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Yamuna grows toxic veggies?

BISWAJEET BANERJEE
LUCKNOW

The Yamuna River's water has become so polluted that it is no longer safe for drinking, bathing, or even irrigation, a shocking revelation made by the Central Water Commission's latest report, 'Status of Trace and Toxic Metals in Indian Rivers'.

The study exposes dangerously high concentrations of heavy metals such as chromium, nickel, and lead, threatening to unleash a public health crisis in cities like Agra and Mathura. According to the report, water samples collected from three locations in Agra, including Poiya Ghat, and one in Mathura revealed alarming levels of these toxic metals. Agra and Mathura are now ranked among 187 worst-hit cities nationwide, where three or more hazardous metals were found in river water, earning them the grim distinction of having the "worst" water quality in the country. The data is damning. In Agra, nickel levels touched 28.87 micrograms per liter, chromium soared to a staggering 135.15 micrograms per liter, while lead reached 23.41 micrograms per liter—several times above permissible limits. In Mathura, chromium was recorded at 138.02 and 0.55 micrograms per liter at different sites, while nickel stood at 56.04 micrograms per liter. Experts have warned that prolonged exposure to such contamination can trigger



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 The city's two major water treatment plants, Jiwani Mandi and Sikandra Water Works, are still stuck with outdated technologies that can only test for basic parameters like turbidity, color, pH, TDS, hardness, coliform, and E. coli.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

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

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

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

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE
NEW DELHI

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



File photo: Ranjan Dimri

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

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

Repatriate B'deshis staying illegally: Nizamuddin locals

RAJESH KUMAR
NEW DELHI

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

US denies backing anti-India agenda

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE
NEW DELHI

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



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

PNS
NEW DELHI

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

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

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



Representative photo

PTI
UNITED NATIONS

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

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

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



ISKCON centre in Bangladesh burnt down: Radharaman Das

PTI
KOLKATA

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

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

Dubai returned dulha brings baraat, but dulhan gayab...

RANI SINGH RAJPUT
CHANDIGARH/ NEW DELHI

The stage was set and the wedding party was ready to bring home the beautiful bride chosen by their Dubai-returned groom. The wedding had been planned online and this was the first time everyone, including the groom, would be meeting the lawyer-bride, or so they thought. However, Deepak Kumar (24) and his entourage of 150 'baraatis' were shocked when they arrived in Moga, Punjab, only to find his

bride "missing", adding insult to injury they also realised that the wedding venue did not exist. A month ago returned from Dubai to Jalandhar, Punjab to marry one Manpreet Kaur. Kumar had been talking to her via Instagram for three years, but had never met her in person, the police said. After realising he had been duped, Kumar lodged a police complaint against Kaur. Kumar told the police that he along with his family had travelled all the way from Mandiali village in Jalandhar to Moga for the

wedding at the venue that had been chosen by the bride and her family. Upon reaching Moga, the bride's family reportedly told Kumar that some people will escort him and his family to the wedding venue. However, even after waiting till 5 pm, no one showed up, Kumar said. He added that they had asked the locals about the wedding venue named 'Rose Garden Palace' but were told that there was no such place in Moga. The groom said that he worked as a labourer in Dubai and had been in



REPRESENTATIVE PHOTO

touch with Kaur through the platform Instagram for the past three years. Kumar said he had seen Kaur's photos but never met her in person. Their parents had arranged the wedding over phone calls, police officials said, adding that Kumar also claimed to have transferred Rs 50,000 to Kaur earlier. His father Prem Chand said that 150 'baraatis' came for the wedding, and that he had already hired taxis, paid for catering and a videographer. Kaur reportedly hails from Moga and had earlier told

Kumar that she works in Ferozepur, he said. The groom's father said that the marriage was fixed after speaking to Kaur's parents over the phone, and guests were invited for the wedding. Meanwhile, Moga Assistant Sub-Inspector Harjinder Singh said they have received a complaint from Deepak Kumar. Singh said the complaint was lodged after the groom's family could not reach the bride as her phone was switched off. Further investigation in the matter is underway, he said.

Government committed to make school education accessible: PM Modi

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

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

He asserted that while the step will benefit a large number of students, many new employment opportunities will also be created.

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



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

Policy. "As part of that, our government has approved 28 new Navodaya Vidyalayas across the country. This will expand residential and quality school education to a larger

extent," Modi said in another post in Hindi. The prime minister also said his government is determined to improve connectivity across the country. "In this direction, our government has approved the Rithala-Kundli corridor under the fourth phase of Delhi Metro in the National Capital Region. This will make commuting between Delhi and Haryana easier," Modi said. The Union Cabinet approved on Friday the opening of 85 new KV and 28 new NVs. It also gave its nod to expanding one KV. The opening of these new KVs will provide an opportunity for over 82,000 students to receive affordable and high-quality education across the country. The total estimated requirement of funds for the

establishment of the 85 new KVs and the expansion of one existing KV is Rs 5,872.08 crore spread over a period of eight years from 2025-26. As of date, there are 1,256 functional Kendriya Vidyalayas, including three abroad - Moscow, Kathmandu and Tehran - and 13.56 lakh students are studying in these schools, an official statement said. The Union Cabinet also approved on Friday the 26.463-km Rithala-Kundli corridor of the Delhi Metro's Phase-IV project that will further enhance connectivity between the national capital and neighbouring Haryana. The entire stretch will comprise 21 stations, all of them elevated. The decisions were taken at a Cabinet meeting chaired by Modi.

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

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI/RAIPUR

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

These include movable assets - investment made by Mauritius-based company Tano Investment Opportunities Fund related to Dubai-based "hawala operator" Hari Shankar Tibrewal through FPI and FDI - and properties in Chhattisgarh, Mumbai and Madhya Pradesh in the name of promoters of multiple betting apps and websites, panel operators and associates of the promoters, the federal agency said in a statement.

A provisional order was issued under the Prevention



of Money Laundering Act (PMLA) on December 5 to attach these assets with a total value of Rs 387.99 crore, the Enforcement Directorate (ED) said. Tibrewal is being investigated by the agency in this case. The ED has issued multiple such orders during this investigation and with the latest order, assets worth Rs 2,295.61 crore have been either frozen, attached or seized so far. Eleven people have been arrested in this case and the ED has filed four chargesheets. The agency has alleged in the

past that its probe into the Mahadev Online Betting (MOB) gaming and betting app has shown the involvement of various high-ranking politicians and bureaucrats from Chhattisgarh. The app's two main promoters, Sourabh Chandrakar and Ravi Uppal, hail from the state. According to the ED, the MOB app is an umbrella syndicate arranging online platforms for enabling illegal betting websites to enrol new users, create user IDs and launder money through a layered web of benami bank accounts.

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

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

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

The Russian-manufactured multi-role stealth guided missile frigate INS Tushil will be commissioned on Monday in the coastal city of Kaliningrad. The warship, billed as one of the most technologically advanced frigates globally, is expected to significantly bolster the Indian Navy's operational capability in the Indian Ocean, a region that has witnessed increasing Chinese forays. Chief of the Naval Staff Admiral Dinesh K Tripathi

will accompany Singh to the commissioning ceremony. Defence Minister Singh will pay an official visit to the Russian Federation from December 8 to 10, an official readout said on Saturday. It said Singh and Belousov will co-chair the 21st meeting of the India-Russia Inter-Governmental Commission on Military and Military Technical Cooperation (IRIGC-M&MTC) in Moscow on December 10. The defence minister's visit to Russia comes five months after Prime Minister Narendra Modi travelled to Moscow and held summit talks with Russian President Vladimir Putin. In the talks, both sides decided to further bolster two-way defence ties. Singh and Belousov will review the entire range of multi-faceted relations between the two countries in the field of defence, including military-to-military and

industrial cooperation, the defence ministry said in the readout. "They will also exchange views on contemporary regional and global issues of mutual interest," it said. People familiar with Singh's visit said India-Russia cooperation in co-production of military hardware will figure prominently in the talks between the two defence ministers. "As part of the visit, the defence minister will also commission the Indian Navy's latest multi-role stealth guided missile frigate 'INS Tushil' at Yantra Shipyard, Kaliningrad on December 9," the ministry said. It said Singh will also pay tributes at 'The Tomb of the Unknown Soldier' in Moscow to honour the Soviet soldiers killed during the Second World War. He is also scheduled to interact with the members of the Indian community in Moscow.

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

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

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

A recent public notice issued by the Drugs Controller General of India (DCGI) informed the public about the reconstitution of this committee. "The central expert committee is reconstituted under the chairmanship of Dr Ajay Kumar Shukla, Professor of Orthopaedics, RML Hospital (New Delhi), to determine the quantum of

compensation as admissible and medical management for the affected patients who were implanted with faulty ASR hip implants," the notice read. The ASR hip implants were manufactured by M/s DePuy international Limited, UK and imported by M/s DePuy Medical Private, Mumbai - now Johnson and Johnson Private Limited - according to the notice. In 2010, the company issued a global recall on the product following complaints related to hip implants from other parts of the world. The affected patients who were implanted with faulty ASR hip implants and are suffering from disability and other losses may approach either the Central Expert Committee or the state-level committee in accordance with their convenience.

CISF sets up Quality Control Unit to enhance aviation security



PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

CISF has set up a quality control unit to "enhance" the "operational efficiency" of its aviation security wing that provides a counter-terrorist cover to 68 civil airports of the country. An spokesperson for the paramilitary force said on Saturday that the Internal Quality Control Unit (IQCU) will play a "crucial" role in

establishing "world-class" security procedures and technology for the airports that are used by lakhs of domestic and international passengers every day. The initiative is in compliance with the National Civil Aviation Security Quality Control Programme (NCASQCP) of 2024 issued by the Bureau of Civil Aviation Security (BCAS) and the Aircraft (Security) Rules of 2023, he said. The BCAS, under the civil aviation ministry, frames security policies for the Indian civil aviation sector. The new unit will bring about uniformity in civil aviation security procedures and training, recommend new technology available world over, allow internal audits of CISF security units and their protocols and identify "gaps" for improvement.

The unit will be part of CISF's Aviation Security Control Center (ASCC) - located in the national capital - which works as a centralised base for coordinating security at all 68 civil airports that are under the security ambit of the force. The latest system will also cover the airports that come under Regional Connectivity Scheme (UDAAN), the spokesperson said. "The IQCU will be led by a senior CISF officer and a team of certified aviation security instructors will run it," he said. The about 1.80 lakh people-strong Central Industrial Security Force, under the Union home ministry, is the national civil aviation security force and it has deployed around 50,000 personnel to guard the 68 airports.

Maharashtra opposition stages walkout over EVM manipulation allegations

T N RAGHUNATHA ■ MUMBAI

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

However, the MLAs belonging to the MVA - comprising the Congress, Shiv Sena (UBT) and NCP (SP) may take oath on Sunday, the second and final day of the oath-taking ceremony. While the MVA MLAs staged a walk out en masse from the State Assembly, two MLAs belonging to the Akhilesh Yadav-led Samajwadi Party took oath. The three MVA constituents collectively account for 46 MLAs in a 288-member State Assembly as against the combined strength of the ruling MahaYuti - comprising BJP, Shiv Sena (ES) and NCP (Ajit Pawar) of 235 in the House. After staging a walkout from the House, the MVA leaders gathered near the statue of Chhatrapati Shivaji Maharaj and explained their stage a walk from the State Assembly.

Talking to media persons, state Congress President and senior party MLA Nana Patole said: "Despite the BJP alliance forming the government after the state assembly elections, the public sentiment is that this government does not reflect their votes. It is not a government of the people's mandate. The sentiment of the people in Markandadi mirrors that of the majority in the state. Respecting public opinion, members of the Mahavikas Aghadi (MVA) have decided not to take their oath today." "We boycotted the oath-taking ceremony as democracy is being murdered

by the use of EVMs. This is not the mandate of the public, it is the mandate of EVM and the Election Commission of India," said Shiv Sena (UBT) MLA Aaditya Thackeray, who is the leader of the legislature party. Meanwhile, pro-tem Speaker Kalidas Kolambkar - who is administering oath to the newly elected members - administered oath to a majority of 235 ruling MVA members on Saturday. He will complete the administration of oath-taking to rest of the new members on Sunday. On Monday, there will be election to the post of Speaker of the Legislative Assembly, which is a mere formality considering the small strength of the Opposition. This is for the first time in the history of Maharashtra, that there would not be a Leader of the Opposition (LoP) in the state Assembly. The Opposition MVA - comprising Congress, Shiv Sena (UBT) and NCP (Sharad Pawar) - put up a pathetic performance by winning a meagre 46 seats. While the Shiv Sena (UBT) secured 20 seats, the Congress and NCP (SP) won 16 and 10 seats respectively. Such was the rout of the MVA in the polls that there will be no Leader of the Opposition (LoP) in the State Assembly. Because, none of the MVA constituents - Congress, Shiv Sena (UBT) and NCP (Sharad Pawar) - has won 10 per cent of the total 288 seats in the House to stake a claim for the LoP's post. In view of the fact that none of the Opposition parties - including Congress, Shiv Sena (UBT) and NCP (SP) - managed to get even ten per cent of the total 288 seats, Fadnavis was earlier asked if there will be a leader of the Opposition in the State Assembly. "We will treat the Opposition with respect. As far as LoP is concerned, it is a decision to be taken by the Speaker," the chief minister said.

Health Minister JP Nadda launches 100-day TB elimination campaign

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI/CHANDIGARH



Health Minister J P Nadda on Saturday said the rate of decline of tuberculosis incidence in India has doubled since 2015 and is ahead of the global average. Nadda said this while inaugurating a nationwide campaign in Haryana's Panchkula to reduce such cases and mortality due to it. The 100-day TB elimination campaign will be implemented in 347 districts of 33 states where the prevalence of the disease is higher. The campaign is focused on enhancing detection, reducing diagnostic delays and improving treatment outcomes. "Under this programme, we have taken detection, tests, treatment and supportive strategies forward in an accelerated way. I feel this 100-day programme will prove to be a milestone in making a 'TB-mukt Bharat' and it will have a far-reaching impact," Nadda said. The Union health minister highlighted the country's long struggle in its fight against tuberculosis, saying that at one time TB meant a 'slow death'.

suffering from TB were isolated to prevent its spread. Since 1962, there have been many campaigns against tuberculosis, but in 2018 the prime minister put forth a vision to end TB much before the 2030 deadline of the Sustainable Development Goals. "We changed strategies to achieve the aim. Services have been decentralised and now, 1,73,000 AAMs (Ayushman Arogya Mandirs) will have the facilities to detect and treat tuberculosis," the Union health minister said. He also informed the gathering that molecular technologies have been introduced for TB detection. Also, a new and shorter regimen of tuberculosis treatment has been started which will help increase compliance and fight TB, he said. In 2014, there were 120 laboratories for TB detection and their number has now reached 8,293, said Nadda.

He highlighted that the rate of tuberculosis incidence decline in India has doubled from 8.3 per cent in 2015 to 17.7 per cent now, which is much ahead of the global average. Deaths due to tuberculosis have also reduced significantly in India by 21.4 per cent in the last 10 years, he said. "Ni-kshay support worth Rs 3,338 crore has been provided through direct benefit transfer to over 1.17 crore tuberculosis patients," the minister said and underscored the government has increased Ni-kshay poshan amount recently from Rs 500 to Rs 1,000 and added energy boosters for the nourishment support for TB patients. Ni-kshay Poshan is not only a policy decision, this is a financial commitment for people in the health sector to eliminate TB, he said. Nadda said the government has now made it mandatory for even private practitioners to notify any new tuberculosis patient so that their treatment can be followed up immediately. "This might look like a small step but it has led to an eight-fold increase in the rate of TB notifications in the private sector," Nadda said.

The 100-day campaign underscores the Union government's commitment to achieving the goal of end-TB by addressing the challenges of tuberculosis notification and mortality in India under the National TB Elimination Programme of the Ministry of Health and Family Welfare. Some of the key focus areas of the campaign are increasing access to advanced diagnostics, targeted screening among vulnerable groups, specialized care for high-risk individuals, and provision of expanded nutritional support. Speaking about Haryana, he said earlier, there were only six medical colleges and now the number has grown to 15. The Haryana chief minister has announced to opening a medical college in each district, he said. Nadda further said the number of undergraduate seats for doctors has increased from 650 in 2014 to 2,185 in Haryana. Similarly, the number of post-graduate seats increased from 243 to 889 now, he added. On this occasion, Haryana Chief Minister Nayab Singh Saini and state Health Minister Arti Singh Rao were also present.

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



PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

Seventy-three complaints have been received against obscene and vulgar advertisements on private television channels by the regulatory bodies over the past three years, the government has told parliament. In a written reply in the Rajya Sabha, Minister of State for Information and Broadcasting L Murugan said the complaints were "suitably" addressed by a three-level grievance redress system. Murugan said the mechanism, established under the Cable Television Networks (Amendment) Rules, includes self-regulation by broadcasters, self-regulation by self-regulating bodies of the broadcasters, and an oversight mechanism of the central government. The minister said appropriate

action is taken wherever violation of the Advertising Code is found by issuance of "Advisories, Warnings, 'Apology Scroll' Orders and Off-air orders." In reply to a separate question, Murugan said OTT platforms are required to adhere to the Code of Ethics under Part-III of the IT (Intermediary Guidelines and Digital Media Ethics Code) Rules, 2021. "These codes are self-regulatory in nature," the minister said. Murugan said these Code of Ethics require the publishers not to transmit any content which is prohibited by law and to undertake age-based self-classification of content into five categories, based on general guidelines provided in the Rules. The guidelines provide that while undertaking such self-classification, the context of the period depicted in such content and the contemporary standards of the country and people to which such content relate, are to be kept in mind, he said. Murugan said the Code also provides that the OTT platforms will put in place adequate safeguard for restricting age inappropriate content for children.

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

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

Christian community should take an in-principle stand on the Waqf Bill as it affects minority rights enshrined in the Constitution, Christian MPs are learnt to have told the Catholic Bishops' Conference of India (CBCI) at a meeting in the national capital. CBCI, the apex body of Catholics in India, called a meeting on December 3 of all Christian MPs. The meeting was attended by around 20 MPs, most of them from opposition

parties. TMC's parliamentary party leader Derek O'Brien, Congress MPs Hibi Eden, Dean Kuriakose, Anto Antony, and CPI (M) MP John Brittas were among the MPs who attended the meeting, while union Minister of State George Kurian joined later, a source who was present at the meeting told PTI. CBCI president Archbishop Andrews chaired the meeting, the first such held in decades. The meeting's agenda included the role of Christian MPs in

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

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

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

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



FEATHERS OF COUTURE

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

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

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

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



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

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

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

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

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

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

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

THE TALE OF LOVE, OBSESSION AND REVENGE RETURNS

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

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

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

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

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



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



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

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

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



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

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

RATING: 3/5

The Art of Authentic Kashmiri Dining

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

FOODFREAK



Pawan Soni
Food critic and founder of the Big F Awards

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

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

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



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



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The Heart of Odisha's Cuisine

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



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

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



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

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

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

The vegetarian menu was, without a doubt, the star of the pop-up. However, it's worth noting that the non-vegetarian thali also garnered rave reviews, with guests praising its perfect blend of spices and execution. Chor Bizarre's ability to balance both vegetarian and non-vegetarian offerings with such precision only further cements its reputation as a destination for authentic regional cuisine.

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



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

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

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



Co Founders : Sohrab Sitaram and Shiv Dhawan



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

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

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



MORE THAN JUST A COFFEE!

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



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

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

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

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

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

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

FACT SHEET

LOCATIONS:

- Cyberhub, Gurugram
- Pacific Mall, Jasola
- Pacific Mall, NSP

the pioneer agenda

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



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

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

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

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

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

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

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

The write thing!

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

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

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

The Allure of Writing Retreats

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



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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

The Journey to Mukteshwar

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

A Gateway to Himalayan Grandeur

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

Mukteshwar Dham: A Spiritual Treat

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



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

Zero Point: A Viewpoint like No Other

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

Why Mukteshwar?

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

THE SCENIC AND SIMPLE MUKTESHWAR



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



WAY TO MUKTESHWAR

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

Mukteshwar by Road

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

Mukteshwar by Train

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

Mukteshwar by Air

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



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



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

Escape to Peaceful Jihar

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



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

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



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

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

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

YOUR WEEK AHEAD

MADHU KOTIYA



ARIES March 21-April 19
This week holds significant promise, particularly in financial matters. You may find yourself receiving substantial gains early in the week. Celebrations are in order, with joyful gatherings that underscore your recent successes in your professional life. Happiness permeates the home front as well, with key contributions from the women in your life, who display remarkable health, creativity, and energy. Their nurturing roles enhance the joy and unity of those around them. The week may also feature meaningful family events such as the joyous arrival of a new family member or the initiation of a lucrative opportunity, bringing loved ones together to share in the collective joy. As the week closes, expect a shift in perspective that could profoundly reshape your approach to life, setting the stage for enduring benefits.
Lucky number 3 | Lucky colour Amber
Lucky day Tuesday



LEO July 23-Aug 22
This week calls for measured actions and a calm demeanor. Embracing moderation rather than giving in to impulsive reactions will serve you well. Opportunities that could significantly improve your circumstances may arise, yet there's a risk of undermining these prospects through unchecked pride or a dismissive attitude. While self-respect is crucial, maintaining a balance with how others perceive you is equally important. You might find that new beginnings in your endeavors could stir envy among competitors. Stay vigilant as you could become the target of negative intentions. It's wise to be observant and understand the motivations of those around you. Secure your valuable possessions and keep a close eye on those who have access to your personal space or property.
Lucky number 9 | Lucky colour Magenta
Lucky day Thursday



SAGITTARIUS Nov 22-Dec 21
This week, you'll find yourself feeling invigorated and full of life, ready to tackle any obstacles that come your way. There's a sense of cosmic alignment that seems to enhance your efforts, steering you towards successful outcomes. Your energy is well-placed, boosting areas of your life that need the most attention. With a clear vision and unwavering resolve, you're set to conquer your highest aspirations. At home, the atmosphere buzzes with the promise of significant events that bring joy and fulfillment. A deep-seated wish of yours may finally come to fruition, possibly linked to family growth or children's achievements, which might include academic successes or securing opportunities they've eagerly sought. Your belief in your abilities and a higher power greatly shapes your reality, fostering a positive environment that encourages you to achieve remarkable things.
Lucky number 5 | Lucky colour Turquoise
Lucky day Monday



TAURUS April 20-May 20
This week is heavily influenced by your emotional and sentimental nature. You may find yourself in a nurturing role, eager to care for those close to you. Your compassionate demeanor makes you a source of solace and advice for many, although this could distract you from your professional responsibilities. Be mindful of those around you, as there's a risk that your straightforward approach might be exploited. It's essential to strategize and act decisively to ensure stability and financial security. Without active efforts and concrete plans, mere wishful thinking won't yield the desired results. Stay focused on your objectives and manage your emotions effectively to navigate through the week successfully.
Lucky number 15 | Lucky colour Crimson
Lucky day Sunday



VIRGO Aug 23-Sep 22
This week, individuals born under Virgo may experience a sense of isolation and a disconnection from everyday activities. Challenges in personal relationships, such as a break-up or a marital strain, could be impacting your emotional well-being. You might also find obstacles in your professional life; despite diligent efforts, progress seems stalled. This period requires patience and resilience. Stay prepared to counter any resistance you face as this may be the final test before you achieve your objectives. An influential figure may emerge to assist you, providing the support needed to overcome your current challenges. Expect a shift towards spiritual growth and a surge of new ideas. This fresh perspective will infuse your endeavors with innovation and a stronger sense of self-assurance.
Lucky number 6 | Lucky colour Olive
Lucky day Saturday



CAPRICORN Dec 22-Jan 19
This week, you may find yourself navigating a mix of emotions and detachment in your personal relationships. Minor irritants could lead to disagreements, but ultimately, decisions will be reached mutually. In your professional life, your kindness and generosity will shine, enhancing your reputation. Unexpected financial gains could provide a sense of security, bolstering your ability to handle both personal and professional challenges with skill and efficiency. Your reliable and devoted nature will make you a trusted figure at work. A natural curiosity will drive your desire to acquire new knowledge, fueling your success and making you a source of inspiration for others. You will uphold strong ethical standards, advocating for your beliefs and demonstrating integrity in all your endeavors.
Lucky number 13 | Lucky colour Maroon
Lucky day Friday



GEMINI May 21-June 20
This week, you demonstrate a compelling sense of authority and determination. Your strength lies not in physical prowess but in your ability to lead and inspire others to action. Your charismatic yet firm approach garners respect, although it leaves little room for emotional considerations. This could lead to some challenges in personal relationships, possibly causing strain or even separation. Family tensions may arise, particularly with maternal figures possibly opposing your choices in personal partnerships, leading to disagreements. Midweek, you might find yourself overwhelmed, struggling to make autonomous decisions due to these pressures. However, by week's end, you will find both financial and emotional enrichment as a respected elder, possibly a paternal figure, steps in to support you. Their fair and generous actions will lay the groundwork for your future achievements.
Lucky number 7 | Lucky colour Indigo
Lucky day Wednesday



LIBRA Sep 23-Oct 22
In the coming period, you may encounter situations that test the strength of your relationships, potentially leading to deep emotional impacts. Embrace these challenges as they arise; they are opportunities for personal growth and resilience. Fear of not meeting expectations or achieving success might loom large, yet remember that true bravery emerges from confronting and mastering these fears. Should a new opportunity present itself, seize it with confidence and move decisively toward your aspirations. Let go of any reservations and clear any obstacles from your path. If recent achievements seem less significant than anticipated, take time to reassess and refresh your strategies. By week's end, you could find yourself in a more prosperous position, with increased financial prospects or an attractive proposal coming your way.
Lucky number 1 | Lucky colour Lavender
Lucky day Wednesday



AQUARIUS Jan 20-Feb 18
This week presents a dynamic and steady phase for you, marked by significant authority and confidence. You find yourself in a scenario where confronting and engaging with influential individuals is not only possible but likely. This period allows you to relish a surge of energy and maintain strong connections with those around you. You may find yourself acting as a guiding figure, providing advice, setting goals, and fostering a sense of security for others. There's a harmonious alignment of your physical, mental, and emotional states, enhancing your decision-making prowess. Your presence demands respect, as you consistently uphold your principles, make fair judgments, and speak honestly. Your ability to maintain a clear vision ensures that emotions do not cloud your decisions, positioning you as a leader who views the broader context of any situation.
Lucky number 4 | Lucky colour Fuchsia
Lucky day Sunday



CANCER June 21-July 22
This week is a time for rejuvenation. Step away from the whirlwind of your daily activities and allow yourself some moments of relaxation. Embrace self-care by engaging in activities that refresh both your physical and mental well-being—consider routine health screenings, engage in mindful exercises, take leisurely strolls, and ensure you are getting ample rest. Such practices will equip you to navigate the energetic pace of life that lies ahead. Your professional life may soon pulsate with new opportunities and potential advancements such as raises or promotions. At home, expect to be more involved with family duties, especially in attending to children's needs, which could increase your expenditures. Additionally, consider planning a getaway that promises romantic undertones and quality family time.
Lucky number 10 | Lucky colour Teal
Lucky day Saturday



SCORPIO Oct 23-Nov 21
Currently, you possess a significant intensity and strength, which enhances your ability to understand the core of any situation distinctly. Your sharp insights and deep perceptiveness are at their peak, simplifying the process of achieving your objectives. This period is optimal for dispelling any confusion that has obscured your inner truths and for releasing the constraints of your past that have impeded your progress. Focus is now essential on your aspirations, accompanied by a profound spiritual enlightenment. Dedicate your time to harmonizing with the natural world—engage in morning or evening walks, embrace practices like yoga and meditation, or even consider participating in sports at a professional level. Embrace the flow of life's currents, allowing them to guide you forward naturally.
Lucky number 14 | Lucky colour Coral
Lucky day Sunday



PISCES Feb 19-March 20
Individuals born under this sign possess boundless potential, enabling them to transform and craft their reality as they see fit. While it is not feasible for everyone to uncover every mystery, these individuals often lead others to explore and tap into their own depths to unveil untapped capabilities. Known for their deep spiritual focus, they wield considerable power to enrich and fundamentally change lives. They adhere to a strong belief in balance and fairness, understanding that every action triggers a corresponding reaction, echoing the principles of cause and effect. To cultivate positive outcomes, they maintain a mindset geared toward making decisions that align with their desired results. This clarity of thought facilitates the full realization of their goals and alleviates many of life's challenges. Anticipate a significant journey or change in the near future.
Lucky number 17 | Lucky colour Purple
Lucky day Friday

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The Power of a Thought

THE TUNING FORK



CV Srikanth

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

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

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

“असतो मासद्गमय”
“Lead me from the unreal to the real.”

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



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

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

understanding the transient nature of thoughts. “शान्ताकारं युज्यते शयनं च शुभ्रतियोगिनाम्”
“Peaceful in form, resting on a serpent, Lord of all beings, O yogis...”
This shloka refers to Lord Shiva, symbolising inner peace and

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

Now you can write to us at agendapioneer@gmail.com