capital markets on net basis on Wednesday, according to exchange data.

## Air India places order for 34 trainer aircraft

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

Air India has placed an order for 34 trainer aircraft, including 31 single engine planes, for its flying training organisation in Maharashtra that is expected to come up by the second half of 2025.

The order includes 31 single-engine aircraft from piper aircraft in the US and three twin-engine planes from Austria-based Diamond Aircraft, the airline said in a release on Thursday.

The Flying Training Organisation (FTO) is being

set up at Belora airport in Amravati, Maharashtra. It is expected to be operational by the second half of next year post-regulatory approvals.

Sunil Bhaskaran, Director of Air India's Aviation Academy, said the FTO will help in building a self-reliant ecosystem of qualified pilots for both Air India and the country's aviation industry. The Tata Group-owned airline has opened its new Aviation Training Academy in Gurugram, Haryana. Air India group is expanding its fleet and network.

# Indian Oil Corporation to invest over ₹21,000 Crore in Bihar refinery expansion

PTI ■ PATNA



Indian Oil Corporation (IOC) - the nation's top oil firm - will invest over Rs 21,000 crore to expand the Barauni refinery in Bihar as well as in setting up a city gas distribution network across the state, a senior executive said on Thursday. IOC is expanding its Barauni refinery to 9 million tonnes per annum from current 6 million tonnes together with a petrochemical plant at a cost of about Rs 16,000 crore and invest another Rs 5,600 crore in setting up network to retail CNG to automobiles and piped cooking gas to households and industries in 27 cities of

Bihar, company Executive Director Suman Kumar said while speaking at the Bihar Business Connect 2024 investor summit here. "IOC is the oldest investor in Bihar, setting up the Barauni refinery in 1964.

The initial capacity was 3 million tonnes per annum which was later expanded to 6 million tonnes.

Now we are expanding the capacity from 6 million tonnes to 9 million tonnes per annum.

Alongside, a 200,000 tonnes polypropylene is also being set up," he said.

Polypropylene will be the raw material for the plastic industry.

The expansion and PP plant is scheduled to be commissioned by 2025-end. Besides, IOC is also investing Rs 5,600 crore in setting up city gas distribution (CGD) network in 27 districts of Bihar, he said.

Previously, the company, along with partners, had spent Rs 9,512 crore in revival of the Barauni fertiliser plant, starting urea production in October 2022. The plant was part of a government initiative to revive closed urea units and

increase the availability of domestically produced urea. The investments are part of the IOC's aim to become a USD 1 trillion company by 2047, he said.

The USD 110 billion oil major has drawn up an aggressive capital expansion plan, proposing to invest more than Rs 2 lakh crore through the decade to expand refining capacity, petrochemical integration, allied infrastructure and renewable energy assets.

With India's economy on the rise, the energy needs of the country are growing exponentially. As 'The Energy of India', the firm aims to become the nation's lead energiser, fulfilling 12.5 per cent

(1/8th) of India's energy needs by 2050, he said.

Besides Barauni, the state-run refiner is expanding the Panipat Refinery from 15 million tonnes to 25 million tonnes a year and the Gujarat refinery from 13.7 million tonnes to 18 million tonnes, along with its integration to lube and petrochemical production units.

While the first phase of petchem expansions at Panipat in Haryana and Paradip in Odisha is complete, the one at Gujarat refinery is scheduled for commissioning in 2024-25. Alongside, it is pursuing green initiatives, including hydrogen mobility, hydrogen transportation,

biofuels, electric mobility, solar cooktops, and minimising water footprint. Oil demand in India, the world's third-largest energy consumer, is projected to rise from 5.4 million barrels per day (bpd) in 2023 to 9.3 million bpd by 2040. Fulfilling this rising demand will require augmenting the country's refining capacity progressively, from the current 256.8 million tonnes per annum to 450 million tonnes.

In addition, the country is set to add 50 GW of renewable energy capacity annually, aiming to achieve 500 gigawatts (GW) of installed renewable capacity by 2030.

## Nearly half of Indian international travellers made last-minute flight bookings in 2024: report

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

The year 2024 witnessed a rise in spontaneous travel among Indian international travellers, with nearly half of them making last-minute plans, barely less than a week before their departure, reveals a new report.

The travel report, conducted by travel-banking fintech platform Niyoo, highlights the evolving mindset of Indian travellers, who are embracing flexibility, prioritising experiences, and benefiting from streamlined travel processes. "Forty eight percent of international flight



bookings by Indians this year were made just 0-7 days before travel. This trend was supported by easier travel access, with 58

countries offering visa-free or visa-on-arrival options to Indian passport holders," reads the report findings. While many travellers

booked international flights at short notice, the report said "30 per cent of visa applications" were submitted 16-30 days before travel, implying a certain degree of preparation. Dubai, which according to the report was by far the most preferred destination for Indian travellers, attracted "45 per cent" of holidaymakers with its luxurious shopping and entertainment.

The list was followed by Vietnam, known for its culture and natural beauty, which drew 15 per cent travellers. Smaller number of travellers, accounting for one per cent each, chose Oman and Japan. Pop culture also played a

significant influence on the travel choices of Indians this year. For instance, web series like "Emily in Paris" inspired many Indian women to visit France, with 30 per cent Indians choosing France as their destination, followed by the UK (29 per cent) and Singapore (26 per cent). The preferred travel destinations for Indian males were different.

"Male travellers leaned towards Thailand, with 80 per cent preferring its beaches and vibrant nightlife, followed by the UAE (77 per cent) and the USA (76 per cent)," it added. Additionally, short holidays were the most popular in 2024, with "66 per cent" of

trips lasting less than seven days.

The number of travellers choosing extended vacations lasting 15 days or more was recorded "17 per cent".

With the increase in travel, more people also focused on safety as the report witnessed a record sale of 7,395 travel insurance policies in 2024, worth a total of Rs 43.2 crore.

"Younger travellers especially prioritised protection, often choosing insurance plans ranging from Rs 50,000 to Rs 1,00,000," it added. The findings were based on the sample size of 1 million Indian international travellers.

## Koelnmesse India launches ORGATEC India for workspace design and technology

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

Koelnmesse India has announced the launch of ORGATEC India, the premier event for workspace design, furniture and technology, aimed at bringing global expertise to country's evolving workspace ecosystem. Slated to debut from November 4 to 6 next year, at the Jio Convention Centre, Mumbai, ORGATEC India will bring together global and local leaders to explore business opportunities, foster connections, and showcase

innovations shaping the future of workspaces.

The event will showcase transformative innovations in workspace design, including sustainable building technologies, adaptive workspaces, and advanced design solutions. With Global Capability Centres reshaping the office landscape, it is projected that GCCs will lease 40-45 percent of total office space in India this year, expanding to over 1,900 centers supporting 2 million professionals by 2025, Koelnmesse India said.

# UNITING ART AND PHILANTHROPY

COMING soon

**KHUSHII NGO** launched the Art Design Culture (ADC) Collective, a unique event combining Indian art and design with a mission to uplift communities in need. The evening also featured the launch of Rajan Kapoor's book *The Serengeti: Wild Wonders of Africa*, adding a thoughtful dimension to the celebration, writes **SAKSHI PRIYA**



In a world where art and culture come together, it's refreshing to see an event that not only celebrates creativity but also serves a greater purpose. The unveiling of the Art Design Culture (ADC) Collective, hosted by KHUSHII NGO at Bikaner House, was a perfect example of such an initiative. This special event seamlessly combined India's rich artistic traditions with the mission of supporting underprivileged communities through KHUSHII's educational and community development programs. The evening began with a gathering of art lovers, patrons and philanthropists who were eager to engage in thoughtful discussions about the role of art in society. Among the highlights of the event were the insightful conversations with celebrated personalities such as *Shabana Azmi* and *Javed Akhtar*. Their reflections on their contributions to Indian art and culture provided valuable perspectives, sparking a meaningful dialogue about the future of Indian creativity. One of the key moments of the evening was the launch of *Rajan Kapoor's The Serengeti: Wild Wonders of Africa*, a



stunning visual exploration of Africa's natural beauty. The launch was accompanied by a discussion on wildlife conservation led by *Dr. Rajiv Bhartari*, which highlighted the importance of preserving nature and the role that art can play in raising awareness about such critical issues.

Design also took centre stage, with renowned designer *Sussanne Khan* sharing her journey in the world of design. Her inspiring words about perseverance, creativity, and pushing boundaries resonated with everyone present. The evening also featured a lively art dialogue moderated by *Rahul Kumar*, where Padma

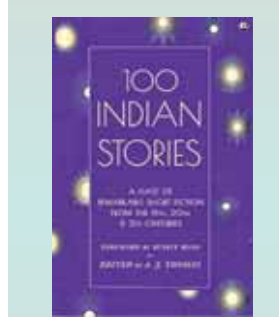
**ABOUT THE BOOK**  
 Book: The Serengeti wild wonders of Africa by Rajan Kapoor  
 Publisher: Niyogi Books  
 Price: ₹4,500

Shri awardee *Paresh Maity* and textile revivalist *Karishma Swali* discussed the evolution of Indian art over the last decade. Their conversation underscored the importance of innovation and tradition in shaping the future of Indian art. The ADC Collective isn't just a celebration of creativity; it's an opportunity to connect with the vibrant world of Indian culture while supporting a meaningful cause. The event will give the public a chance to explore a stunning collection of artworks and interact with talented Indian artisans. All proceeds from the event will go directly towards supporting KHUSHII's philanthropic work, making it an impactful experience for both art enthusiasts and those eager to contribute to a greater cause. This initiative highlights how art can be a powerful tool for social change. By combining the beauty of Indian craftsmanship with the mission of uplifting communities, the ADC Collective offers a perfect example of how culture and philanthropy can work hand in hand to create positive change.

PHOTOS: PANKAJ KUMAR



**Book: The Tamils**  
 A Portrait of a Community  
 Author: Nirmala Lakshman  
 Publisher: Aleph book Company



**Book: 100 Indian Stories**  
 A Feast of Remarkable Short Fiction from the 19th, 20th, and 21st Centuries  
 Author: Edited by A. J. Thomas  
 Foreword by Ruskin Bond  
 Publisher: Aleph book Company



**Book: The Comeback** A Novel  
 Author: Annie Zaidi  
 Publisher: Aleph book Company

## SHATTERED SYRIA: CHAOS AFTER ASSAD

By GYANESHWAR DAYAL

Our Regular columnist, *Nilantha Ilangamuwa's After Assad: Is Syria the New Libya in the Mediterranean?* is a compelling exploration of the geopolitical chaos unleashed by the fall of Bashar al-Assad's regime. Independently published in 2024 and available on Amazon, the book offers a stark analysis of a nation fractured by war, foreign interference, and sectarian tensions, drawing thought-provoking parallels with Libya's disintegration post-Gaddafi. *Ilangamuwa* delves into the complex aftermath of Assad's collapse, illustrating how the removal of a dictator does not necessarily lead to stability or democracy. Instead, the power vacuum has given rise to militias, territorial struggles, and foreign interventions. The narrative paints a grim picture of a nation torn apart by competing agendas, with Turkey, Iran, Israel, Russia, and Western powers vying for influence, often at the expense of Syria's sovereignty and its people's welfare. This multi-layered analysis is not just a critique of these powers but a searing indictment of how global ambitions exploit fractured states. The book contextualises the Syrian conflict within a broader historical framework, tracing the roots of sectarian manipulation and authoritarian rule under the Assad dynasty. *Ilangamuwa* connects these factors to the current fragmentation, showing how decades of repression and inequality laid the groundwork for the present turmoil. His parallels with Libya highlight the recurring failures of external interventions, where short-term strategic goals leave behind a legacy of chaos and suffering. The human cost of this conflict is at the heart of *Ilangamuwa's* narrative. He vividly describes the destruction of key Syrian cities, the displacement of millions, and the rise of extremist factions like Hay'at Tahrir al-Sham. He challenges the ethical basis of foreign powers' involvement, arguing that their actions often prioritise geopolitical objectives over humanitarian considerations. The looting of Damascus following Assad's downfall is capturing the collapse of state authority and the pervasive violence engulfing the capital. The author's critique extends to the duplicity of international media and foreign policy actors. By juxtaposing Syria's fate with Western portrayals of regime change, *Ilangamuwa* exposes the contradictions and hypocrisies in global narratives about intervention and democracy. His insights into how powers such as the United States and Turkey manipulate proxy wars underscore the cynical exploitation of regional instability. This is not merely a political or historical study; it is also a distressing reflection on the enduring suffering of the Syrian people. *Ilangamuwa's* writing is enriched by his encounters with Syrian activists, journalists, and intellectuals, lending authenticity to his analysis. These voices, often overshadowed by dominant geopolitical discourses, remind readers of the resilience and hope that persist amidst devastation.

**ABOUT THE BOOK**  
 Book: Ilangamuwa's After Assad: Is Syria the New Libya in the Mediterranean?  
 by Nilantha Ilangamuwa

## THE UNTOLD JOURNEY OF A CRICKET LEGEND

By KUMAR CHELLAPPAN

The game of cricket remains a mystery to me even in the autumn of life. My first encounter with it occurred in the 1960s when I witnessed this strange game being played at a maidan in Fort Kochi, where our teachers had taken us for a day-long excursion. The picturesque maidan had two screens made of white cloth stretched across the ends, while 'gentlemen' in white trousers and shirts played the game with bats and a ball. Sreedharan Pillai, the teacher who accompanied us, told me that it was 'cricket', a game played by royalty. Months later, I came across this game again at my school in Perumbavoor, where the royalty had assembled to play cricket. They arrived in cars such as Herald, Fiat, Vanguards, Chevrolet, and the occasional Ambassadors. One of the spectators told me that the players were from Kannan Devan Tea Estates in Munnar and shipping agents based in Kochi. Since I couldn't grasp the nuances of the game, I asked my classmate Sundararajan, son of a senior manager at Travancore Rayons, who often spoke of Pataudi, Sarbadhikari, and others. "You will not understand this game because it's played by educated and wealthy people," Sundararajan told me. In every place, there are those who are considered masters of all topics. We had Gopalakrishnan, the local tailor, who was an encyclopedia of knowledge. There was nothing he didn't know. "Arrey, you will not understand it. It's a game played by officials like engineers, adhikaris, contractors, sarvadhikaris, and vakeels," Gopal Ji ticked me off. It was years later that I heard names like Farook Engineer, Nari Contractor, Hemu Adhikari, Berry Sarvadhikari, and the occasional Smiths and Tailors who toured India! Cricket got a major boost in 1983 when India won the World Cup in England under the captaincy of Kapil Dev, the Haryana Hurricane. Alongside him, another player emerged as the darling of the masses: the unassuming Mohinder

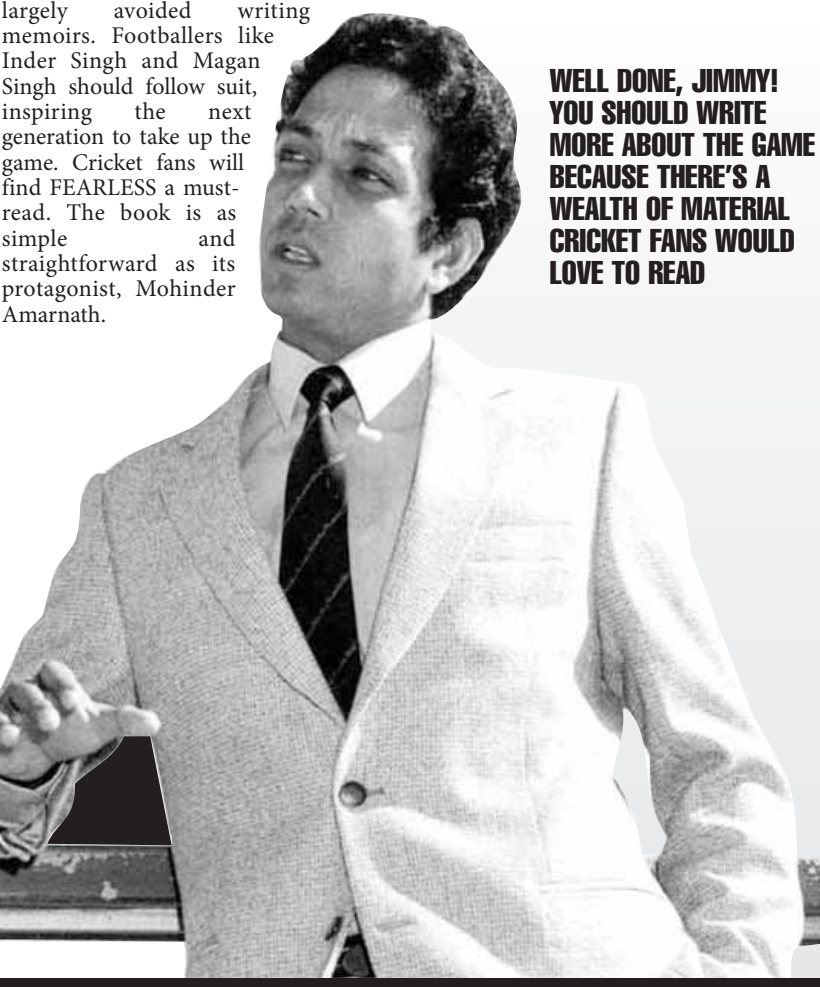
Amarnath, whose stellar performance with both bat and ball led India to triumph. Before the World Cup, Mohinder had already earned a reputation as a fantastic all-rounder, particularly in the 1977-1978 series in Australia, which is often remembered as the 'Mohinder Amarnath series.' It's shocking that such a brilliant cricketer had to spend many years in the wilderness due to the callous attitude of Indian selectors, who overlooked him despite his exceptional performances. Though he played against the touring Australian side in 1969, he was sidelined for years. The reason for this remains a mystery. After three decades of first-class cricket, Mohinder penned his memoirs, FEARLESS, with his younger sibling Rajinder. The three sons of legendary Lala Amarnath—Surinder, Mohinder, and Rajinder—had made their father proud with their performances, though Rajinder never made it to the national side. Despite being born to a legendary father, Mohinder had no godfathers in the game. His memoirs detail the trials he faced. He doesn't blame anyone in particular but does highlight how the Delhi District Cricket Association's actions kept him from the national team. Mohinder attributes this to the authorities' potential frustration with his outspoken father, Lala Amarnath, who didn't hesitate to speak his mind. FEARLESS is more than just a memoir; it offers valuable lessons for aspiring cricketers. Life wasn't easy for Mohinder, despite having a father who was a flamboyant cricketer. Critics consider Mohinder the best Indian batsman against fast bowling. Indian players, barring a few like Farook Engineer and Viswanath, often collapsed against pace bowlers. Had Mohinder been included in the team, the outcomes would likely have been different. An interesting anecdote from Mohinder's memoir involves the 1978 Pakistan tour. In the midst of a contentious series, Asif Iqbal, the Pakistani all-rounder,

approached the Indian team with an offer from Kerry Packer, the founder of World Series Cricket. Iqbal, eager to distract the Indians, sent a WSC representative with a lucrative offer, but despite Mohinder's signed contract, nothing came of it. Mohinder describes it as a strategic move to disrupt their focus before a crucial Test match. The chapter on the 1983 World Cup transports readers back in time, immersing them in the spirit of the game. There are many cricketer memoirs, but FEARLESS stands out as monumental. The book captures the sweat and blood of Mohinder and Surinder (who was also dropped despite impressive performances). The discrimination faced by northern players at the hands of the western zone selectors is another compelling aspect of FEARLESS. Indian sportsmen, unlike their cricketer counterparts, have largely avoided writing memoirs. Footballers like Inder Singh and Magan Singh should follow suit, inspiring the next generation to take up the game. Cricket fans will find FEARLESS a must-read. The book is as simple and straightforward as its protagonist, Mohinder Amarnath.

**ABOUT THE BOOK**  
 Book: FEARLESS - A Memoir Mohinder Amarnath with Rajinder Amarnath  
 Publisher: Harper Collins  
 Price: ₹799

**WELL DONE, JIMMY! YOU SHOULD WRITE MORE ABOUT THE GAME BECAUSE THERE'S A WEALTH OF MATERIAL CRICKET FANS WOULD LOVE TO READ**

## FROM WILDERNESS TO GLORY



Get in touch at [vivacity@dailypioneer.com](mailto:vivacity@dailypioneer.com)

# India to play its Champions Trophy matches at neutral venue

PTI ■ DUBAI

The deadlock over the hosting of next year's Champions Trophy finally ended on Thursday when the ICC announced that India will play their matches of the 50-over event at a neutral venue instead of host country Pakistan, which will get a similar arrangement for tournaments to be held in India till 2027. The agreement will also extend to the 2028 women's T20 World Cup, which will be held in Pakistan. Although no formal announcement has been made, but India's Champions Trophy matches are likely to be held in the UAE. "The ICC Board has approved that all matches between India and Pakistan played at ICC Events during the current rights cycle from 2024 to 2027 (which are to be hosted in India or Pakistan)

will be played at a neutral venue proposed by the tournament host," said the ICC in a statement, confirming what PTI reported on December 5. The arrangement will also cover next year's women's World Cup in India and the T20 World Cup in 2026, to be jointly hosted by India and Sri Lanka. "India's Champions Trophy games will most likely be played in the UAE. As far as the Women's ODI World Cup in India is concerned, the India-Pakistan game could be held in Sri Lanka," said a source. India had refused to travel to Pakistan for the event scheduled in February-March due to security concerns. The Indians have not played in Pakistan since the 2008 Mumbai terror attacks in which 150 people were killed. The two countries' last bilateral engagement was



back in 2012. Travelling to Pakistan also requires Indian government's clearance which has remained firm on the status quo. "The schedule for the ICC Champions Trophy 2025 is set to be confirmed soon," the ICC added. The decision, that came after a series of back-channel talks, was on expected lines after the sport's governing body maintained prolonged silence on the contentious matter during the previous set-up led by chairman Greg Barclay. His successor Jay Shah took charge on December 1 and all stakeholders, including the Pakistan Cricket Board, the BCCI and the broadcasters, were running out of time to organise the 50-over event that was last played in the UK in 2017. Thursday's announcement meant it was the first major decision taken in Shah's tenure.

While BCCI's stance was always clear, the matter got stretched because of PCB's refusal to allow a "one-sided" arrangement of neutral venues. Led by Pakistan interior minister Mohsin Naqvi, the PCB was determined not to lose face in front of the local public. PCB, which had sent its team to India for the ODI World Cup last year, had categorically opposed the hybrid model but eventually agreed to it on reciprocal grounds. The PCB had earlier indicated that it wanted a greater share in the annual revenue cycle to accommodate the Indian demand for a hybrid model but there is no word yet on whether that has been discussed or accepted. The tournament will feature eight teams, divided into two groups. The top two teams from each group will advance to the semifinals.



## Ashwin deserved a fitting farewell: Kapil Dev

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

Unable to comprehend R Ashwin's sudden decision to retire from international cricket, a shocked World Cup-winning skipper Kapil Dev deserved a fitting farewell, ideally on home soil. Ashwin stunned one and all by calling it quits on Wednesday, right after the Brisbane Test against Australia ended in a draw. Kapil felt Ashwin seemed unhappy with something. "I was shocked by how one of India's greatest cricketers chose to leave the game. The disappointment among the fans was widespread, but I also saw a tinge of hurt on his face. He looked unhappy, and that was sad. He deserved much better, a fitting farewell," Kapil said in a statement to PTI. As has been his wont, Ashwin chose to walk his own way while retiring in the middle of an important series. Kapil said he would like to hear the Tamil Nadu man's side of the story. "He could have waited and announced his retirement on Indian soil, but I don't know why Ashwin called it a day. I would want to hear his side of the story. Give him that respect. He has played 106 Tests for the country. I don't think anyone can match his

humongous contribution to Indian cricket." Kapil hoped that the Board of Control of Cricket in India (BCCI) would arrange a "grand farewell" to Ashwin. "I'm sure the parent body of cricket in India, BCCI, shall plan a grand farewell for this giant match-winner of Team India," he said. Kapil, 65, said Ashwin was a stalwart, a versatile and unorthodox bowler, who constantly hustled the batters with his change of pace and cleverly disguised line and length. "He was ready to experiment, and that is what set him apart. In a game where the batters get the most accolades, Ashwin stood out with his prowess. "Ashwin was brave. He could bowl at any stage of the contest. Do you find bowlers with such tremendous tactical sense who can adapt quickly? He was his captain's go-to man," he said. Praising both his cricketing brain and off-field character, Kapil said Ashwin was a match-winner with no parallel in modern cricket. "He has won India's highest number of Man of the Series awards. That is a tremendous compliment that puts his game and consistency in perspective. He was not a "yes" man and came across as a gritty fighter.



## Australian top-three seriously out of form, should go back to basics: Ian Healy

PTI ■ MELBOURNE

Ahead of the crucial Boxing Day Test against India from December 26, legendary wicketkeeper Ian Healy has pointed out the serious lack of form of the top-three Australian batters and advised them to go to the basics and perform if they want to continue in the team. Australia made 445 in the first innings of the rain truncated third Test at Brisbane with Travis Head and Steve Smith smashing centuries but the home team did miserably in the second innings before declaring at 89 for 7. The match ended in a draw with the five-match Test series level at 1-1. "I don't see them (Australia) regressing going into Melbourne, but they are out of form, they're seriously out of form," Healy told SEN Radio. Opens Usman Khawaja, Nathan McSweeney and one-drop batter Marnus Labuschagne performed below expectations at the Gabba before Smith and Head halted the slide with centuries in the first innings.

The second innings was even worse with the top three managing just 13 runs. "Questions have got to be asked of George Bailey: 'Can we get this form back? Are you confident that form will reemerge in our top three?' 'Otherwise changes have to be made, and what suggestions might you have for us, George?' That type of thing," Healy opined that the Melbourne Test should be Khawaja, McSweeney and Labuschagne's best chance to redeem themselves and asked the trio to get back to the basics. "The Melbourne Test is probably the least volatile wicket they'll play on and that's their best chance. But form takes a little longer than a week to turn around, and it's just not coming for them. "They've got to get right back to basics and strip it right back. See the ball and hit it, don't care where your feet go. That's the first step, just get some clarity in your head," said Healy. Australia must avoid defeat in Melbourne to keep their hopes alive of taking back the Border-Gavaskar Trophy.

## ISL: FC Goa aim to end Mohun Bagan's unbeaten streak

PTI ■ MARGAO

FC Goa will seek to snap a rampaging Mohun Bagan Super Giant's eight-match unbeaten streak in the Indian Super League (ISL) when the two sides square off in a 12th round match here on Friday. FC Goa, under India head coach Manolo Marquez, will also aim to improve their record against the Mariners, having lost five of their eight meetings in the ISL, including a narrow 0-1 defeat in their most recent fixture in February. Super Giant's unbeaten run has seen them win seven and draw one of their last eight ISL games, and that has put them on top of the league leaderboard with 26 points from 11 matches, winning



eight, drawing twice and losing once. On the other hand, the Gaurs are placed fourth with 19 points from the same number of games. Both these teams have been in equally efficient form upfront, with the Kolkata-based side netting 22 times in the competition thus far, as compared to the 21 of the Goan club.

However, the visitors have been comparatively better organised at the back, as they have conceded 10 goals as opposed to the 15 of FC Goa. Head-to-head, FC Goa have won twice, whereas Super Giant have emerged victorious five times in the eight times these two teams have faced each other in the ISL. FC Goa head coach Marquez admitted that the

Mariners have a nice mix of international and domestic stars that make them a strong opponent. "I feel that we are playing one of the strongest teams in the competition. Mohun Bagan have most of the top national team players, and they've spent a lot on getting good foreigners too," Marquez said. "We need to keep fighting to win" Super Giant head coach Jose Molina lauded his team for not giving up under any circumstance. "The mentality of Mohun Bagan Super Giant is to fight every game till the end. We have to attack and defend well, communicate properly, but most importantly we need to keep fighting to get the win," Molina said.

## Hazlewood 'frustrated' at missing remainder of India series due to 'random' injury

PTI ■ BRISBANE

Australia fast bowler Josh Hazlewood is "frustrated" by the timing of his injury after he was ruled out of the remaining two Tests against India due to a right calf strain sustained during the drawn third match at the Gabba. Hazlewood, who had also missed the second Test (pink-ball) in Adelaide - which Australia won by 10 wickets - due to a side strain, described the latest injury as "random". "Just frustrating really. Ticked every box heading into the (third) Test, I could understand if it was my side again, but it was just a random calf strain," he told 7NEWS. "It's just the timing again, they are only little 2-3 week injuries, it's just the timing of it and missing big games is the frustrating thing." The 33-year-old Hazlewood was sent for scans after just one over of bowling on the fourth day after hurting his right calf

in the warm-up before play. The injury only turned out to be a strain, but it's expected to be serious enough to end his home Test summer early. "Obviously, do a deep dive into it and see what we can come up with... Feels pretty random," he said. "I've had a history of sides and calves, they're probably the two things that have kept me out for the majority over the last four years. "But yeah I sort of just keep adding another layer to the defence hopefully, get back into the gym, I've ticked a lot of boxes over the last 12 months." Hazlewood said he does not want to rush back to action before regaining full fitness, which he is hoping to achieve by the two-match Test tour of Sri Lanka in late January and February.

## IOC publishes manifestos of 7 candidates running to be president and lead Olympics

AP ■ GENEVA

The seven candidates running for International Olympic Committee president had their manifestos published on Thursday, and one is offering to take just half of the eight-year mandate on offer and stand again in 2029. Sebastian Coe, the World Athletics president who turned 68 this year, pledged to embed "transformative change over the next four years" then seek re-election ahead of schedule. Coe was among several candidates offering to give back to IOC members - who elect their president at a March 18-21 meeting near the site of Ancient Olympia in Greece - a decisive choice in picking future host cities. Under the hands-on presidency of Thomas Bach, who reaches his limit of 12 years in office next year, members now simply rubber-stamp a single host candidate that has worked with the IOC administration.



Two members of the Bach-chaired IOC executive board, Juan Antonio Samaranch Jr. and Prince Feisal al Hussein, joined Coe in promising to empower members to have a bigger role in the Olympic body. They also promise to raise the retirement age for members from 70 to 75 years. Members must be invited to join the exclusive IOC club and the current 111 include European and Middle East royalty, leaders of international sports bodies, former and current Olympic athletes, politicians,

diplomats, industrialists and an Oscar-winning actress. Only IOC members can be presidential candidates and the other contenders are board member Kirsty Coventry and three more presidents of sports governing bodies: Johan Eliasch from skiing, David Lappartient from cycling, and Morinari Watanabe from gymnastics. The manifesto releases are one of just two set-piece events in a mostly opaque campaign with strict rules to limit self-promotion and engagement with voters. Candidates will present themselves to voters, though not take questions, at a

Jan. 30 meeting at IOC headquarters in Lausanne, Switzerland. The IOC has had no female president and just nine men leading it in a 130-year history. Eight of those presidents were from Europe and one from the United States. Coventry, the 41-year-old sports minister of Zimbabwe, is just the second female candidate ever to run for the IOC leadership and is widely seen as Bach's preferred choice to continue his policies. Coventry and Coe are two-time Olympic champions in swimming and track, respectively. Coe also led organising the 2012 London Olympics. Coe upset the IOC establishment - including some voters - this year by committing World Athletics to pay \$50,000 prize money to gold medalists in track and field at the Paris Olympics. The sport also will pay silver and bronze medalists at the 2028 Los Angeles Summer Games.

Though not specifying prize money, Prince Feisal called for Olympic athletes to be "properly valued" while Samaranch proposed letting athletes use footage of their performances on social media channels. That would relax strict IOC rules on Olympic athletes' ability to promote themselves. Challenges facing the IOC include picking a host for the 2036 Olympics, with India and Qatar in the mix, and looking at moving the Summer Games from its established July-August place in the modern sports calendar. The next IOC president also must address the impact of climate change on the global sports calendar, gender issues in sports, when and how to bring Russia back fully into the Olympic Games and signing a new U.S. Broadcast deal. Long-time partner NBC's deal expires after the 2032 Brisbane Olympics and has been a foundation of Olympic revenue, which was \$7.6 billion in the 2021-24 Olympic cycle.

**CANCELLATION OF BID**  
MM- The Bid for the Works Advertised vide No. ADVT 08125IPR, Bhubaneswar on Dt.04.12.2024 i.e., "Construction of Divisional Forest Officer (DFO) Residence Building at San Duhianali, Athmallik under Athmallik Range of Athmallik Forest Division" (Tender Notice No.6187/1F/2024 Dt.02.12.2024 is hereby cancelled. Sd/- Divisional Forest Officer, Athmallik Division. OIPR-08125/11/0012/2425

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**GOVERNMENT OF ODISHA**  
OFFICE OF THE SUPERINTENDING ENGINEER  
RURAL WORKS DIVISION, SUNABEDA  
e-Procurement Notice for Building works  
Identification No Online Tender /06/RWD-SBD/2024-25  
Letter No. 4854 Date: 18.12.24

01. Name of the work	:: Building works Pottangi, Semilguda, Nandapur Bandhugaon, Laxmipuri, Narayanpatna, Lamtaput block
02. Total Number of works	:: 30 nos works
03. Estimated cost	:: 2.00 to 16.00 lakhs
04. Class of Contractor	:: "C" & "D" Class
05. Period of Completion	:: 02 months
06. Other Details	

Procurement Officer	Bid Identification No.	Availability of tender online for bidding	
Superintending Engineer, R.W. Division, Sunabeda	Online Tender/06/RWD-SBD/2024-25	From 23.12.2024 at 11.00 a.m.	To 02.01.2025 upto 17.00 p.m

Further details can be seen from the website www.tendersorissa.gov.in  
OIPR-25059/11/0006/2425  
Superintending Engineer, Rural Works Division, Sunabeda

**OFFICE OF THE SUPERINTENDING ENGINEER**  
BHUBANESWAR (R&B) DIVISION NO III  
BHUBANESWAR  
bbsrrandb03@yahoo.com  
60Esg.No - 7662 Date - 13.02.2024  
Government of Odisha "e"-Procurement Notice No (32) of 2024-25  
Bid Identification No: - C.C. (R&B) 03

1	Name of the Work	Building Work
2	Total No of works	1 no. work
3	Estimated Cost	1Rs. 16,91,842.00
4	Class of Contractor	"D" & "C" Class Contractors
5	Period of Completion	3 (Three) Calendar Months
6	Type of Tender	Single Cover System (Online)
7	Date & Time of availability of bid document in the portal	From 20/12/2024 at 10.00 A.M. to 27/12/2024 at 5.30 P.M.
8	Last Date & Time for Receipt of bids in the Portal	27/12/2024, upto 5.30 P.M.
9	Name & Address of the Officer inviting Bid	Dr. Gayatri Patel, Superintending Engineer, Bhubaneswar (R&B) Division No III, Bhubaneswar

Further details can be seen from the e-procurement portal https://tendersorissa.gov.in  
N.B: Subsequent corrigendum / addendum if required shall be available in the website as indicated above  
OIPR-34089/11/0012/2425  
Superintending Engineer BBSR (R&B) Division No.III, BBSR