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magazine



## War of words follow Manmohan Singh



The mortal remains of former PM Manmohan Singh being taken to Congress headquarters for party leaders and workers to pay their last respects. PTI

**DEEPAK KUMAR JHA ■ NEW DELHI**  
A political row has erupted between the Bharatiya Janata Party-led Centre and Congress-led Opposition parties over a memorial for the former Prime Minister Manmohan Singh who was cremated with full State honours on Saturday in the presence of top dignitaries from India and abroad. While the Home Ministry claimed to assure the late PM's family in a communication for a memorial in due course, the Congress, Samajwadi Party (SP) and Bahujan Samaj Party (BSP) demanded that the last rites

should have been performed at a designated place where the Manmohan Singh's memorial could have been developed. Singh, 92, died on the night of December 26. Simultaneously former President late Pranab Mukherjee's daughter Sharmistha too cried foul on the part of the grand old party which failed to honour the rights of Mukherjee who spent his entire life serving the Congress. The Congress alleged that the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) was "deliberately insulting" the first Sikh PM of the country by not designating a place for his funeral and memorial. While Congress president Mallikarjun Kharge urged

Prime Minister Narendra Modi to have Singh's funeral at a place where his memorial can be built, SP chief Akhilesh Yadav and BSP president Mayawati urged the Central government to avoid any political controversy over the funeral and memorial of former prime minister Manmohan Singh. Demands for giving Singh a Bharat Ratna, the highest civilian award, were also raised during the last ritual procession of Manmohan Singh. "The tradition of honouring the country's former Prime Ministers must be upheld. There is no need for politics on this issue nor should there be any. Dr. Manmohan Singh's memorial should be constructed at

Rajghat. The BJP should refrain from presenting an inappropriate example of its narrow-minded thinking. History will never forgive them for this negative approach," he said. BSP president Mayawati said the wishes of Singh's family should be respected. "The Central government should ensure that the funeral and memorial of Dr Manmohan Singh, the country's first Sikh prime minister, are conducted at a location preferred by his family. No politics should be done on this matter and the government must honour the sentiments of Singh's family and the Sikh community." Aam Aadmi Party (AAP) also criticised the BJP for not allocating space within the Rajghat complex for the last rites of former prime minister Manmohan Singh and said that it "reflects poorly on India globally". AAP called on the BJP to clarify its stance and demanded an apology to Singh's family and the Sikh community. "Manmohan Singh, a global icon and India's only Sikh Prime Minister, was denied even 1,000 square yards of land for his cremation and memorial at Rajghat. Almost all former Prime Ministers were cremated there, but the BJP government refused this basic courtesy to Singh," said AAP National Convenor Arvind Kejriwal. AAP Rajya Sabha MP Sanjay Singh accused the BJP of disrespecting the Sikh community and questioned the rationale behind the decision. In a statement, the Ministry of Home Affairs assured that a place would be allocated for Singh's memorial and that his family and Congress president Mallikarjun Kharge had been informed. BJP President and Union Minister JP Nadda attacked Congress and the Gandhi family for getting into petty politics when the entire nation mourns the demise of Dr. Manmohan Singh.

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## Delhi LG orders high-level inquiry into AAP's ₹2,100 dole for women

**RAJESH KUMAR ■ NEW DELHI**

In a move that may once again rattle Aam Aadmi Party (AAP) convener Arvind Kejriwal, and his party ahead of the upcoming assembly polls, Delhi Lieutenant Governor Vinai Kumar Saxena ordered a high-level inquiry into the AAP led Delhi government's proposed Mukhyamantri Mahila Samman Yojana in which AAP's poll promise of Rs 2,100 to women if elected. The Lieutenant Governor also ordered that the Chief Secretary of the Delhi Government may bring the matter to the knowledge of the Election Commission of India (ECI) through the chief electoral office given that such canvassing is happening ahead of the election. "Manmohan Singh, a global icon and India's only Sikh Prime Minister, was denied even 1,000 square yards of land for his cremation and memorial at Rajghat. Almost all former Prime Ministers were cremated there, but the BJP government refused this basic courtesy to Singh," said AAP National Convenor Arvind Kejriwal. AAP Rajya Sabha MP Sanjay Singh accused the BJP of disrespecting the Sikh community and questioned the rationale behind the decision. In a statement, the Ministry of Home Affairs assured that a place would be allocated for Singh's memorial and that his family and Congress president Mallikarjun Kharge had been informed. BJP President and Union Minister JP Nadda attacked Congress and the Gandhi family for getting into petty politics when the entire nation mourns the demise of Dr. Manmohan Singh.



"This has reference to representation dated 25.12.2024 received from Sh. Sandeep Dikshit... he has alleged that the Chief Minister of Delhi and Sh Arvind Kejriwal have been announcing that Delhi Government is going to give every female in Delhi (above the age of 18 years) an amount of Rs 1000 per month... If AAP is elected back in the 2025 Vidhan Sabha elections, they will raise the amount to Rs 2100..." the communication from the LG's Principal Secretary to Chief Secretary Dharmendra and Delhi Police Commissioner Sanjay Arora stated. The communiqué read, "Hon'ble Lieutenant Governor has desired the Chief Secretary to get an inquiry conducted through Divisional Commissioner in the matter of collection of personal details and forms by non-government people." "Accordingly, Further, Commissioner of Police may direct the field officers to take action as per law against the person who is breaching the privacy of gullible citizens by collecting their personal details in garb of giving benefits. DCP's may be advised to take action against private individuals organizing camps for fraudulent enrollment of Government Schemes," the Lieutenant Governor's office said. Meanwhile, the AAP, in response, has alleged that the inquiry came not from the Delhi Lieutenant Governor but from the "office" of BJP leader Amit Shah. Addressing a press conference, AAP convener Arvind Kejriwal also rubbished an order by LG for enquiry into collection of details of women through registration under the scheme as "fake," saying the monetary promise was a poll announcement.

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## Google maps misguides again: two injured in car accident

**BISWAJEET BANERJEE ■ HATHRAS**



**Shift Dallewal to hospital: SC gives Punjab Govt till December 31**  
**PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI**  
The Supreme Court on Saturday witnessed an unprecedented hearing on the issue of providing medical aid to Punjab farmer leader Jagjit Singh Dallewal, who is on fast-unto-death for over a month at Khanauri border seeking legal guarantee of Minimum Support Price (MSP) of crops among other demands. The hearing was conducted by a vacation bench of justices Surya Kant and Sudhanshu Dhulia, which gave time till December 31 to the Punjab Government to shift Dallewal to a nearby makeshift hospital, in an attempt to save his life. Normally, the SC, during winter break, does not have vacation Benches to conduct urgent hearings on emergent issues, and sitting of a Bench on Saturday is unusual. The Bench pulled up the Punjab Government for allowing the situation to escalate and not complying with its earlier directions to provide medical assistance to Dallewal. Expressing helplessness, the Punjab Government said it is facing huge resistance from protesting farmers who have encircled Dallewal and are preventing him from being taken to hospital. Punjab Advocate General Gurminder Singh told the bench that a team of experts visited the protest site and tried to persuade Dallewal to shift to hospital and take medical help. "He (Dallewal) has refused any kind of medical aid, including (IV) drips, saying that it will undermine the cause of movement," he said.

In yet another incident of Google Maps leading travelers astray, a car accident occurred on an under-construction highway in Hathras district, leaving two people injured. The mishap took place in the Hathras Junction police station area near Vahanpur. According to the police, Bareilly residents Vimlesh Srivastava and Kushal Kumar were traveling to Mathura using Google Maps for navigation. Late at night, after passing through Sikandra Rao, they followed directions onto the under-construction Mathura-Bareilly Highway. Due to the absence of reflective boards warning about roadblocks, their car collided with a heap of stones and soil, causing significant damage. The injured duo promptly informed the police, who arrived at the scene, cleared the car from the highway, and rushed the victims to a hospital for treatment. This is not the first time Google Maps has caused inconvenience or accidents. Recently, a family from Meerut endured hours of distress while trying to reach Saharanpur from Haridwar at night. Vinod Kumar, a resident of Meerut's Shastri Nagar, was traveling with his wife and son. Initially, their journey via Google Maps was smooth until they reached Bhagwanpur. The app then suggested a shortcut through a link road to Saharanpur. About 10 kilometers into this route, they encountered a dry but rocky stream, making it impossible to proceed. The app redirected them to another route, leading to hours of wandering in forested areas. Eventually, they managed to contact a



relative near Bihari Garh, who guided them to safety. The family reached their destination close to midnight, heaving a sigh of relief. Last month, Google Maps was blamed for a major accident in Bareilly when it directed a car onto an incomplete bridge, resulting in three friends falling off and sustaining severe injuries. Such incidents highlight the risks of relying solely on digital navigation systems without verifying local conditions. Authorities and travelers are urged to exercise caution, especially on unfamiliar or under-construction routes.

## Highest single-day December rainfall in 101 years

**RAJESH KUMAR ■ NEW DELHI**

Delhiites experienced an overcast and chilly day after the city recorded the highest single-day December rainfall in 101 years. The city received 41.2 mm of rain between 8.30 am on Friday and 8.30 am on Saturday, marking the highest single-day December rainfall in 101 years. According to the India Meteorological Department (IMD), the Capital had last recorded the highest-ever rainfall on a single day in the month on December 3, 1923, at 75.7 mm. While rain in December is not unusual, it is usually light. As per IMD data, Delhi usually sees 8 mm of rain during the month over half a day. The rain in the city over the past 24 hours is over five times that. The rains also made December 2024 the fifth-highest in terms of monthly rainfall since records began in 1901. In December 2024, Delhi logged 42.8 mm, the highest in the last 27 years when 71.8 mm of rain was seen in the month. "The cumulative 24-hour rainfall ending at 8.30am today is the second-highest since 1901 at Safdarjung. December's monthly rainfall is now the fifth-highest. The 24-



WEATHER	
AQI	139
MAX	15.8°C
MIN	12.7°C

hour cumulative rainfall refers to the precipitation recorded over the past 24 hours ending at 8.30am IST on the given date," the IMD official explained. The rainfall largely attributed to an active western disturbance interacting with easterly winds, transformed the usual dry chill of December into an anomaly. "The interaction between a very active western disturbance and a cyclonic circulation on the east, along with a few other factors, has brought about this unusual weather. November and December are the two driest months in Delhi. During these months, it is usually a western disturbance that brings rain to the capital. It is the different weather systems clashing that lead to heavy downpours," an

Heavy rainfall coupled with gusty winds continued to lash Delhi in the early hours of Saturday. Several areas, including Palam, Safdarjung, Lodi Road, Mehrauli, and Gurugram, reported uprooted trees, resulting in significant disruptions. In Sector-9, RK Puram, a portion of a road caved in, causing a motorcycle and a car to fall into the cavity. The last time December rains were this intense was in 1997, when the total monthly precipitation was 71.8mm. Going further back, the highest December rainfall was recorded in 1901 at 77.2mm, followed by 1967 (69.5mm) and 1936 (68.1mm). IMD classifies up to 15.5mm of rainfall in 24 hours as "light rain", 15.6-64.4mm of rainfall as "moderate", 64.5-115.5mm as "heavy rainfall" and 115.6-204.4mm as "very heavy rainfall". Delhi witnessed incessant rainfall since Friday morning causing severe waterlogging and traffic snarls in several parts, leading to the mercury dropping in the National Capital. In June this year, Delhi has recorded 228.1 mm of rain in the 24 hours in one of the wettest spells the capital has recorded causing waterlogging in several parts of the National Capital.

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## Kashmiriyat shines as snow envelops J and K

**MOHIT KANDHARI ■ JAMMU**

When it snowed heavily in different parts of Kashmir valley, unmatched Kashmiri hospitality and timely response of the Indian army brought much-needed cheer to the faces of stranded tourists stuck in snow-bound areas since Friday afternoon. Over 300 tourists were rescued across different locations in the last 24 hours as most parts of Kashmir valley were under a virtual whiteout. Normal life was thrown out of gear in the Union Territory as several parts of the Valley received snowfall that disrupted flight and railway operations and also led to the closure of the Srinagar-Jammu National Highway. Due to bad weather conditions, all flights at Srinagar Airport were cancelled on Saturday, a

spokesman of the Srinagar airport posted a message on X. Kashmir University also postponed all its examinations scheduled for Saturday due to the inclement weather. Fresh dates for the postponed exams will be notified separately, the University said. Moderate to heavy snowfall was recorded across Kashmir since Friday, including the season's first snowfall in Srinagar city and other plain areas of the valley. Tourists camping in Srinagar were seen enjoying snowfall in the busy Lal Chowk area and near the banks of Dal Lake. In south Kashmir, heavy to very heavy snowfall was recorded in the plains, while central Kashmir's plains received moderate snowfall. The plains of north Kashmir received light to moderate snowfall, the officials said. In

the Jammu region, higher reaches of Doda, Kishtwar and Kathua also witnessed a fresh spell of snowfall. Residents of the Gund area on the Srinagar-Sonamarg highway turned out to be real saviours when they decided to throw open the gates of Jamia Masjid late Friday night to accommodate stranded passengers from Punjab during the night. The warm hospitality and delicious food served by the locals to these tourists not only won their hearts but also sent a message of bonhomie and mutual trust among the members of the different communities. A video of stranded passengers, relishing delicious meals inside Jamia Masjid, Gund also went viral on various social media platforms. "It was the best possible solution as the mosque has a 'hamaam', which stays warm throughout the night," said Bashir Ahmad, a resident. The tourists expressed their gratitude to the locals for their help. "We were stuck in the snow, and you came to our rescue. We are extremely thankful to all of you," one of them said. The Jamia Masjid at Gund is located less than 10 kilometres from the site of a terrorist attack in Gagangir, where six people, five non-local labourers and a local doctor, were killed in October this

after they were left stranded in the snowbound area. Chief Minister Omar Abdullah convened a video conference meeting with all districts across Jammu and Kashmir to review snow clearance operations and restoration of essential services following heavy snowfall in the Kashmir Valley. Police and civil administration across different district headquarters have already begun reaching out to stranded tourists, providing hot drinks and other necessities to keep them warm. While authorities launched snow clearance operations at the respective district headquarters, most of the main roads and roads to hospitals were cleared of snow, but many interior roads were still blocked, the officials said.

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# Ayodhya prepares for devotee influx

STAFF REPORTER ■ AYODHYA

The temple town of Ayodhya is gearing up for a massive influx of devotees and tourists as the new year approaches, marking the end of the first English calendar year since the grand consecration ceremony at the Ram Temple was held on January 22. With nearly all accommodations in Ayodhya and neighbouring Faizabad fully booked, the Ram Jannabhoomi Teerth Kshetra Trust has extended 'darshan' timings for the devotees and made extensive arrangements to manage the anticipated crowd. "We are ready to welcome the devotees this new year. All our rooms have been booked in advance till January 15," Ankit Mishra, owner of a local hotel in Ayodhya, said. When last checked on Saturday morning, online booking platforms showed rooms still available at some hotels and lodges, even though a few establishments are charging upwards of Rs 10,000 per night due to the surge in demand. Ayodhya has witnessed a spike in religious tourism since the consecration ceremony earlier this year, and while the Hindu new year in 'Chaitra' (March-April)

holds traditional significance, the English new year is also seeing a rise in devotional fervour. "A large number of devotees visit religious sites and offer prayers on January 1, seeking the blessings of Ram Lalla at the start of the year," Ramakant Tiwari, a local priest, said. To ensure smooth crowd management and security, Ayodhya Senior Superintendent of Police (SSP) Rajkaran Nayyar said, "There will be robust security arrangements at the Ram Temple, Hanumangarhi, Lata Chowk, Guptar Ghat, Surajkund, and other popular sites." The temple trust has also made comprehensive preparations to handle the swelling crowd, particularly between December 30 and the first two weeks of January. A trust representative said, "Extended 'darshan' timings and strategic arrangements have been made to ensure a seamless experience for all the devotees." The consecration ceremony at the Ram Temple, which was attended by Prime Minister Narendra Modi and hundreds of people from all walks of life, marked an upsurge in tourism activities in Ayodhya as well as Uttar Pradesh.

# Kashmiriyat shines as snow envelops J and K

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Due to slippery conditions, motorists were facing difficulties in driving, they added. The snowfall also affected the power supply in several areas of the valley, the officials said. Jammu and Kashmir Chief Minister Omar Abdullah was himself monitoring the situation. In a post on X, Chief Minister informed, "Out of 41 33KV feeders

dysfunctional in Kashmir due to heavy snowfall, 37 have been restored and charged. Similarly, out of 739 dysfunctional 11KV feeders, 639 have been restored and recharged, bringing a major relief to the valley. The majority of the rest are expected to be restored by the evening. Kudos to the PDD team for their relentless efforts in this snowfall in such a short time."

# War of words follows Manmohan's farewell

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"Congress party is busy turning this moment of grief into an opportunity to fulfill their political agenda. Gandhi family has neither honored nor delivered justice to any leader of the nation, even if they were from the Congress party. The nation will never forget or forgive the historic sins of the principle-less Congress party," Nadda said in a statement. Former Rajasthan Chief Minister Ashok Gehlot accused the NDA government of creating an "unnecessary controversy" over the cremation and memorial of former Prime Minister Manmohan Singh. He added that the Government of India is conducting the cremation of a respected personality at Nigambodh Ghat instead of at any special place. Gehlot recalled after the death of former Vice President Bhairon Singh Shekhawat the Congress led Rajasthan government immediately allotted a special place for his last rites and a memorial in Jaipur and similarly after the death of Bal Thackeray in Maharashtra in 2012, the Congress government allotted a special place in Mumbai's Shivaji Park for his last rites. Before the mortal remains of Singh were consigned to flames, the security forces gave a 21-gun salute to the former PM. Sikh priests and Singh's family members recited verses from the Gurbani before performing his last rites. Singh's wife Gursharan Kaur and one of their daughters also laid a wreath on his body. The three daughters of Singh, Upinder Singh, Daman Kaur and Amrit Kaur, along with other relatives were present. Singh's funeral pyre was lit by his eldest daughter Upinder Singh at the Nigambodh Ghat amid the chanting of religious hymns.

The last rites were performed in the presence of President Droupadi Murmu, Vice President Jagdeep Dhankhar and Prime Minister Narendra Modi, as also top leaders of the Congress party including Mallikarjun Kharge, Sonia Gandhi and Rahul Gandhi. King of Bhutan Jigme Khesar Namgyel Wangchuck and Mauritius Foreign Minister Dhananjay Ramful were among the foreign dignitaries who paid tributes to Singh, who served as the PM from 2004 to 2014. Defence Minister Rajnath Singh, Home Minister Amit Shah and Lok Sabha Speaker Om Birla also paid their last tributes to the former prime minister and laid wreaths on his mortal remains. Chief of Defence Staff General Anil Chauhan and chiefs of the tri-services also laid wreaths. Several chief ministers also attended the last rites. Amid Manmohan Singh's memorial row, former President Pranab Mukherjee's daughter Sharmistha criticised the party for demanding a separate memorial space for Manmohan Singh while failing to convene a Congress Working Committee meeting to condole her father's death. Speaking out against the lapse, she revealed that a senior Congress leader had dismissed the idea, claiming such meetings were not customary for former Presidents. "When baba passed away, Congress didn't even bother to call a CWC for a condolence meeting. A senior leader told me it's not done for Presidents. That's utter rubbish," Sharmistha said. She further revealed that her father's diaries documented how, after former President KR Narayan's death, such a meeting had been convened, with Pranab Mukherjee himself drafting the condolence message. She, however, said that former PM Manmohan Singh deserves a separate memorial space.

# Bengaluru traffic police orders restrictions on popular haunts

STAFF REPORTER ■ NEW DELHI

With just days left for 2025, the Bengaluru Police has made elaborate arrangements for the upcoming New Year celebrations in the city with tight security deployment on heavy footfall areas of the city to ensure safety of public and smooth flow of traffic. Addressing a press conference here, City Police Commissioner B Dayananda said that like every year, Bengaluru Police has made elaborate security arrangements for the New Year Celebrations in the city to ensure no untoward incidents take place. "Based on the previous year's incidents and experience, we are improving the security. We have identified the areas where people are going to gather in large numbers. MG road, Brigade Road junction, Koramangala, Indiranagar and so on, accordingly arrangements have been done," he said. According to him, meetings and discussions have been held with civic body BBMP

(Bruhat Bengaluru Mahanagara Palike), Metro, and other organisations. They were appealed to make arrangements for lighting, barricading and operating metro service in night. Separate meetings have also been held with the representatives of Ola and Uber and pickup locations have been arranged. "To ensure stampede like situation doesn't happen, one way pedestrian system has also been ensured in MG road and Brigade Road. People can walk from Cauvery emporium to opera junction, not opposite. We appeal the people not to wear any type of face masks," he added. Since a large number of people, motorists and pedestrians will gather at several parts of Bengaluru to celebrate New Year on M G Road, Brigade Road, Koramangala, Indiranagar 100ft road etc, in the interest of public safety, the traffic police has put necessary restrictions on the movement of vehicles on these roads. In a statement, the city traffic police said that pedestrians will be allowed to walk only

on Brigade Road from M G Road Junction towards Opera Junction. Going in the opposite direction is prohibited. "If they have to come back to M.G. Road, they can come via Residency Road-Residency cross road (Shankarag Cinema) route. Drivers/owners of vehicles parked on M.G. Road, Brigade Road, Rest House Road, Church Street, and Residency Road and St. Marks Road shall vacate their vehicles by 4 PM on December 31, failing which, they will be prosecuted," it stated. According to traffic police, from 11 PM on December 31 to 6 AM on January 1, 2025, all types of vehicles will be prohibited on all flyovers in the city (except the elevated expressway leading to the KIA airport) to prevent accidents, mishaps etc. On the KIA International Airport elevated expressway, two wheelers are prohibited from December 31, 2024 10 PM to January 1, 2025 up to 6 AM. There will be zero tolerance towards Drink and Drive and driving under the influence of narcotic drugs.

# ITI students assault bus staff after argument over ticket

STAFF REPORTER ■ NEW DELHI

Seven students of ITI, Gurugram were arrested for allegedly beating up a bus driver and conductor following a verbal argument over tickets, police said on Saturday. The incident happened when the bus driver and the conductor got down from the bus at the last stop. In his complaint to the police, bus conductor Lalaram said that on December 21, around 4.20 pm, the bus left for the railway station from the Millenium City Metro Station when some students boarded the bus at Industrial Training Institute (ITI) Chowk. Lalaram said they were not paying for the tickets, which is why they had an argument with them. Later the students got down at the last stop, he said. He said after parking the bus, driver Rajesh Kumar and he got down from the vehicle and went to get some water when the ITI students gathered and started beating up.

# Woman arrested for selling psychotropic injections in Delhi

STAFF REPORTER ■ NEW DELHI

A 35-year-old woman was apprehended for allegedly selling psychotropic injections of mephentermine illegally without any prescription or licence in south Delhi's KM Pur area, police said on Saturday. They said 60 such injections were seized from her house. On December 26, acting on a tip-off, a joint team comprising the Anti-Narcotics Task Force (ANTF) of the Crime Branch and the Delhi drug department launched a coordinated operation in Kotla Mubarakpur and nabbed the woman, Nidhi, for selling mephentermine injections to gym-goers illegally without the proper licences, according to a statement. Authorities believe that Nidhi was involved in the illegal distribution of these injections which are often misused for non-medical purposes, it said. Deputy Commissioner of Police (crime) Bhisam Singh said when the raid was

conducted at Nidhi's residence, around 60 injections of mephentermine were found. These injections are classified under Schedule-H of the Drugs and Cosmetics Act, 1940, and are not covered under the NDPS Act, Singh said. The joint team seized these injections and the drug inspector has taken action under section 22/23 of the Drugs and Cosmetics Act, 1940, police said in the statement. Punishment under these sections is a minimum of three years and a maximum of life imprisonment. Singh said further investigation is ongoing to identify any potential connections to larger networks involved in drug trafficking. The police said Nidhi has no prior criminal record. However, her activities of illegally storing and selling psychotropic substances posed a significant threat to public health, particularly among the youth in the area.

# AAP protests BJP's vote-for-cash tactics in Capital

STAFF REPORTER ■ NEW DELHI

The women's wing of AAP staged a protest outside the residence of BJP leader Parvesh Verma on Saturday, accusing him of distributing cash to women in the New Delhi Assembly constituency in a bid to "buy votes" ahead of the upcoming assembly elections. AAP's Delhi State Women's Wing President Sarika Chaudhary, in a statement, criticised the BJP leader for undermining democratic processes and demanded immediate action from the Election Commission. The protest comes after Verma allegedly gave Rs 1,100 in cash to women, a move that AAP leaders have described as an attempt to influence voters in AAP national convener Arvind Kejriwal's constituency, an official statement of AAP said. Responding to the protest, Verma said in a post on X, "Arvind Kejriwal sent people

to my house to abuse me, and I said, 'Atithi Devo Bhava'." Chaudhary added, "This is nothing but an attempt to buy votes and deceive innocent women. If this is a legitimate government scheme, why is it only being implemented in one assembly constituency? We demand equal treatment for all women in Delhi." Protesters marched to Verma's residence carrying empty envelopes as a symbolic demand for the same Rs 1,100 being distributed in the New Delhi constituency, the party said. "This selective handout is clearly a strategy to influence voters," a protester said. "If the BJP claims this is a government scheme, why aren't all women in Delhi being included? We demand clarity and accountability." The AAP women's wing also condemned alleged "harassment" faced by protesters at the site and reiterated their demand for stringent action against Verma.

# Students reject BPSC's offer for talks, demand meeting with CM

PTI ■ PATNA

The row over the alleged Bihar Public Service Commission (BPSC) question paper leak seemed to be heading for an impasse with protesting students on Saturday rejecting the Patna district administration's offer for talks with authorities in the commission and insisting on an appointment with Chief Minister Nitish Kumar. In hardening of stance, Patna District Magistrate (DM) Chandrasekar Singh also said he would not allow the 'Chatra Sansad' (students' congregation), called by Jan Suraj founder Prashant Kishor on Sunday and warned of action against coaching institute owners who were found to be involved, in any manner, in the protests henceforth. Kishor on Saturday went to Gardani Bagh where BPSC aspirants have been staging a dharna for the last several days. Addressing the protesters, Kishor said, "Before coming here, I had a long discussion with people from the education field. I must say that irregularities and paper leaks have now become the norm as far as BPSC exams are concerned. It can't go on like this... We have to find a solution. That's why we have



Educator Faizal Khan, known professionally as Khan Sir, addresses aspirants during a protest against alleged paper leak and irregularities in the BPSC 70th Integrated Combined Competitive Examination (CCE) 2024, in Patna, Friday, Dec. 27. PTI

decided to organise 'Chatra Sansad' near Mahatma Gandhi's statue at Gandhi Maidan in Patna tomorrow to find a solution to this issue." Speaking to PTI, Patna DM Singh said, "The district administration will not allow students to congregate near the Mahatma Gandhi statue at Gandhi Maidan... It's a restricted area. Other events are also going on there. Adequate security personnel have been deployed in and around Gandhi Maidan. Strict action will be taken against

those who try to take law into their hands tomorrow." Regarding the district administration's offer to protesting students, the DM said, "The protesting aspirants have so far not made their stand clear. Earlier in the day, we gave them an offer for facilitating their meeting with the BPSC authorities so that they could put forth their grievances. They want to meet the CM in this regard... That can't happen as BPSC is an independent body and the government has no role to play in this." T h e

candidates have been protesting for more than a week seeking the cancellation of the 70th Integrated Combined Competitive (Preliminary) Examination (CCE), 2024 conducted by the BPSC over allegations of question paper leak. The protesters have been staging a dharna at Gardani Bagh for several days. They contend that cancellation should be ordered across the board since re-examination for just one centre would go against the principle of "level playing field".

# Shift Dallewal to hospital: SC gives Punjab Govt till December 31

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This infuriated the bench which blamed the Punjab Government for not doing enough to contain the situation and said the farmer leaders who are not allowing Dallewal to be taken to the hospital are involved in the criminal offence of abetment to suicide. The SC allowed the Punjab Government to seek any logistic support from the Centre if the situation warrants, and hoped that the state government will comply with its direction of shifting Dallewal to hospital. The Bench said Dallewal is under some kind of "peer pressure" and those farmer leaders who are not allowing him to be shifted to a hospital do not

seem to be his well-wishers. "Are they interested in his life or something else? We don't want to say much and only hope that the Punjab government will comply with our directions," the Bench said. On Friday, the Bench had issued a notice to the Punjab Government on a contempt petition against its Chief Secretary and the director general of police (DGP) for non-compliance of an order directing that medical aid be provided to Dallewal. Dallewal has been on an indefinite fast at the Khanauri border since November 26 to press the Centre to accept farmers' demands, including a legal guarantee of Minimum Support Price for crops.

# Highest single-day December rainfall in 101 years

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The minimum temperature, recorded early Saturday morning, was 12.7 degrees Celsius at the Safdarjung weather station. This was 6 degrees above normal. The maximum temperature was 15.8 degree Celsius. This was five degrees below the normal. Amid the rain, Delhi witnessed some improvement in the air

quality, which remained in the 'moderate' category, with an Air Quality Index (AQI) of 139. This is both because of the rain and a slight increase in wind speed. The Air Quality Early Warning System (AQEWS) for Delhi has forecast that the AQI may even dip into the "moderate" range over the weekend, before deteriorating again early next week. "The air quality is likely to be in the poor

category on Sunday. The air quality is likely to be in the very poor category on Monday. The outlook for subsequent six days is that the air quality is likely to be in very poor category," the AQEWS bulletin said. The India Meteorological Department has issued a 'yellow' alert for the weekend, predicting "light rain/thunderstorms". Meanwhile, North India, including the capital Delhi, will see a chilly

start to the New Year, with the weather office predicting a significant drop in minimum temperatures across several regions. Heavy rains at the fag end of the year will only intensify the ongoing cold wave conditions in the first week of 2025. As intermittent rain continues in several parts of Northwest India, the IMD has predicted a fall in the minimum temperature by 3-5 degrees Celsius in the next two days.

# Delhi LG orders high-level inquiry into AAP's ₹2,100 dole for women

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"We announced Rs 2,100 per month to all eligible women in Delhi under Mahila Samman Yojna and free treatment of the senior citizens under Sanjeevani Yojna, after forming a government in Delhi. What are they going to enquire?" Kejriwal said. The AAP national convener alleged that the BJP was trying the government's schemes just so that it could have a chance at defeating it in the February election. The party claimed that more than 22 lakh women were already registered for the scheme. The Lieutenant Governor's secretariat stated the Lieutenant Governor has noted that the Women and Child Development Department earlier this week published a public notice in newspapers saying it would launch a digital portal for the

collection of forms as and when the scheme is notified. The department advised people not to fill forms being given by an unauthorised person. Additionally, the Lieutenant Governor's office has directed the Police Commissioner to direct the field officers to take action as per law against the persons who are breaching the privacy of gullible citizens by collecting their personal details in garb of giving benefits. The Deputy Commissioner of Police (DCP)'s may be advised to take action against private individuals organising camps for fraudulent enrolment of government schemes. The Women and Child Development Department earlier this week published a public notice in newspapers saying it would launch a digital portal for the

collection of forms as and when the scheme is notified. The department advised people not to fill out forms handed to them by unauthorised persons. In regard to Dikshit's allegations that the AAP government in Punjab was transferring cash (in crores) from various locations in Punjab to Delhi, Saxena requested DGP Punjab and the governments of Haryana and Rajasthan to be vigilant about "private cars from Punjab, with Punjab Police escorts" being sent to Delhi through their states. "Hon'ble Lieutenant Governor has noted that the elections to Delhi Legislative Assembly are likely to be conducted shortly and (the) possibility of using such illegal money in the ensuing election to influence the voters of Delhi cannot be

ruled out," the communication to the Delhi chief secretary and police commissioner stated. The use of "money power" in elections, Saxena also noted, was not only an offence under Sections 170 and 171 of the Bharatiya Nyaya Sanhita, 2023, and Section 123 of the Representation of the People Act, 1951, but also an impediment to free and fair elections. Furthermore, Lt Governor directed the police commissioner to investigate surveillance allegations made by Congress leader Sandeep Dikshit and submit a comprehensive report within three days. Dikshit, who has been fielded against AAP chief Arvind Kejriwal from the New Delhi constituency, met Lieutenant Governor Vinai Kumar Saxena on Thursday and made serious

allegations against the AAP as ties between the two parties, part of the INDIA Bloc, hit rock bottom ahead of the elections. In his complaint, Dikshit alleged that the Chief Minister of Delhi and AAP convener Arvind Kejriwal have been announcing that Delhi Government is going to give every female in Delhi (above the age of 18 years) an amount of Rs 2100 per month if elected. Further, Dikshit has informed that they are going door to door making women sign some forms. Dikshit has requested that in view of the clarification submitted by the Women and Child development department, GNCTD, it is clear that this is a fraud being perpetrated by the AAP and has requested to institute a high level inquiry in the matter. Dikshit also made allegations on

surveillance by Punjab's intelligence officials and flow of cash from Punjab to Delhi by AAP. In a statement, the AAP said, "They claim we are registering people for a government scheme, but this is completely false, as it has been repeatedly clarified everywhere that this is an electoral promise to be implemented once we come to power." They also accuse us of collecting data from people, but all we ask is for a missed call, which provides a phone number and nothing more, raising the question: is collecting data with consent illegal? People voluntarily share extensive personal data with companies when buying vehicles, purchasing insurance, or signing up for private schemes, so why is this being questioned here?" the AAP questioned.



# Delhi Police announce traffic advisory, route diversions for New Year's eve

STAFF REPORTER ■ NEW DELHI

To ensure the smooth flow of traffic on New Year's Eve, the Delhi Traffic Police have issued a traffic advisory for a smooth regulation of traffic in the entire national capital. The advisory has said that no vehicular movement will be allowed in the inner, middle or outer circle of Connaught Place except for those with valid access. The restrictions listed in the advisory will take effect from 8 pm on December 31, till the conclusion of New Year celebrations. It will apply to all private and public transport vehicles. A senior officer said traffic personnel will be deployed in adequate strength at various areas of the city. The main focus will be at the markets, near malls, and the areas where people come for the celebrations like Connaught Place, Hauz Khas etc. Restrictions shall be imposed from 8 pm onwards on Tuesday in the area of Connaught Place till the end of New Year celebrations. It will be applicable to all private and public transport vehicles, Deputy Commissioner of Police (Traffic) Dhal Singh said. The DCP said strict action shall be taken against drunken driving, over speeding, stunt biking, reckless driving, zig-zag and dangerous driving, etc. The Traffic Police said that special arrangements and deployment have been made in view of the celebrations.

Delhi Traffic Police has made elaborate traffic arrangements, at and around India Gate for regulation of traffic both pedestrian and vehicular. No vehicle will be allowed to proceed towards Connaught Place beyond Mandi House round about, round, Bengali Market round about, North foot of Ranjit Singh Flyover. Minto Road - Deen Dayal Upadhyaya Marg crossing, Chelmsford Road near Munje Chowk (New Delhi Rly. Station), R.K. Ashram Marg-Chitragupta Marg Crossing, Gole Market round about, roundabout G.P.O., New Delhi, Patel Chowk, Kasturba Gandhi Road - Ferozeshah Road Crossing, Jai Singh Road-Bangla Sahib Lane, Bangla Sahib Lane, Panchkuian Road - Bangla Sahib Lane and round about Windsor place. No vehicular traffic shall be allowed in inner, middle or outer circle of Connaught Place except for those that are carrying valid Passes. Motorists can park their vehicles at the following places in the vicinity of Connaught Place: Near Gole Dak Khana on (a) Kali Bari Marg (b) Pt. Pant Marg (c) Bhai Veer Singh Marg, near Patel Chowk on Rakab Ganj Road behind AIR, near Mandi House on Copernicus Marg upto Baroda House, near Minto Road on D.D. Upadhyaya Marg and Press Road area, near Panchkuian Road on R.K. Ashram Marg, Chitragupta Road & Basant Road

towards Pahar Ganj, near K.G. Marg-Ferozshah Road Crossing on Copernicus as well as K.G. Marg towards C hexagon, near round about Bengali market - on Babar Road and Tansen Marg, near Windsor Place, Rajender Prasad Road, Raisina Road, near Gole Market at Peshwa Road, Service Road along Bhai Veer Singh Marg and R K Ashram Road and near R/A Buta Singh on JantarMantar Road, Raisina Road. Places across the city where these celebrations will take place include Surya Hotel at New Friends Colony, Eros Hotel, Crown Plaza Hotel, Nehru Place South Extension Market, Select City Walk Mall Saket, Qutub Minar, Prominade Mall, Radisson Blu Hotel, Mahipal Pur Janak Puri District Centre and many others including Connaught Place. According to the advisory, limited parking space will be available near Connaught Place on first come first serve basis. Unauthorised parked vehicles shall be towed away and prosecuted. Delhi Traffic Police has made elaborate traffic arrangements, at and around India Gate for regulation of traffic both pedestrian and vehicular. In case of heavy pedestrian movement, vehicles may not be allowed to go through C-Hexagon, India Gate area and diverted from the following place

include Q-Point, round about MLNP, roundabout Sunehri Masjid, roundabout Mar-Janpath, Rajpath Rafi Marg, roundabout Windsor Place, roundabout Rajendra Prasad Road-Janpath, KG Marg-Feroze Shah Road, roundabout Mandi House, W point, Mathura Road-Purana Qila Road, Mathura Road Sher Shah Road, SBM-Zakir Hussain Road. Visitors are advised to use public transport as there is shortage of parking space at India Gate. "In view of large gathering expected at Delhi Zoo resulting in congestion on Mathura Road, the General Public/Motorists are advised to avoid Bhairon Road/Mathura Road between Hazrat Nizamuddin and Pragati Maidan," it said. The police have warned that strict action shall be taken against drunken driving (U/S 185 MVA), over speeding (U/S 112/183 MVA), stunt biking, reckless driving, zig-zag and dangerous driving (U/S 184 MVA). Commuters can take the Ring Road from ISBT to the Ashram or via Delhi Gate, Bahadur Shah Zafar Marg, Mathura Road to reach Ashram and vice-versa or via ISBT, Rani Jhansi Marg, Panchkuian Road, Mandir Marg, Park Street, Mother Teresa Crescent Road & beyond or via Rani Jhansi Marg, Panchkuian Road, Hanuman Murti, Ring Road.

# BJP accuses Kejriwal of promoting fake voter IDs

STAFF REPORTER ■ NEW DELHI

Delhi BJP on Saturday accused Arvind Kejriwal of trying to rig upcoming assembly elections by promoting fake schemes and creating fake voter IDs using fraudulent Aadhaar cards. Leveling these charges Delhi BJP president Virendra Sachdeva during a news conference also presented Hindu homeowners whose addresses were used to create fake Muslim votes, stating that households with five members were sud-

denly recorded as having 60 or more Muslim voters. Sachdeva alleged that Kejriwal, along with his MLAs, has been running a fake voter scheme for the last 10 years to win elections. He said voter history shows a suspicious trend. Before the 2015 assembly elections, the voter count in Delhi increased by 14 lakh in just eight months, jumping from approximately 1.19 crore in 2014 Lok Sabha elections to 1.33 crore. After that, during the next four years leading to the 2019 Lok

Sabha elections, only six lakh voters were added. But within eight months before the 2020 assembly elections, the voter count jumped by another nine lakh to over 1.48 crore. Sachdeva claimed that they tried to repeat this cycle again. Due to BJP's check most such voter application were rejected this time but now numerous fake voter forms were recently submitted online across Delhi. BJP demands that the Election Commission conduct a thorough investigation into these new voter applications in Delhi.

# AAP slams Center's decision to cremate Dr Singh at Nigambodh ghat



Mortal remains of former prime minister Dr Manmohan Singh before being taken to the Nigambodh Ghat for his last rites. PTI

STAFF REPORTER ■ NEW DELHI

The Aam Aadmi Party (AAP) has strongly condemned the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) for not allotting space in the Rajghat complex for the cremation and memorial of former Prime Minister Dr. Manmohan Singh. On Saturday, AAP National Convenor Arvind Kejriwal expressed his shock on social media platform X, saying, "I am stunned to hear that former Prime Minister of India, Dr. Manmohan Singh Ji, was cremated at Nigambodh Ghat. Until now, all former Prime Ministers of India were cremated at Rajghat." Singh was cremated at Nigambodh Ghat on Saturday in the presence of top dignitaries from India and abroad. He passed away on the night of December 26 at the age of 92. An order issued by the Ministry of Home Affairs (MHA) on Friday stated, "It has been decided by the Government that a state funeral will be accorded to Dr.

Manmohan Singh. The funeral will take place at 11:45 am on 28th December 2024 at Nigambodh Ghat, New Delhi." The AAP called on the BJP to clarify its stance and demanded an apology to Singh's family and the Sikh community. Kejriwal further questioned, "Dr. Manmohan Singh Ji, who hailed from the Sikh community, earned global recognition, and served as India's Prime Minister for ten years, was denied even 1,000 square yards of land for his cremation and memorial by the BJP's central government?" Senior leader and MP Sanjay Singh also stated that the BJP has stunted the entire Sikh community by not providing space in the Rajghat complex for the cremation of former PM Dr. Manmohan Singh. Singh, expressed his dismay stating, "It is deeply regrettable that we even have to discuss such an issue. This shows how narrow and petty the government's mindset is. I want to ask Prime Minister Narendra Modi: Dr. Manmohan Singh was a great

economist respected worldwide. As India's Prime Minister, he devoted ten years of his life to the country's progress. Why this disrespect toward him?" Senior AAP leader and Cabinet Minister, Saurabh Bharadwaj, expressed his shock, saying, "I am stunned to hear that Dr. Manmohan Singh, who served as the Prime Minister of this country for ten years and is regarded globally as a scholar. His economic policies are studied in universities worldwide. He saved the nation from economic crises and led India forward during liberalization." "And yet, the funeral of a Prime Minister from the Sikh community is being conducted at Nigambodh Ghat? Nigambodh Ghat for Dr. Manmohan Singh? Has our nation's politics stooped so low that the central government cannot allocate even a thousand square yards of land in Delhi for a learned former Prime Minister? This is disgraceful. Such matters should not be politicised," Saurabh Bharadwaj stated.

# Fire breaks out in JNU hostel, no injuries reported

STAFF REPORTER ■ NEW DELHI

A fire broke out at Jawaharlal Nehru University's Godavari Hostel, officials said. No one was reported hurt in the incident. Videos shared by the JNU Students' Union (JNUSU) showed flames and smoke emerging from an electrical panel board.

The Delhi Fire Services (DFS) said the fire originated in an air-conditioning unit Friday night. "We received a call at 10.18 pm. It was a minor fire in electrical equipment. One fire tender was rushed to the site, and it took 15 minutes to douse the flames," a DFS official said. JNU Vice-Chancellor Santishree Dhulipudi Pandit

said the fire was immediately tended to. "I visited Godavari Hostel in the morning. A short circuit occurred on the third floor of the West Wing, which was immediately brought under control. The wireman and electrical department were present, and the cause was identified as overload due to the use of heaters by the

inmates. No one was injured, and the situation is under control," she said. In a post on X, JNUSU president Dhananjay blamed the incident on "poor safety measures" at the hostels. "The JNU administration and vice chancellor have pushed JNU students into the jaws of death. The fire in Godavari Hostel is proof of this," he

said. The JNUSU has repeatedly raised concerns about the safety and renovation of hostels with the administration, but the response has always been that the government is not providing funds. This RSS-backed administration and government have driven JNU into a state of deterioration," he said.

# LG blames AAP for data misuse

STAFF REPORTER ■ NEW DELHI

The Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) and the Congress welcomed the Lieutenant Governor Vinai Kumar Saxena's order to probe the complaints of data collection from women under the pretense of the Mahila Samman Yojana and its potential transfer to private companies. Delhi BJP president Virendra Sachdeva on Sunday assured that the BJP would fully cooperate with the investigation if needed. Responding to Arvind Kejriwal's statements, Sachdeva said Kejriwal has been feeding lies to the people of Delhi for the past ten years and has failed to fulfill any of his promises. He questioned whether a cabinet proposal to grant ₹2100 crore monthly under the Chief Minister Mahila Samman Yojana had ever been passed. He further accused Kejriwal of

using women's issues only for electoral gains and called on him to learn from BJP-led states about quietly and effectively implementing programs to support women. Sachdeva criticized Kejriwal, pointing out his unfulfilled promise of ₹1000 monthly for women in Punjab before the government was formed. If any cyber crime takes place against Delhi women, the sole responsibility, Sachdeva said, would fall on Kejriwal for collecting their private data under the Mahila Samman Yojana and passing on to private parties. Delhi Congress has slammed the Aam Aadmi Party (AAP) for snooping of senior leader and party's candidate from New Delhi assembly seat, Sandeep Dikshit and large sums of cash being brought into the city from Punjab ahead of the next year's Assembly election.

Lambasting the Kejriwal and AAP government, Delhi Congress president Devendra Yadav said Kejriwal was standing on a shaky ground in his sitting seat, and face an impending defeat, and therefore he was misusing Punjab police personnel to intimidate his powerful Congress candidate Sandeep Dikshit. Yadav said that it was highly condemnable that Kejriwal was adopting such demeaning tactics "to curb the democratic process and free and fair election" after realizing that he was facing certain defeat. He said that the Lt. Governor has taken cognisance of Dikshit's complaint as the charges levelled by Dikshit are "grave" and it is imperative that prospective candidates for the Delhi Assembly elections are "not intimidated and discouraged" from participating in the democratic process.

# BJP afraid of defeat over women scheme: Kejriwal

STAFF REPORTER ■ NEW DELHI

The BJP is panicked with the announcement of Rs 2,100 payment to women under 'Mahila Samman Yojana' and it is trying to stop the scheme fearing defeat in the upcoming polls, AAP supremo Arvind Kejriwal said on Saturday. Speaking at a press conference, Kejriwal also rubbished an order by LG for enquiry into collection of details of women through registration under the scheme as "fake," saying the monetary promise was a poll announcement. "We announced Rs 2,100 per month to all eligible women in Delhi under Mahila Samman Yojana and free treatment of the senior citizen under Sanjeevani Yojna, after forming government in Delhi.

What are they going to enquire?" Kejriwal said. The AAP national convenor alleged that the BJP was trying the government's schemes just so that it could have a chance at defeating it in the February election. Earlier in the day, the LG office shared a letter announcing an inquiry against private persons allegedly gathering personal details of women in the name of Mahila Samman Yojana. The LG in the letter said that the chief secretary of the Delhi government may bring the matter to the knowledge of the Election Commission of India through the chief electoral office given that the alleged canvassing was happening ahead of the election.



# BJP accuses Kejriwal of illegal construction

STAFF REPORTER ■ NEW DELHI

Leader of the Opposition in the Delhi Assembly, Vijender Gupta, once again targeted Aam Aadmi Party leader and former Delhi Chief Minister Arvind Kejriwal. Gupta alleged illegal constructions at Kejriwal's official residence at 6, Flag Staff Road, involving exorbitant expenses on luxurious amenities. Gupta challenged Kejriwal to address the public and reveal the "dark truth" of the Sheesh Mahal. According to Gupta, the public deserves to know what secrets are buried within and why these are being hidden. During a press conference at the Delhi BJP office, Gupta questioned the necessity of a planned illegal construction worth ₹200 crore. He claimed that eight Type-V flats at 45 and 47 Rajpur Road, along

with two bungalows (8-A and 8-B), were demolished and merged to create a grand Sheesh Mahal for the Chief Minister over an extensive 10-acre plot (approximately 50,000 square yards). These demolished properties reportedly included housing for senior administrative officers. Taking a jibe at the AAP's self-proclaimed "honest" leadership, Gupta accused Kejriwal of failing to secure approval from any competent authority to consolidate these seven government properties into the Chief Minister's residence. The demolished properties officially remain listed as separate entities in government records despite being absorbed into 6, Flag Staff Road. Gupta also alleged that some ongoing illegal construction at this address was abruptly halted after the opposition spotlighted the issue.

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# Several Union Ministers and CMs to attend WEF at Davos

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

Union Ministers Ashwini Vaishnav, CR Patil, Chirag Paswan, K Ram Mohan Naidu and Jayant Chaudhary, alongside three Chief Ministers -- Devendra Fadnavis, Chandrababu Naidu and Revant Reddy, will join hundreds of Government and business leaders from across the globe in Swiss ski resort town Davos next month for the World Economic Forum Annual Meeting 2025. Andhra Pradesh Chief Minister Naidu will also be joined by his son and senior minister in his state Nara Lokesh, while Karnataka's Deputy Chief Minister DK Shivakumar, Tamil Nadu Minister TRB Rajaa and Uttar Pradesh Minister Suresh Khanna will also be there for the five-day annual congregation of the world's rich and powerful, starting January 20, 2025. Actor Bhumi Pednekar,

known for films like Dum Laga Ke Haisha, Toilet: Ek Prem Katha, Shubh Mangal Saavdhan, Pati Patni Aur Woh, Badhai Do and Saand Ki Aankh, would also be there. Besides over 50 Presidents and Prime Ministers from across the world, top officials of international organisations like the United Nations, IMF, World Bank, Interpol, NATO, European Central Bank and WTO are also expected to be in Davos for the WEF Annual Meeting 2025. Senior ministers from Pakistan and Bangladesh, including Bangladesh Government's Chief Adviser and head of the interim government Muhammad Yunus would also be present. Vaishnav, Minister for Railways, Information & Broadcasting and Electronics & IT, had also attended the last WEF annual meeting, alongside Smriti Irani and Hardeep Singh Puri from the Union Council of Ministers.

This time, Vaishnav will be joined by Jal Shakti Minister Patil, Food Processing Industries Minister Paswan, Civil Aviation Minister Naidu and Minister of State for Skill Development and Education Chaudhary. Prime Minister Narendra Modi has also attended the meeting in the past, but there is no official word so far about his participation in the high-profile summit, for which the main theme this time will be 'collaboration for the intelligent age'. Expected to be attended by nearly 50 heads of state and governments from across the world, the annual meeting would take place against the backdrop of a change of regime in the US and various geopolitical and macroeconomic issues, including the Ukraine war and continuing West Asia crisis. Both Modi and Donald Trump attended the WEF Annual Meeting in 2018 for the first time as India's Prime



Minister and the US President, respectively. While Modi became Prime Minister of India for the third consecutive term earlier this year, Trump is set to assume office for the second time on January 20, and his return is expected to be among the key topics of discussion at Davos. Maharashtra Chief Minister Fadnavis and Andhra Pradesh

Chief Minister Naidu have been to Davos multiple times, while Telangana Chief Minister Reddy attended the WEF Annual Meeting in January 2024 as well. Besides Government leaders and civil society members, the Indian presence would comprise top executives of business conglomerates like Reliance, Tata, Adani, Birla, Bharti,

Mahindra, Godrej, Jindal, Bajaj and Vedanta groups. Besides Mukesh Ambani and Gautam Adani, the next-generation leaders from their groups are also expected to be present, while technology leaders, including Salil Parekh of Infosys, Rishad Premji of Wipro, as also Sumant Sinha of ReNew, Vijay Shekhar Sharma of Paytm and Adar Poonawalla of Serum Institute are expected in the Swiss Alpine resort town. Geneva-based WEF, which describes itself as an international organisation for public-private cooperation, will convene leaders from government, business and civil society as well as scientific and cultural thinkers for its 55th annual meeting under the theme of 'Collaboration for the Intelligent Age'. According to the WEF, the meeting will serve as a trusted global platform for dialogue and cooperation, bring together a diverse community

of stakeholders, seek to connect the dots in an era of complexity and be firmly future-oriented -- both in terms of insights and solutions. Several sessions are expected to be attended by Indian leaders, including one on 'India's Economic Blueprint'. As one of the world's fastest-growing major economies, India has been growing at over 8 per cent, and this growth has been buoyed by a focus on promoting local innovation and startups in technology and manufacturing, representing a departure from traditional export-oriented models. The leaders would deliberate how India has capitalised on this new blueprint and to what extent it can continue to drive global growth. According to the WEF, the annual meeting will take place at a time when geo-economic fragmentation, geopolitical polarisation and divisions over values continue

to impact countries and communities across the world. At the same time, exponential innovation and deployment around whole sets of inter-connected technologies -- from AI and quantum to energy tech, biotech and health tech -- offer an unprecedented opportunity to increase productivity and hence, standards of living. Reviving and reimagining growth is critical to building stronger and more resilient economies, and the meeting would seek to discuss how to avoid an Age of Fragmentation and instead work together on a can-do, people-centred agenda for an Intelligent Age. The global leaders would also deliberate on how to reinvent the muscle of collaborative innovation to get out of the current low-growth, high-debt world economy and address common challenges from climate change to the ethical use of AI.

## PM CARES fund contributions fall to ₹912 crore in FY 23

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

The total voluntary contribution to the PM CARES Fund fell to Rs 912 crore in the fiscal year 2022-23, its lowest since the public charitable trust was created in March 2020 following the COVID-19 outbreak. A study of the audited statements of the Prime Minister's Citizen Assistance and Relief in Emergency Situations (PM CARES) Fund website shows that the voluntary contribution peaked at Rs 7,184 crore in 2020-21 and then fell to Rs 1,938 crore in 2021-22, before declining further in 2022-23 as the Covid threat receded after 2021. The fiscal 2022-23 is the last year for which the statement is available on the website.



Foreign contribution has seen a sharper decline, registering a high of Rs 495 crore in 2020-21, before falling to Rs 40 crore and Rs 2.57 crore in the next two years. The total expenditure in 2022-23 was around Rs 439 crore, with Rs 346 crore of it used by the "PM Cares for Children", a government

initiative to support children who lost both of their parents, legal guardians or surviving parents to the Covid pandemic. An amount of nearly Rs 92 crore was spent on the procurement of oxygen concentrators, according to the statement. The Narendra Modi government had set up the

PM CARES Fund with the primary objective of dealing with any kind of emergency or distress situation, like the one posed by the Covid pandemic, and to provide relief to the affected. It was registered as a public charitable trust. The prime minister is the ex-officio chairman of the body and the fund consists entirely of voluntary contributions and does not get any budgetary support. The fund has been used over the years to boost emergency care, including for setting up oxygen plants and purchasing ventilators in hospitals run by the central and state governments as part of the larger exercise to meet the challenges posed by the pandemic. In 2021-22, an amount of Rs 1,703 crore was spent on

pressure-swing adsorption oxygen plants, besides spending Rs 835 crore on ventilators, out of a total expenditure of nearly Rs 1,938 crore. Its objective was to undertake and support relief or assistance of any kind relating to a public health emergency or any other kind of emergency, calamity or distress, either man-made or natural, including the creation or upgradation of healthcare or pharmaceutical facilities, other necessary infrastructure, funding relevant research or any other type of support. To render financial assistance, provide grants of payments of money or take such other steps as may be deemed necessary by the Board of Trustees to the affected population.

## Indian Army contingent leaves for Nepal to participate in joint military exercise Surya Kiran

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

An Indian Army contingent comprising 334 personnel departed for Nepal on Saturday to participate in 18th edition of battalion level joint military exercise Surya Kiran. The exercise will be conducted in Saljhadi, Nepal from December 31 to January 13, defence ministry said here adding it is an annual training event conducted alternatively in the two countries. The Indian Army contingent is led by a battalion from the 11th Gorkha Rifles. The Nepal Army contingent will be represented by Srijung Battalion. The aim of the exercise is to enhance interoperability in jungle



warfare, counter terrorism operations in mountains, and Humanitarian Assistance and Disaster Relief under United Nations Charter. The exercise will focus on enhancing operational preparedness, aviation aspects, medical training, and environment conservation. Through these activities, the troops will enhance their

operational capabilities, refine their combat skills and strengthen their coordination to operate together in challenging situations. This edition of the exercise follows successful visits by Army chief General Upendra Dwiwedi to Nepal, and the visit by General Ashok Raj Sigdel, Chief of the Army Staff of Nepali Army to India.

# Mauritius announces flying flag at half-mast as mark of respect to Manmohan Singh

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

Mauritius has announced that its national flag will fly at half-mast at all government offices and institutions till sunset on Saturday as a mark of respect to India's former prime minister Manmohan Singh. Bhutan's national flag was flown at half-mast across the country, its embassies and consulates abroad, according to the Royal Bhutan government as a mark of respect to the departed. In a note, Mauritius Prime Minister Navin Ramgoolam's office also urged the private sector to fly the flags at half-mast. Mauritius Foreign Minister Dhananjay Ramful travelled to Delhi and paid respects to the former prime minister. "Following the passing away of Dr Manmohan Singh,

former Prime Minister of the Republic of India, the public is hereby informed that the Mauritius Flag will be flown at half-mast on all government buildings until sunset today Saturday, the day of his funeral," the Mauritius prime minister's office said. "An appeal is also made to the private sector for all flags to be flown at half-mast," it said in the note. Singh, who served as the prime minister from 2004 to 2014 and widely known as the architect of India's economic reforms, died on Thursday night. He was 92. India's relations with several key countries, including Mauritius, saw significant upswing during Singh's prime ministership. Singh's last rites were held with full state honours on Saturday at the Nigambodh Ghat cremation ground in Delhi. President Droupadi

Murmu, Prime Minister Narendra Modi and King of Bhutan Jigme Khesar Namgyel Wangchuck were among those who attended Singh's funeral. Bhutan's King Jigme Khesar Namgyel Wangchuck attended the funeral of former prime minister Manmohan Singh, a day after leading the Himalayan nation in offering prayers for the Indian leader at a Buddhist monastery in Thimphu. Separate prayer ceremonies were held for the former Indian prime minister at all 20 Dzongkhags or districts of Bhutan, according to the Bhutan government. Bhutan's national flag was flown at half-mast across the country and at its embassies, and consulates abroad, according to the Royal Bhutan government. A thousand butter lamps were lit at the ceremony held in



Thimphu's Kuenrey of Tashichhodzong that was led by the King. The prayer was attended by Prime Minister Tshering Tobgay, Indian ambassador Sudhakar Dalela, several members of the Royal family and senior officials of the Bhutanese government. "As a mark of respect to the

late former prime minister and in solidarity with the government and people of India, all national flags across the country and at Bhutan's embassies, missions, and consulates abroad are being flown at half-mast," the Bhutanese government said in a social media post on Friday. India's relations with several key countries including Bhutan saw significant upswing during Singh's prime ministership. India and Bhutan enjoy strong bonds of friendship based on goodwill, trust and mutually beneficial cooperation. The basic framework of India-Bhutan relations is the "Treaty of Friendship and Cooperation" signed in 1949. It was renewed in February 2007 when Singh was the prime minister. The cooperation in the hydro-power sector is one of the cornerstones of the relations. The ongoing cooperation between India and Bhutan in the hydro-power sector is covered under the 2006 bilateral agreement for cooperation and its Protocol signed in 2009. The pact and the protocol were inked during Singh's

tenure as the prime minister. Meanwhile, Abed Elrazeg Abu Jazer, the charge d'affaires of the Palestine embassy in India, on Friday paid his last respects to the former prime minister and appreciated his support to Palestine. Jazer said Singh played a key role in Palestine getting land for its embassy in Delhi. "We have a history of relationships. He (Singh) met Yasser Arafat in 1991 when he was finance minister, he met (State of Palestine) President Mahmoud Abbas several times throughout his tenure," the diplomat told reporters outside the Congress headquarters where he paid tribute to the former prime minister on behalf of Palestine. He also laid a wreath on behalf of the president of the State of Palestine. "We had good relations with

him (Singh). He met our president several times during his tenure. He also provided land for establishing the Palestinian embassy in Delhi, gave support to build the embassy, and also inaugurated it in 2012," Jazer said. "We appreciate his support to Palestine, we are remembering his contributions. We stand with the Indian people to show our respect for the leader," he added. Abbas visited New Delhi several times during the United Progressive Alliance (UPA) government. In a speech before the UN General Assembly in September 2011, Singh had said India supported "the Palestinian people's struggle for a sovereign, independent, viable and united State of Palestine with East Jerusalem as its capital".

## As individuals age, singlehood may also bring economic, emotional challenges: Study

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

Although marriage or long-term relationships are often seen as the norm, remaining single for life is becoming an increasingly common choice. While singlehood can provide independence and freedom, a new study reveals that it may also bring economic and emotional challenges, particularly as individuals' age and become more dependent on others for support. Published in the journal Psychological Science, the study highlights the lower life satisfaction and distinct personality traits of lifelong singles compared to their partnered peers. "When there are differences, they might be especially important in elderly people who face more health issues and financial issues," said Julia Stern, one of the lead authors and a senior researcher at the University of Bremen in Germany. "They need more help, and



the help is usually the partner." The study used a survey of more than 77,000 Europeans over the age of 50 and was the first of its kind to look across cultures and at people who had been single their entire lives. Stern and colleagues compared single people and partnered individuals on life satisfaction ratings and the Big Five personality traits (openness to experience, conscientiousness, extraversion, agreeableness, and neuroticism). The findings revealed that, in

addition to lower life satisfaction scores, lifelong singles are less extraverted, less conscientious, and less open to experience, compared to partnered people. Although this study cannot definitively decipher if personality differences are due to selection, people with certain personality types may be more likely to start relationships, or socialization, long-term relationships could change personalities, the evidence points to the former. Stern

said that changes to personality from being in a relationship are small and temporary. For instance, although an extraverted person beginning a new relationship may be keen to stay in with their partner, eventually their extraversion comes back. But she warned that the results are average effects and not necessarily descriptive of everyone; of course, there are single extraverts and introverts in committed relationships. For singles, living in a society where marriage is the expectation may affect their life satisfaction. For instance, in countries with higher marriage rates (such as southern European countries), singlehood resulted in even lower life satisfaction scores, but the effects were small. Stern suggested developing new kinds of programs to prevent loneliness that take these personality traits into consideration and help older singles meet like-minded people.

## CBI searches premises of Assistant Director of ED in Shimla

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

The CBI has searched the premises of an Assistant Director of the ED in Shimla, who managed to give a slip to the agency during a trap operation on Sunday and escaped, officials said. The Assistant Director of the Enforcement Directorate (ED) posted at Shimla and his brother Vikas Deep, a senior manager in the Punjab National Bank in Delhi, had allegedly gone to Chandigarh to receive bribe money from a businessman, who is facing a case lodged under the Prevention of Money Laundering Act (PMLA), they said. The businessman filed a complaint with the Central Bureau of Investigation (CBI) about alleged extortion, based on which the Chandigarh unit of the agency planned the trap operation where the complainant was asked to give a bribe of Rs 55 lakh in cash to the officer with CBI sleuths keeping an eye, the officials said. It was planned that the



CBI would nab the accused after the bribe was allegedly received by him, they said. The ED officer, who is on deputation from the Central Board of Indirect Taxes and Customs (CBIC), got alerted during the operation and allegedly fled the spot with the cash, the officials said. The agency has been trying to locate him for six days. It has even launched technical surveillance to pin-point his location but to no avail. So far, cash amounting to around Rs 1 crore, including the bribe amount, has been recovered, they added. The

car used by the absconding officer to escape was also located at the ED office, the officials said. The CBI has arrested Vikas Deep in connection with the case and produced him before a court, they said. The agency is questioning him regarding his alleged involvement in the case. Sources in the ED said the accused assistant director of its Shimla sub-zonal office and his supervisory officers -- a deputy director and the joint director (based in Chandigarh) -- have been transferred to Delhi following the case.

## Principal Secretary to PM condoles Manmohan Singh's passing

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

In his condolences on passing away of former Prime Minister Dr. Manmohan Singh, Principal Secretary to PM Dr PK Mishra on Friday said the country has lost a very distinguished leader, an eminent economist and a great human being. "My memories of Dr. Manmohan Singh dates back to the time when he was teaching at the Delhi School of Economics and I was in my M.A. first year. Seeing him among the stalwart professors in that era was reassuring for a student like me, having come from Sambalpur district in Odisha. Those were the days when very eminent professors such as Amartya Sen, Mrinal Datta Chaudhuri, A.M. Khuroo, K.N. Raj, Sukhamoy Chakraborty, Dharmachand and others were teaching there," Mishra said in a statement.



# ED summons BRS Leader KT Rama Rao and others in formula-e money laundering case

PTI ■ HYDERABAD

The Enforcement Directorate has summoned Bharat Rashtra Samithi leader KT Rama Rao and some others for questioning next month in a money laundering case linked to alleged payment irregularities during a Formula-E race held in Hyderabad in February 2023, official sources said on Saturday. The federal agency filed an enforcement case information report (ECIR) or FIR last week in the case under various sections of Prevention of Money Laundering Act (PMLA), taking cognisance of a Telangana Police Anti-corruption Bureau (ACB)



complaint. Bharat Rashtra Samithi (BRS) working president and son of former Telangana chief minister K Chandrashekhara Rao, Rama Rao has been asked to depose for recording of his

statement on January 7, the sources said. Senior IAS officer Arvind Kumar and retired bureaucrat and former Hyderabad Metropolitan Development Authority (HMDA) chief

engineer BLN Reddy have been summoned on January 2 and January 3, respectively, they added. The probe against 48-year-old Rama Rao, popular as KTR, pertains to alleged payments of about Rs 55 crore, some of it in foreign currency without approvals, to conduct a Formula-E race in Hyderabad during the previous BRS regime in February 2023. The Enforcement Directorate (ED) is also probing possible foreign exchange violations in the case under the provisions of Foreign Exchange Management Act (FEMA), as per the sources. Rama Rao had denied any

## Tribals who received recognition from Manmohan Singh mourn his demise, recall cherished memories

PTI ■ KORAPUT/ODISHA



As the nation bid adieu to former prime minister Manmohan Singh in New Delhi on Saturday, two tribals in a remote Odisha district, who were honoured by him in 2012 for biodiversity conservation, recalled with tears cherished memories with the beloved leader. Railla Muduli, a resident of Boliguda village and Chandra Pradhani of Nuaguda, said words were not enough to express their grief over the demise of Singh. The former PM passed away on Thursday night at Delhi's All India Institute of Medical Sciences due to age-related medical complications. He was 92. Muduli and Pradhani had received Certificates of Recognition for their contribution to biodiversity

conservation from Singh during the 99th Indian Science Congress held at Bhubaneswar 12 years ago. "I was at a loss for words when I heard about his demise on Friday," said Railla, a farmer from the Bhumia tribe. "I remember feeling very nervous that day (in 2012), but receiving the award from the former prime minister was an unforgettable moment. He was gentle and soft-spoken, and encouraged us to work dedicatedly for biodiversity conservation," he said. Pradhani couldn't hold back tears while recalling his brief interaction with Singh. "Sir smiled at me as I received the award and motivated us to continue our efforts in preserving biodiversity. His words will remain an inspiration for years to come," he said. "I wish I had more opportunities to meet him," Pradhani said. Prasant Parida, director of the M S Swaminathan Research Foundation in Jeypore, said Koraput was recognised as a Globally Important Agricultural Heritage System (GIAHS) by the Food and Agriculture Organisation (FAO) in 2012. "Railla and Chandra were instrumental in representing Koraput at the event where the former prime minister acknowledged their community's efforts," said Parida.

## Manipur CM N Biren Singh condemns militant firing, four injured in Imphal east district



PTI ■ IMPHAL

Manipur Chief Minister N Biren Singh on Saturday strongly condemned the indiscriminate firing by militants in Thamnepokpi and Sanasabi areas of Imphal East district in which four persons were injured. The CM in a post on X said, "Strongly condemn the

calm and unity in the wake of such challenges. "Adequate security personnel have been rushed to the affected areas. The injured are receiving necessary medical assistance, and the government calls for calm and unity in the face of such challenges. Central forces and state police should have proper coordination and understanding when dealing with such situations" Singh added. A video journalist was injured in firing by armed men from the hills in Manipur's Imphal East district on Saturday morning, police said. L. Kabichandra, a video journalist of a private TV channel, sustained bullet injuries on his left thigh and

was rushed to a hospital, they said, adding that he was hit by a bullet fired likely by a sniper. Kabichandra was reporting the attack by armed men at Thamnepokpi village since Friday. Security forces also retaliated the fire, they said. On Friday night firing by militants towards Thamnepokpi in Imphal East district from the surrounding hills of Kangpokpi district an elderly woman was injured. She was rushed to Yaingangpokpi Primary Health Centre for treatment and is out of danger. Earlier on Friday, two persons including a security personnel were injured in firing at Sanasabi.

## Kerala Congress slams CM Pinarayi Vijayan for inaugurating airport event amid national mourning for former PM

PTI ■ KOCHI



The Congress in Kerala on Saturday criticised Chief Minister Pinarayi Vijayan for participating in an official inauguration ceremony at the international airport here while the nation was mourning the demise of former Prime Minister Manmohan Singh. Speaking to reporters here, Leader of Opposition in the state Assembly V D Satheshan described the Chief Minister's action as "disrespectful" and "inappropriate". It is disrespectful and inappropriate for someone like the CM to attend and inaugurate an official event at Kochi airport while the funeral of Manmohan Singh, who served as Prime Minister

of India for ten years, is being held in New Delhi, the LoP said. He added that the Chief Minister of Kerala should not have attended such an event and that a request had been made to the airport management to postpone the function and inform the Chief Minister about it the day before. Satheshan expressed his "grief and protest" over the

"disrespect" shown by the CM. Earlier in the day, Vijayan inaugurated the Taj Cochin International Airport, a five-star hotel developed by Cochin International Airport Limited (CIAL) and operated by the IHCL Taj Group. In New Delhi, former Prime Minister Manmohan Singh was cremated with full state honours on Saturday in the presence of top dignitaries from India and abroad. The last rites were attended by President Droupadi Murmu, Vice President Jagdeep Dhankhar, and Prime Minister Narendra Modi, along with top Congress leaders including Mallikarjun Kharge, Sonia Gandhi, and Rahul Gandhi.

## Four lives lost in separate road accidents in Madhya Pradesh



PTI ■ BHOPAL

Four men were killed and two others suffered injuries in separate road accidents in Sehore and Katni districts of Madhya Pradesh on Saturday, police said. Vinand Gyanchand (20) and his cousin Ajay Ghasiram Verma (25) were crushed to death by a truck when they were returning home in Kothari village of Sehore district, Ashta area Sub Divisional Officer of Police (SDOP) Akash Amalkar told PTI. The truck driver fled from the spot, located around 25 km from the district headquarters, but was caught within a few minutes, he said. The victims' bodies were sent to a government hospital for post-mortem, Amalkar said. The process to register a case against the driver was on and investigation was underway, he added. In the second accident, drivers of two trucks were killed after their vehicles collided on Katni-Damoh road, about 33 km off the Katni district headquarters, Rithi police station inspector Rajendra Mishra told PTI.

## Denial of fireworks permission sparks row at Thrissur Temples, shrine managements cry foul

PTI ■ THRISSUR/KERALA

The district administration's denial of permission for the fireworks display during 'Vela Ezunnallippu', a traditional ritual, at the famed Paramakkavu and Thiruvambady temples here has sparked a row with the shrine managements viewing it as a "test dose" to destroy the iconic Thrissur Pooram. The Additional District Magistrate (ADM) here on Friday issued an order denying permission for the fireworks display in connection with the annual ritual citing the new amendment to the union government's Explosive Rules and based on reports of various state government departments in accordance with that. The Vela Ezunnallippu ritual and the related fireworks display of the two temples are scheduled in January first week. In the order, the district administration stated that there is no physical circumstance to carry out the fireworks display in the area and it may pose a threat to the life and property of the public. The opinion of concerned investigating officers that the fireworks should not be allowed taking into account the safety of public life has also been considered, said the order. The order was issued on the request for permission to conduct fireworks display submitted by Thiruvambady Devaswom. Meanwhile, the order denying permission to the

fireworks display citing the central explosive rule guidelines drew sharp reactions from the temple managements. K Girish Kumar, Secretary, Thiruvambady Devaswom, vehemently criticised the move and said permission for the fireworks display is being denied citing technical reasons and urged political leaders and ministers from the district to raise their voice against it. "The Vela Ezunnallippu and its related fireworks are held on the same Swaraj Round where the Thrissur Pooram is conducted annually. The present move is a test dose to destroy the iconic Pooram," he told reporters here. Rejecting the reasons for denying permission for the fireworks display, he said the school, hospital, petrol pump and other such institutions have been there in the area for years and the rituals were held there without any issues in the past. The fireworks display is to be conducted in the midnight after taking all necessary precautions and so it won't pose any security issues as claimed in the order, the Devaswom Secretary further said. Without naming anyone, he further alleged that there were attempts to block the parading of jumbos and the apex court granted permission for the same recently. Now-a-days, the temple authorities are forced to approach the court for each and everything to protect the traditional rituals, he added.

## Patna district administration offers to facilitate meeting between BPSC and protesting candidates over exam cancellation demand

PTI ■ PATNA



The Patna district administration on Saturday said it has made an offer to the candidates, demanding cancellation of the Bihar Public Service Commission (BPSC) examination held on December 13, to facilitate a meeting with it so that they could put forth their grievances. The candidates, seeking cancellation of the 70th Integrated Combined Competitive Examination (CCE), 2024, under the BPSC over allegations of question paper leak have been protesting for more than a week. The protestors would be required to nominate five of

their representatives for talks after which the BPSC would take a decision "within a reasonable time", Patna District Magistrate (DM) Chandrasekhar Singh said. "The district administration has offered the protesting

aspirants to give a list of the representatives (all of them examinees) so that we can facilitate their meeting with the BPSC authorities over the issue," the DM told PTI on Saturday. "They can apprise the

commission's officials of their grievances in the meeting. The district administration also assures the protesting aspirants that the commission would take appropriate decisions or a stand within a reasonable time," Singh said. The commission is an independent body and it is free to make decisions on its own, he said. The BPSC had decided to cancel the preliminary examination held at Babu Pariksha Parisar centre only due to disruption created by a group of unruly aspirants. The re-examination will be held on January 4 at some other centre in the city. The protestors have been

sitting on dharna at Gardani Bagh for several days. They contend that cancellation should be ordered across the board since re-examination for just one centre would go against the principle of "level playing field". Meanwhile, the Patna Police have issued notices to certain people, associated with coaching institutes, and sought clarification over allegedly instigating the protesting aspirants and delivering provocative speeches while addressing students at Gardani Bagh, the dedicated site for organising protests in the city. "Yes, notices have been served to them by the Patna Police in this regard.

## Punjab Govt reclaims 12,809 acres of land worth ₹3,080 Crore, generates ₹573.66 Crore in revenue

PTI ■ CHANDIGARH

The Punjab government has so far reclaimed 12,809 acres of land and handed them over to panchayats since the start of a campaign in 2022 to remove encroachments, Minister Tarunpreet Singh Sond said on Saturday. The market value of this reclaimed land exceeds Rs 3,080 crore, he added. About 6,000 acres of the reclaimed land was leased out, generating an annual income of Rs 10.76 crore during the 2024-25 fiscal, the rural development and panchayat minister said. During the current financial year, the rural development and panchayats department

auctioned 1.36 lakh acres of 'shamlat' (village common land) for Rs 469 crore. Another Rs 93.90 crore was generated by leasing livestock markets through e-auctions, the minister said. Under the Pradhan Mantri Awas Yojana (Gramin), 18,000 homes, costing about Rs 220 crore, will be completed by the end of this fiscal, he said. In the 2025-26 fiscal, an additional 25,000 houses will be constructed. To identify new beneficiaries, a fresh survey has been underway since November 1, with dedicated surveyors deployed in each village, Sond said. He said the department

initiated the Rural Library Scheme from Issru village (in Khanna) this year, realising Chief Minister Bhagwant Mann's vision of establishing libraries in villages. The chief minister inaugurated the first library on August 15. At present, 114 rural libraries are functional across Punjab while work on 179 is underway, he said. The department also facilitated financial assistance for self-help groups by enabling them to secure loans worth Rs 94.35 crore from banks, according to an official statement. Under the Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act (MGNREGA), Rs 983.98 crore was spent

during the 2024-25 fiscal, generating 2.15 crore person-days of employment. An average of 7.02 lakh rural families were provided employment under the scheme this year, according to the statement. The department also planted 95.03 lakh saplings in 2024. Besides, 2,461 sports grounds were built and work on 1,623 is underway. Various initiatives are being undertaken to enhance the aesthetics of villages and effectively manage waste, the minister said. He mentioned that panchayat elections were conducted in 2024, during which 3,044 panchayats were elected unanimously.

## ED raids Chhattisgarh Cong MLA Kawasi Lakhma, son in money laundering case linked to liquor scam



PTI ■ RAIPUR

The Enforcement Directorate on Saturday conducted raids at the premises of Chhattisgarh Congress MLA and former excise minister Kawasi Lakhma, his son and some others as part of a money laundering investigation linked to an alleged liquor scam in the state, official sources said. They said a total of seven premises - including Lakhma's residence in Raipur and his son Harish Lakhma's premises in Sukma district apart from that of some linked persons - are being searched under the provisions of the Prevention of Money Laundering Act (PMLA). The Chhattisgarh Congress alleged the raids were part of a conspiracy by the BJP to harass the opposition party's leaders ahead of urban body and panchayat polls. Lakhma, 71, is a six-time MLA from Korta assembly seat and served as excise minister in the previous Congress government. Harish Lakhma is stated to be a

panchayat president in his district. The ED sources said they are investigating allegations made by some "key accused" that Lakhma was paid about Rs 2 crore per month between 2020-2022 when he held the excise portfolio. According to the agency, the alleged liquor scam was orchestrated between 2019-22 under the then chief minister Bhupesh Baghel-led Congress government. "The Chhattisgarh liquor scam resulted in massive loss to the state exchequer and filled the pockets of the beneficiaries of the liquor syndicate with more than Rs 2,100 crore illegal proceeds of crime," the agency had claimed earlier. Chhattisgarh Congress communication wing president Sushil Anand Shukla told PTI that central agencies are being misused as urban body and panchayat elections are expected to be held in the state. This is a conspiracy by the BJP to harass Congress leaders, he said.

## Cyber fraudsters target Mahakumbh mela, police crackdown on fake booking websites

BISWAJEET BANERJEE ■ PRAYAGRAJ

In a growing trend of cyber fraud targeting the Maha Kumbh Mela, several fake websites promising hotel, tent, and cottage bookings have come to light, prompting the police to launch an intensive crackdown. On Friday, the cyber police registered cases against four such fraudulent websites and subsequently shut them down. Deputy Inspector of Cyber Cell Vinod Kumar Yadav stated that cybercriminals were exploiting the faith and enthusiasm of devotees by



creating fake platforms offering premium services, including accommodations and special VIP bathing arrangements. "These websites are deceiving

pilgrims and extorting significant sums of money under the guise of bookings," he said, urging people to remain vigilant. This marks the fifth case registered against fake websites since November 18, when the cyber police began targeting such fraudulent activities. A dedicated team is now investigating the domains of these sites to identify their operators. Emails have been sent to hosting services to uncover the registrants and locations from where these sites are

being managed. The four websites identified and acted upon are: \*https://mahakumbhfestival.com/ \*https://mahakumbhcottagesreservation.org/ \*https://jainmandiranddharamshala.in/ \*https://mahakumbhcottagesreservation.org/ The cyber police confirmed that FIRs have been filed, and efforts are underway to track down the fraudsters. "Once the domain details are received, we will expedite the arrest of those behind this scam," Yadav added.

The Maha Kumbh Mela, a globally renowned religious gathering, attracts millions of pilgrims. With this influx, cybercriminals see an opportunity to exploit unsuspecting devotees. The police have advised pilgrims to verify booking platforms thoroughly and rely only on official websites for reservations. Authorities are also urging citizens to report suspicious websites or activities immediately, reinforcing the message that collective vigilance is the key to preventing such frauds.



Putin apologises to Azerbaijani leader for 'tragic incident' involving crashed plane

AP ■ MOSCOW Russian President Vladimir Putin on Saturday apologised to his Azerbaijani counterpart for what he called a "tragic incident" following the crash of an Azerbaijani airliner in Kazakhstan that killed 38 people.

Israeli airstrikes hit Yemen airport

Jet with hundreds onboard was landing at that time, says UN official

Israel detains director of Gaza hospital

AP ■ DEIR AL-BALAH Israel's army detained the director of one of northern Gaza's last functioning hospitals as overnight strikes in the territory killed nine people, including children, Palestinian medical officials said Saturday.

Trump asks Supreme Court to delay TikTok ban

PTI ■ WASHINGTON US President-elect Donald Trump asked the Supreme Court on Friday to pause the potential TikTok ban from going into effect until his administration can pursue a "political resolution" to the issue.

BEFORE DEBTS RECOVERY TRIBUNAL-II, DELHI
4th FLOOR, JEEVAN TARA BUILDING, PARLIAMENT STREET, NEW DELHI-110001
Notice under section 19(4) of the Recovery of Debts Due to Bank and Financial Institutions Act 1993 read with rule 12 & 13 of the Debts Recovery Tribunal (Procedure Rule) 1993 in the matter of TA No.196/2022 Date: 21.10.2024

SPECIAL TRAINS
In order to clear extra rush of passengers, Railways have decided to run the following Special Trains as per details given below:-
03255/03256 Patna Jn. - Anand Vihar (T) - Patna Jn. 08 Trips

ANNUAL MAINTENANCE FOR BIU
E-Tender Notice No. DCBL/17/2024/MLG, dated: 26-12-2024. Open E-Tenders are invited by the undersigned for the following works:
Tender No.: DCBL392024MLG Name of works: Annual Maintenance for BIU 1 & 2 at Bogibeel near Dibrugarh for 06 (Six) years. Approximate Tender Value: ₹48,67,500/- Bid Security: ₹97,400/- Date of closing of Tender: 17-01-2025 at 15:00 hrs. Date of Opening of Tenders: 17-01-2025 at 15:05 hrs.

Italy's parliament approves budget

AP ■ ROME Italy's parliament on Saturday approved the government's 2025 budget, worth about 30 billion euros (USD 31 billion) in tax cuts and social security contributions for low-income citizens.

Afghan forces target Pakistan in retaliation for deadly airstrikes

AP ■ KABUL Afghanistan's Defence Ministry said Saturday that its forces hit several points inside Pakistan in retaliation for deadly airstrikes last week.

BNP criticises Yunus' suggestion to lower voting age to 17

PTI ■ DHAKA The Bangladesh Nationalist Party (BNP) on Saturday said that Chief Adviser Muhammad Yunus' suggestion to set the minimum voting age at 17 would put pressure on the Election Commission and could delay the election process.

9th telecom firm hit by massive Chinese espionage campaign, White House says

AP ■ WASHINGTON A ninth US telecom firm has been confirmed to have been hacked as part of a sprawling Chinese espionage campaign that gave officials in Beijing access to private texts and phone conversations of an unknown number of Americans, a top White House official has said.



# Gutsy Reddy's maiden ton keeps India afloat

PTI ■ MELBOURNE

Nitish Reddy, an unknown entity in red ball cricket before the start of Border-Gavaskar series, virtually bailed India out with his dogged maiden Test century here on Saturday, severely denting Australia's hopes of winning the Boxing Day contest.

Reddy's unbeaten 105 took India to 358 for nine, still 116 runs short of Australia's first innings score of 474 as rain brought an early end to the third day's play.

With the flat MCG deck not offering much to the bowlers, saving the Test match shouldn't be a big deal for India. Reddy, easily India's 'find of the series', played a pivotal role in visitors' fightback.

Reddy's combative spirit and the invaluable 127-run stand he shared with Washington Sundar (50 off 162 balls) proved to be the turning point for the hosts.

Reddy's innings was termed as one of greatest Test knocks by the legendary Sunil Gavaskar given the situation as India were in a precarious

position after Rishab Pant's dismissal courtesy a rash shot had left India tottering at 191 for six.

The young Andhra batter could have been stranded on 99 when Jasprit Bumrah got dismissed, leaving Reddy with last-man in Mohammed Siraj, who walked in to another round of boos and faced three deliveries from home skipper Pat Cummins.

Both Reddy and his father Muthyala's expressions changed with each ball but Siraj survived to allow Reddy savour the moment he must have dreamt a thousand times.

A picture-perfect straight drive off Scott Boland was the moment of the series for India as Reddy balanced his helmet with the bat and took a knee, expressing his gratitude towards the Indian dug-out which gave him a standing ovation.

The 21-year-old struck the 'Pushpa' pose after completing his fifty and the 'Salaar' pose to celebrate the century.

A decade back, when his father Muthyala left a secured job to open a micro-



finance (lending) business and incurred losses, the Reddy family was advised not to give wings to young Reddy's cricketing dreams but they were unrelenting.

Sitting in the stands near the boundary, Reddy's father broke down when his son achieved the milestone.

As Indian fans clicked selfies with him it must have reminded of the day when his son received the best U-16 cricketer award from the BCCI in 2017, and an impressionable Reddy was seen clicking selfie with his idol Virat Kohli and his wife Anushka Sharma while leaving the hotel premises.

Reddy's batting was based on stable core, playing the ball late and only going for the drive when the ball was pitched up. He wasn't defending unnecessarily and 10 fours and a six was a testimony to that.

If the morning was more about Rishabh Pant's inexplicable shot selection, the afternoon session belonged to Reddy, whose attacking game put the pressure right back on Australia.

There were plenty of boundaries and a six off Nathan Lyon but none more gorgeous than the off-drive off Cummins. Reddy has been by far India's most consistent batter in the series and the maiden Test century couldn't have come at a more opportune time and that too at an iconic venue.

Washington, at the other end, grew in confidence and trusted his defence apart from punishing the loose deliveries. It did help that the drop-in surface at the MCG has got better for batting as the match progressed.

The second new ball did very little for Australian bowlers and the Indian duo ran very well between the wickets. With Mitchell Starc's back acting up a little, the two batters looked to reduce the deficit further.

In the morning it was all about Pant's shot selection that hurt India.

The third day's MCG track is perhaps the best to bat on with green grass making way for a brownish tinge and an old Kookaburra hardly doing anything.

Had Pant stuck around,

there was no way he wouldn't have scored big. Pant did start well and got a few boundaries but then the urge to play the falling lap pull over long-leg brought about his dismissal.

When he tried it for the first time off Scott Boland, who came round the wicket, Pant was hit in the naval area and seemed to be in pain.

He got up but didn't realise that Cummins had placed one fielder at deep fine-leg and one at deep third man for both the conventional and reverse lap shot.

Without learning his lessons or caring about success percentage, Pant tried a similar shot but the extra bounce meant that the top edge flew to third man for a regulation catch.

"If there was a word called 'worstest', then this was one such shot," former India skipper Sunil Gavaskar said on air.

But Reddy showed steely resolve as he started with a punchy off-drive off Lyon and also jumped down the track to loft him over for a straight six during a splendid recovery act.

## Nitish Reddy: Story of sacrifices made by middle class family

PTI ■ MELBOURNE

Nitish Reddy loves his tattoos like most 21-year-olds do, and one on his ankle is a picture of 'Achilles' Heel'. He considers it a reminder of all the difficulties that his family has endured in the last 10 years to power his cricketing dream.

For Reddy, becoming a cricketer was both a choice and a compulsion. He wanted to do something for his parents, who gave their tears and sweat to fuel his India dream.

The middle-class family gambled with its finances to allow Reddy soar high. The risks taken and losses suffered will not bother them now.

"Getting into the Indian team is a proud feeling but it is only 50 percent of the dream. It will be fulfilled if I can wear that jersey and win matches for my country," an emotional Reddy had told PTI in June this year.

"I want to see respect for my father in the eyes of those who once tore him to shreds for believing in my talent."

The maiden Test ton

celebration in 'Salaar' style was a tribute to his father Muthyala, who watched his son rescue India from the stand behind team's dug-out.

The journey was not just Reddy's but also of his father's sacrifices and belief that his son was special.

As a 12 year-old, Reddy overheard his relatives cursing his father for losing money in his micro-financing business after taking a voluntary retirement from service (VRS) from Hindustan Zinc.

He took the decision to avoid getting transferred to Udaipur since he knew the city did not have the facilities and coaching to help his son excel as a cricketer.

He invested the payout of Rs 20 lakh to start his business. However, his friends, who took loan from him never returned the amount, resulting in massive losses.

"I could hear those discussions and even as a 12-year old. I understood everything. It was a promise I made to myself that only one thing can redeem my



dad's prestige — an India call-up," Reddy had told back then.

It was the time when he could just afford one bat a year (one good seasoned English willow cost around 15,000 back then. It is close to 50k now for international players).

"I can't tell you how happy I am," Muthyala said, struggling to express his emotions, standing outside the MCG after his son's rescue act.

"Virat sir has told him to work hard," he said.

A few years back, Reddy was adjudged the best U-16 cricketer by the BCCI and

Prasad for enrolling him in its state-of-the-art academy in Visakhapatnam.

"Initially, he was placed in our U-14 academy, located far from his hometown. However, his parents encouraged him to pursue his dreams, and he steadily progressed through our academies. Nitish eventually earned a spot in India's U-19 team, showcasing his skill and determination," Prasad recently told PTI.

In 2023, Reddy secured spot in India's Emerging Asia Cup team but was dropped after playing a few games. The squad had players like Yash Dhull, Nishant Sindhu, who are far away from national reckoning.

There are certain events that change the course of one's career and that Emerging Asia Cup made him realise that to make a mark at the international level, he needed to think out of the box.

"I started spending more time at the nets and also hired a few side arm specialists (throwdown) available in Vizag and practised for a month.

"They were all hurling the

ball at 145 clicks and initially I found it hard. And then by the end of the month got adjusted. That practice went a long way when I played IPL this season where I could hit sixes," he had said.

His SRH skipper Pat Cummins might be smiling quietly and thinking aloud as to why he told Reddy that he has the potential to play for India and develop into a good all-rounder.

India head coach Gautam Gambhir also deserves credit for putting his foot down for having Reddy Down Under after watching his exploits in a T20 series against Bangladesh.

It was a leap of faith and Reddy is now the 'find of the series' for India. On the Christmas Day, when everyone was fretting about India's combination, Sanjay Manjrekar had questioned, "Will Leaving Reddy out give India a better balance?"

On Saturday, one of Reddy's sponsors, a popular sports equipment and apparel brand quote tweeted Manjrekar with the cricketer's pic urged the cricket pundit to keep quiet.

## Nick Kyrgios heavily criticizes Sinner, Swiatek for doping-related issues

AP ■ BRISBANE

Just days away from his return to tennis at the Brisbane International, Nick Kyrgios hasn't minced his words in referring to doping-related charges against Jannik Sinner and Iga Swiatek, labelling breaches of the sport's anti-doping program as "disgusting for our sport."

The International Tennis Integrity Agency (ITIA) levelled charges against world No.1 Sinner and former world No.1 Iga Swiatek. Sinner tested positive twice for an anabolic steroid in March, but avoided a ban because the ITIA determined he was not to blame.

Swiatek also accepted a one-month suspension in November after testing positive for the banned substance trimetazidine.

"Two world No.1s both getting done for doping is disgusting for our sport. It's a horrible look," Kyrgios said at his Brisbane International



press conference on Saturday. "Tennis integrity right now, and everyone knows it but no one wants to speak about it, it's awful."

Kyrgios, 29, has not played tournament tennis since June 2023 due to wrist and knee injuries. He was asked about his motivations for speaking out on the Sinner and Swiatek situations.

"Someone like me ... I would never even in my entire life ever try and dope in this sport," he said. "Especially going through an injury like I went through, obviously there are things out there that could speed up healing, help me get back to prime level, help my recovery."

## Carlsen disqualified from top chess meet for violating dress code

PTI ■ NEW YORK

Five-time world champion Magnus Carlsen was first fined and then disqualified from the World Rapid and Blitz Chess Championship here for his refusal to comply with the FIDE's dress code after turning up in jeans here.

Defending champion Carlsen was fined USD 200 for wearing jeans, which are "explicitly prohibited" under tournament regulations and when he refused the request to change his attire right after the eighth round by chief arbiter Alex Holowczak, he was disqualified.

He was not paired for Round 9 of the Rapid championship, taking place at Wall Street.

One of the game's greatest players, the Norwegian ace had agreed to follow the dress from the next day but was not ready to do it immediately, resulting in his disqualification.

"I would rather be at someplace with better weather," is how Carlsen summed up his disqualification from the championship in which he has won in the last two editions.

In a statement, the game's global governing body FIDE emphasised that the dress code rules are well-communicated to all participants and designed to ensure professionalism.

"The dress code regulations are drafted by members of the FIDE Athletes Commission, which is composed of professional players and experts. These rules have been in place for years and are well-known to all participants and are communicated to



them ahead of each event," FIDE said in the statement, posted on X.

"FIDE has also ensured that the players' accommodation is within a short walking distance from the playing venue, making adherence to the rules more convenient."

It added, "Today, Mr. Magnus Carlsen breached the dress code by wearing jeans, which are explicitly prohibited under long-standing regulations for this event. The Chief Arbiter informed Mr. Carlsen of the breach, issued a USD 200 fine, and requested that he change his attire."

"Unfortunately, Mr. Carlsen declined, and as a result, he was not paired for round nine. This decision was made impartially and applies equally to all players."

Earlier, Russian Grandmaster Ian Nepomniachtchi was also penalised for a similar violation but he complied by changing his attire, allowing him to continue in the event.

Meanwhile, "upset" with the turn of events, Carlsen said he won't participate in the Blitz section of the championship as he is "pretty tired" of FIDE's dress code policies.

"I am pretty tired of FIDE, so I want no more of this. I don't

want anything to do with them. I am sorry to everyone at home, maybe it's a stupid principle, but I don't think it's any fun," Carlsen told Norwegian broadcasting channel NRK.

"I said I don't want to bother changing now, but I can change until tomorrow, that's fine. But they didn't want to compromise. I've reached a point where I am pretty upset with FIDE, so I didn't want to either. Then that's how it goes," he added.

The Carlsen dress code fiasco is being seen as a signal to the chess world about his keenness to develop the faster version of the game that he considers as a "real skill" as well as his personal interest about developing the "freestyle chess" for which he recently raised USD 12 million.

Freestyle chess, as he prefers to call it, is the version of the game wherein chess pieces can be shuffled in any order. This was an idea propagated by the great Bobby Fischer.

"This is a war with FIDE (the game's apex body)," said Norwegian sports broadcaster Kaja Snare before adding that this is the end of an era for world chess.

## Chhetri farewell signals end of an era in forgettable year for Indian football

PTI ■ KOLKATA

Indian football found itself in the throes of despair throughout 2024 with the senior men's team failing to register a single win in a year when the long-serving Sunil Chhetri finally decided to hang up his boots internationally after 19 years of yeoman service.

The familiar sight of the diminutive No. 11 running into the box, deftly chipping the ball into the back of the net, bringing out his trademark 'namaste' celebration, and looking skywards with his fingers pointing to the heavens will forever be etched in the hearts of Indian football fans.

With his record 151 appearances and 94 goals for India, Chhetri became synonymous with the sport in the country, inspiring millions while leading the team with distinction.

The talisman's retirement, at 39, marked a poignant end in a year of more lows than highs with the men's national team facing transitional challenges and failing to notch a single win across 12 months for the first time in a decade.

"You don't wish to stop playing for the country. But one day you have to, and you will be fine. Finally, I reached this decision. And I think I made the right decision," an emotional Chhetri had said after his decision to retire.

India's FIFA World Cup qualifier against Kuwait was his last appearance for the country.

On June 6, in his final match at Salt Lake Stadium, 58,921 fans gathered to bid farewell



to the legend but the game ended in a goalless draw, much to the disappointment of his supporters.

It was a night heavy with emotion, as Indian football lost its torchbearer, the unifying figure who had carried the sport on his shoulders for nearly two decades. The national team has never been the same since his retirement.

World Cup Qualifiers debacle

The disappointing exit from the second round of FIFA World Cup Qualifiers was followed by the acrimonious sacking of head coach Igor Stimac, a year before his contract expired.

Stimac initially demanded USD 920,000 (Rs 7.72 crore) as compensation and approached the game's governing body FIFA after rejecting the All India Football Federation's (AIFF) offer of first three, then five, and finally 10 months' salary as settlement.

The matter escalated before both parties reached an

agreement, setting the national federation back by USD 400,000.

Stimac was earlier given an extension until 2026 on the condition of reaching the quarterfinals of the AFC Asian Cup but India finished last in their group after failing to win a single match.

Manolo Marquez, a familiar face in Indian football having led Hyderabad FC to an ISL title in 2022, was appointed as the new head coach in July while keeping his job at FC Goa till the end of the ongoing season.

But his appointment failed to turn around India's fortunes as the team lost once and drew thrice under the Spaniard.

The Indian team ended the year with a 1-1 draw against Malaysia. In all, the side played 11 matches and suffered six losses in a forgettable year. The lack of results reflected in their rankings as the team slipped to 126 in the FIFA chart from 102 in December last year.

At club level, Mohun Bagan

continued their dominance with the two teams winning the Shield and ISL title respectively.

There was, however, also a setback for Mohun Bagan who were considered 'withdrawn' from the AFC Champions League 2 after refusing to travel to Iran for their match against Tractor SC on October 2, citing security concerns amid political unrest in that part of the world.

The Asian Football Confederation (AFC) cancelled all of Mohun Bagan's matches in the competition, considering them null and void. This followed the club's goalless draw against Ravshan Kulob in their opening Group A match at Salt Lake Stadium.

The year proved to be a historic one for Odisha FC who secured a spot in the AFC Women's Champions League Group Stage after topping their preliminary stage group with two wins, including a 4-1 victory over Lion City Sailors and a 2-1 win against Etihad Club.

There was also a tug of war between bitter rivals Mohun Bagan and East Bengal over one of the finest centrebacks Anwar Ali, leading to legal battles over his contract.

Controversy off the field

The sport also had its share of off-the-field controversies with some questioning AIFF president Kalyan Chaubey's leadership following the termination of Nilanjan Bhattacharjee, the head of the national federation's legal body.

Chaubey faced allegations of mishandling tender processes and using AIFF funds for personal expenses from the ousted Bhattacharjee.

Former India captain Bhaichung Bhutia also called for Chaubey's resignation citing 'issues' with AIFF's administration.

If that was not enough, the federation found itself embroiled in a new controversy over its handling of the broadcasting rights for the I-League 2024-25 season.

After initially entering into a deal with Sony for the coverage of matches, the AIFF abruptly switched to Shraci Sports, an inexperienced entity. The move led to sponsor concerns, with club owners threatening to withdraw teams if proper broadcasting arrangements aren't made.

The AIFF, though, denied any wrongdoing.

Future tense

The Indian team is currently in a transition phase, with head coach Marquez experimenting with various combinations and giving opportunities to a group of promising youngsters to identify the next No. 10.

However, the team remains unsettled, with the veteran duo of Gurpreet Singh Sandhu and Sandesh Jhingan carrying significant responsibility at the back.

Following a challenging year, Marquez faces the task of steering India to a third consecutive AFC Asian Cup qualification.

The Blue Tigers are placed in a competitive Group C and will face Hong Kong, Singapore, and Bangladesh after beginning their campaign on March 25 next year.





THE YEAR THAT WAS:

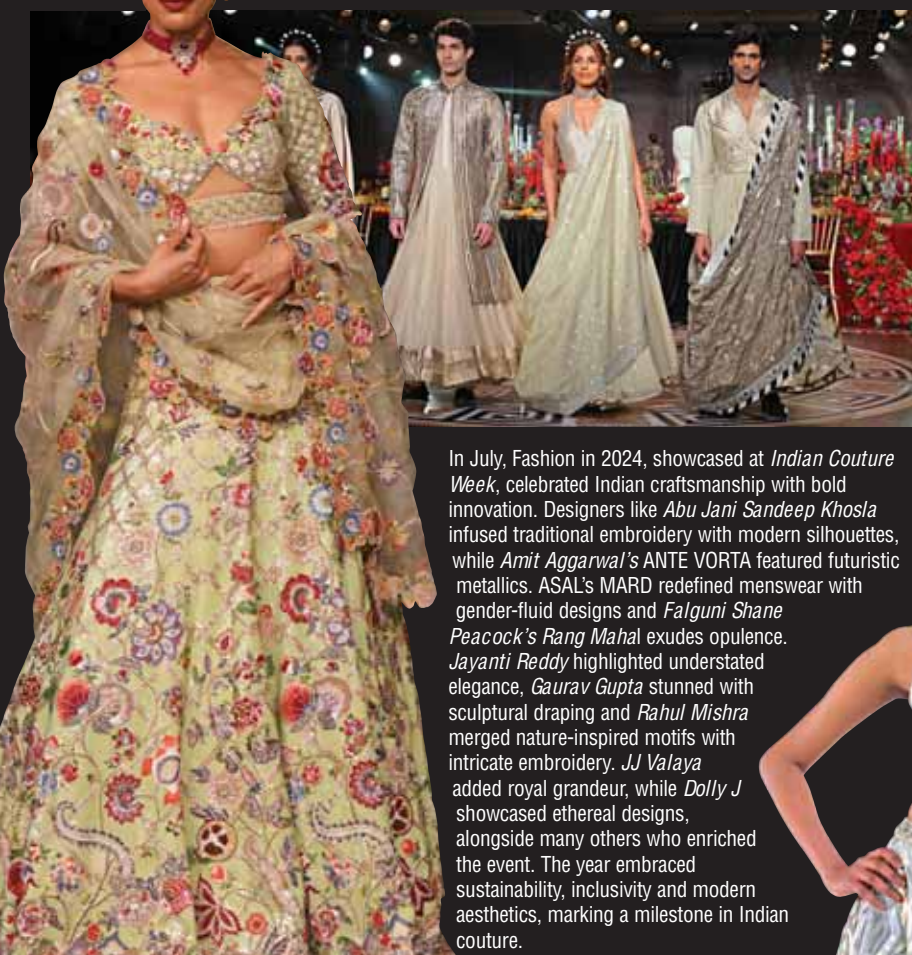
FASHION



A year of creativity, celebration and heartfelt goodbyes, 2024 showcased Indian fashion's evolving soul and the stories it tells, writes **SAKSHI PRIYA**

PHOTOS : PANKAJ KUMAR

INDIAN COUTURE WEEK



In July, Fashion in 2024, showcased at *Indian Couture Week*, celebrated Indian craftsmanship with bold innovation. Designers like *Abu Jani Sandeep Khosla* infused traditional embroidery with modern silhouettes, while *Amit Aggarwal's ANTE VORTA* featured futuristic metallics. ASAL's *MARD* redefined menswear with gender-fluid designs and *Falguni Shane Peacock's Rang Mahal* exudes opulence. *Jayanti Reddy* highlighted understated elegance, *Gaurav Gupta* stunned with sculptural draping and *Rahul Mishra* merged nature-inspired motifs with intricate embroidery. *JJ Valaya* added royal grandeur, while *Dolly J* showcased ethereal designs, alongside many others who enriched the event. The year embraced sustainability, inclusivity and modern aesthetics, marking a milestone in Indian couture.

Fashion is the art of self-expression, a canvas where creativity meets elegance, a place where every stitch tells a story and every design carries a vision. As we bid farewell to 2024, this year has truly proven to be a defining moment in the world of fashion. From the grand showcases at *Indian Couture Week* to the dazzling displays at *Lakmé Fashion Week*, Delhi has been the stage for timeless elegance and bold creativity. Designers like *Rahul Mishra*, *Gaurav Gupta* and *Ravi Bajaj* have brought their unique touch to Indian fashion, seamlessly blending tradition with modern innovation. The year culminated in *Rohit Bal's* emotional final show, marking the end of a legendary era. As we look forward to the exciting promises of 2025, we wish our readers a year ahead filled with inspiration, style, and unforgettable moments in the ever-evolving world of fashion.

QUETZALLI BY SUNEET VERMA

*Suneet Verma's* Quetzalli collection fuses Mexican craftsmanship with Indian Couture, celebrating heritage and artistry. *Varma's* Quetzalli collection, in collaboration with *PATRÓN Tequila*, brought together the best of Mexican craftsmanship and Indian couture. The show was a visual feast, with gowns adorned in intricate lacework, metallic motifs and dramatic feather details. The collection, which blended traditional techniques with modern sensibilities, captivated the audience from start to finish. A fitting grand finale left a lasting impression, showcasing *Varma's* genius in weaving cultural stories through couture.

LAKME FASHION WEEK



In October 2024, the fashion world was treated to an unforgettable display of Indian craftsmanship and innovation. *Péro* by *Aneeth Arora* opened the season with its enchanting "HELLO péro" collection, which creatively blended nostalgia and modernity. *Kalki's* "Mushk" collection wowed with its intricate handwoven embroidery, while *Monisha Jaising's* luxurious designs made a bold statement. *Payal Pratap's* work elegantly fused traditional techniques with contemporary silhouettes. *Samant Chauhan's* showcase stood out with his unique handloom weaves and rich textures. The grand finale, presented by *Rohit Bal*, unveiled his breathtaking "Kaaynaat: A Bloom in the Universe," where intricate embroidery and flowing fabrics celebrated nature's beauty, leaving a lasting impact with Lakmé muse *Ananya Panday* as the showstopper.

MISHRU BY SWAPNA ANUMOLU



October in Delhi brought a wave of creativity and couture to the city, with *Resonance 2024/25* by *Mishru* taking centre stage at the Embassy of Belgium. The artistry of *Swapna Anumolu*, whose latest collection beautifully fused nature with urban aesthetics. Each piece told a story, blending intricate craftsmanship and vibrant textures. The highlight of the evening was *Bollywood's Shradha Kapoor*, who graced the runway as the showstopper, effortlessly bringing the collection to life. *Mishru's* stunning fusion of traditional techniques with modern designs marks a new chapter for Indian fashion, embracing both heritage and future innovation.

THE MAN IN THE MIRROR BY ABHINAV MISHRA

The 2024 couture season brought a stunning celebration of tradition and innovation with *Abhinav Mishra's* "The Man in the Mirror." The collection showcased mirror-work, with pieces like "Kalbeliya" drawing inspiration from Rajasthan's folk dance, featuring bold colours and intricate patterns. From traditional lehengas to contemporary kurtans, Mishra's creations blended heritage with modern flair.

AURUM BY RAVI BAJAJ

*Ravi Bajaj's* new label, "Aurum," made its debut with a stunning fashion show that beautifully combined traditional Indian elements with a modern twist. The collection, focused on wedding wear, featured intricate designs in lace, organza

and pearls, with men's kurtas and womenswear lehengas showcasing timeless elegance. The collection's gold and white colour scheme symbolised prosperity, offering a fresh take on bridal attire. As 2024 ends and the wedding season approaches, "Aurum" stands out, redefining modern wedding wear with grace and sophistication.

A FAREWELL TO A FASHION ICON

As 2024 unfolds, it has been a year of both celebration and sorrow in the fashion world. We witnessed monumental achievements in design and innovation, but also faced the heart-wrenching loss of *Rohit Bal*, affectionately known as "Gudda." His final show at *Lakmé Fashion Week*, titled "Kaaynaat: A Bloom in the Universe," was a moving tribute to his creative spirit, celebrating the beauty of nature and cosmic wonder. Actress *Ananya Panday*, the showstopper, embodied Bal's timeless, graceful vision, while each piece showcased his devotion to beauty, detail and imagination. His legacy will endure.

BAARAAT BY TASVA BY TARUN TAHILIANI

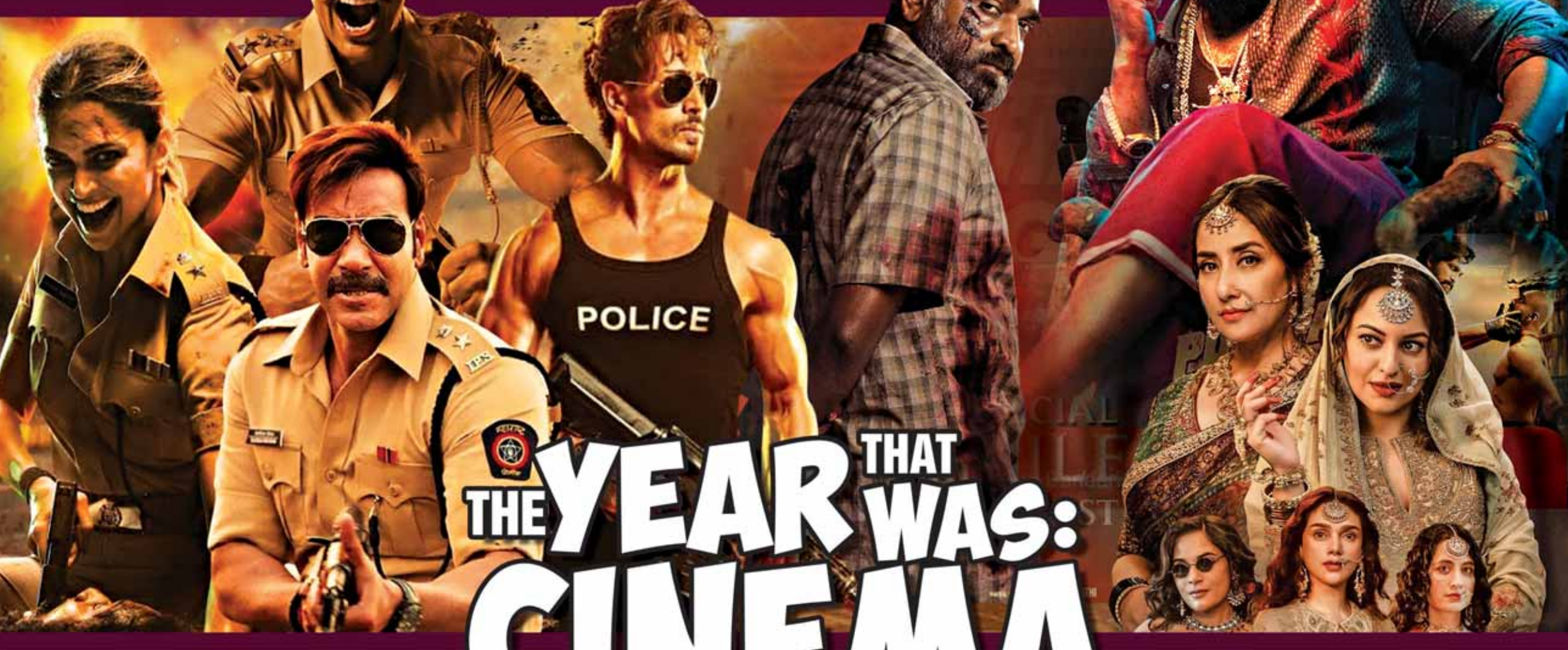
Men's fashion has evolved dramatically, with 2024 marking a defining year in wedding wear. The spotlight shifted to the modern groom, embracing his individuality and heritage. "BAARAAT" by *Tasva*, a showcase designed by the renowned *Tarun Tahiliani*. The collection featured exquisite sherwanis and bandhgallas, each a perfect blend of tradition and contemporary flair. The collection, with intricate detailing and luxurious fabrics, allowed grooms to shine, making a powerful statement about embracing personal style while honoring their roots.

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# the pioneer agenda

"Cinema's characteristic forte is its ability to capture and communicate the intimacies of the human mind"  
— Satyajit Ray



## THE YEAR THAT WAS: CINEMA

2024 has yet again been an amazing year for films, from iconic performances to thrilling narratives and unexpected misses, writes **ABHI SINGHAL**

### TOP 10 FILMS

**Amar Singh Chamkila:** The film takes you through the lives of pop star duo Amar Singh Chamkila and Amarjot Kaur, shedding light on their rise to fame in the 1980s through chart-topping songs.  
**RATING: 4/5**

**Do Patti:** Do Patti is a story of twin sisters, whose troubled relationship is tested by love, betrayal, and redemption. The film explores the themes of domestic violence with standout performances by Kriti Sanon.  
**RATING: 4/5**

**Maharaja:** After his home is broken into, a barber seeks revenge by cryptically telling police that his "lakshmi" has been abducted. The story of his journey to retrieve "lakshmi" begins.  
**RATING: 4/5**

**Bhaiyya Ji:** A retired crime boss is pulled back into a world of bloodshed and violence as he seeks vengeance against those who killed his younger brother, featuring Manoj Bajpayee as Bhaiyya Ji.  
**RATING: 4/5**

**Lucky Bhaskar:** Lucky Bhaskar a Telugu-language period crime drama about a lower-middle-class man who turns to financial scams to overcome debt and humiliation, featuring Dulquer Salmaan in a compelling titular role.  
**RATING: 4/5**

**CTRL:** CTRL is a thriller directed by Vikramaditya Motwane, plotting the dark side of the digital age and the dangers of oversharing online.  
**RATING: 3.5/5**

**Article 370:** The story follows Yami Gautam as a special agent, assigned a high-stakes mission to quell violence in Kashmir and render Article 370 ineffective.  
**RATING: 3.5/5**

**Berlin:** In 1993, the Bureau accused and arrested a deaf-mute young man of spying in New Delhi. An interpreter with expertise in sign language is brought in.  
**RATING: 3/5**



**Laapataa Ladies:** Laapataa Ladies is a humorous and heartwarming tale of identity, empowerment, and self-discovery, marking Kiran Rao's triumphant return to direction.  
**RATING: 4.5/5**



**Sector 36:** Sector 36 is a chilling crime thriller showcasing Vikrant Massey as a psychotic serial killer. The 124-minute drama is a must-watch for crime genre enthusiasts, delivering an unsettling narrative.  
**RATING: 3.5/5**

SPOTLIGHT

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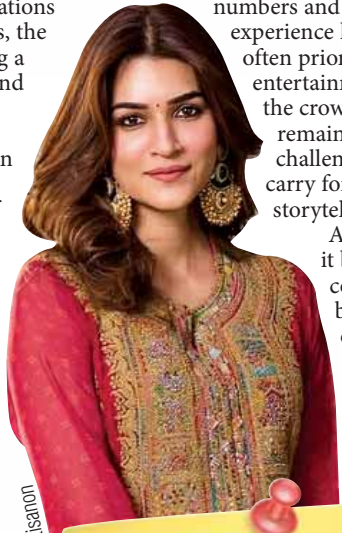
Cinema has long been a reflection of society, a medium of mass communication, and an instrument for change. From its inception, films have served as more than just a source of entertainment. They have been a mirror to society, amplifying voices, shedding light on pressing issues, and sparking conversations that transcend borders. Over the decades, the cinematic landscape has evolved, offering a fascinating mix of artistry, storytelling, and technical brilliance. This year was no exception.

Looking back at the journey of Indian cinema, it is astonishing to witness its evolution—from the poignant realism of Satyajit Ray's "Pather Panchali" and the thought-provoking narratives of Shyam Benegal to the visual spectacles crafted by modern filmmakers like S.S. Rajamouli and Sanjay Leela Bhansali. Over 69 years, the industry has grown into a cultural phenomenon, shaping not just entertainment but also the values and ideals of its audience.

The early years of Indian cinema were driven by socially conscious storytelling, as seen in classics like Shatranj Ke Khilari, Sadgati, and Aparajito. These films addressed societal issues with sensitivity and depth, using the medium to educate and inspire change. Directors like Ray and Benegal paved the way for a golden era where art met purpose, creating a legacy of films that resonated deeply with audiences.

In recent years, however, talking about

films like Pushpa 2, Teri Baaton Mein Aisa Uljha Jiya, Kalki 2898 AD, Kill, and more there has been a discernible shift in the motives behind filmmaking. While the essence of cinema as an art form endures, the industry has leaned heavily towards commercialisation. With a focus on box office numbers and global appeal, the cinematic experience has transformed into a spectacle, often prioritising grandeur and entertainment over substance. Yet, amidst the crowd of mass-market releases, there remain exceptions about the films that challenge norms, provoke thought, and carry forward the tradition of meaningful storytelling.



**Actor of the year**  
Kriti Sanon stole 2024 in her name by her stellar, glamorous performances and delivering back to back hit films even with female protagonists loved by the audience.

As we look back at the year that was, it becomes evident that cinema continues to straddle the line between its artistic roots and its commercial aspirations.

The past year has been a testament to the diversity of the medium, offering a mix of groundbreaking narratives, record-breaking successes, and a glimpse into the future of filmmaking will also some flops which didn't do well. This retrospective explores how the industry has evolved over time and examines the key highlights of the cinematic journey this year, from the unforgettable performances to the innovative storytelling that defined 2024.

### WRONG CHOICES (FLOPS)



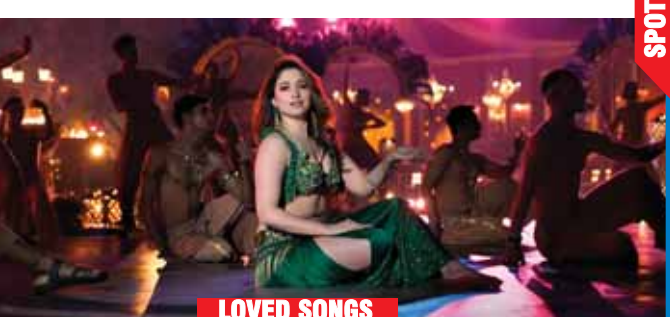
**Bade Miyan Chote Miyan:** Bade Miyan Chote Miyan is a Hindi sci-fi action film directed by Ali Abbas Zafar, starring Akshay Kumar, Tiger Shroff, and Prithviraj Sukumaran. The story follows two ex-soldiers racing to thwart a vengeful scientist's plan to attack India.

**Sarfira:** Sarfira is a Hindi drama directed by Sudha Kongara, starring Akshay Kumar, Paresh Rawal, and Radhika Madan. A remake of Soorai Pottru, it follows a man's fight to create affordable airlines for low-income people, battling numerous obstacles along the way.

**Maidaan:** Maidaan is a biographical sports drama directed by Amit Ravindernath Sharma, starring Ajay Devgn as Syed Abdul Rahim, a pioneering football coach in India.

**The Buckingham Murders:** The Buckingham Murders is an Indian crime thriller directed by Hansal Mehta, starring Kareena Kapoor Khan as a grieving British-Indian detective investigating a child's murder in Buckinghamshire.

**Yodha:** Yodha an action thriller following Arun Katyal (Sidharth Mahotra), a former soldier suspended after a failed mission, who is found on a hijacked plane years later. Blamed for the hijacking, Arun seeks revenge against the system.



**Aaj Ki Raat:** Madhubanti Bagchi, Divya Kumar, Sachin - Jigar

**MixSingh**  
**Ve Haaniyaan:** Danny Ft Avvy Sra  
**Sahiba:** Jasleen Royal  
**Suniyan Suniyan:** Juss and  
**Kaavaala:** by Shilpa Rao, Anirudh Ravichander

### LOVED SONGS



### TOP 5 WEB SERIES

**Jannapaar:** Jannapaar is a series on Amazon Mini TV about Shanky Bansal, a young man from East Delhi grappling with identity and aspirations. Struggling with feelings of inferiority, Shanky disowns his roots but eventually learns to embrace and take pride in them.

**Gyaarah Gyaarah:** Gyaarah Gyaarah, streaming on Zee5, is an Indian adaptation of the South Korean series Signal. It blends time travel, suspense, and crime drama across three timelines.

**Heeramandi:** Airing on Netflix, Heeramandi: The Diamond Bazaar is a 2024 Hindi period drama by Sanjay Leela Bhansali, exploring the lives of tawaifs in Lahore's Heera Mandi during India's independence struggle. The star-studded cast includes Manisha Koirala, Sonakshi Sinha, and Aditi Rao Hydari.

**Mirzapur Season 3:** The third season of Mirzapur gets into an intense power struggle between Guddu, Sharad Shukla, and Kaleen Bhaiya, as alliances shift and rivalries deepen in the lawless city.

**Ranneeti:** The web series Ranneeti: Balakot and Beyond is a 2024 action series streaming on Zee5, following an R&AW agent and his team as they combat hybrid warfare post-Pulwama attacks. They race to rescue a captured pilot, expose Pakistan's propaganda.

SPOTLIGHT



# The year that was: food

With 2024 about to end, we reflect on the food trends and unforgettable flavours that defined the year, says **SAKSHI PRIYA**

## A YEAR TO SAVOUR: FOOD MOMENTS OF 2024

As 2024 draws to a close, it's time to reflect on the tastes and trends that defined our culinary year. From viral dishes that united food lovers to beloved celebrity recipes that took over our kitchens, the year reminded us how food connects us. Whether it was the streets of Delhi buzzing with chatter over piping-hot kachoris or Instagram feeds flooding with quirky food combos, 2024 proved that our love for good food knows no bounds. So, let's dive into the highlights that made this year a feast for both our plates and our hearts.

## VIRAL CELEBRITY RECIPES

### Jackie Shroff's Anda Curry Patta and Baingan Bharta

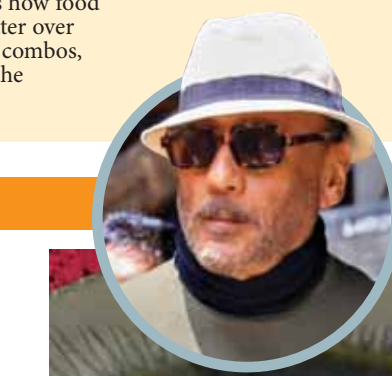
Jackie Shroff's *Anda Curry Patta* became a go-to comfort dish for many, while his smoky *Baingan Bharta* gave eggplant a superstar moment. Everyone seemed to try their hand at his recipes, inspired by the way he explained each step in his cooking videos, peppered with his trademark "bhidu" charm. Fans couldn't get enough, rating his dishes a solid 10 out of 10 for their earthy, soulful, and undeniably delicious flavours. Jackie truly became the culinary hero of 2024!

### Aditi Rao Hydari's Khagina

Aditi Rao Hydari's *Khagina* became a sensation as everyone tried recreating her rich, buttery take on the classic egg dish. Her charming explanation, "cut the onions into moon-shaped slices, cook until pinkish, crack the eggs and top with masala", made it a viral hit. Fans across the internet hailed it as the perfect brunch staple, calling it a true "taste of warmth".

### Farah Khan's Yakhni Pulao

Farah Khan's *Yakhni Pulao* was the culinary sensation of the year. A soulful mix of tender meat and fragrant rice, the dish captivated fans who couldn't stop praising its simplicity and rich flavour. On her YouTube channel, she showed every step, making it easy to recreate. Viewers loved her detailed tips and rated it a perfect 10, proudly sharing their own versions online and creating videos titled "Trying Farah Khan's Favourite Yakhni Pulao".



THESE DISHES NOT ONLY DEFINED THE CULINARY LANDSCAPE OF 2024 BUT ALSO REMINDED US OF THE DEEP CONNECTIONS BETWEEN FOOD, CULTURE AND COMMUNITY. HERE'S TO MORE DELECTABLE ADVENTURES IN THE YEAR AHEAD!

## INSTAGRAM VIRALS

**Vada Pav in Delhi:** A tiny stall in the heart of Delhi sent Mumbaikars into a frenzy! Foodies queued up for hours to get a taste of this Mumbai classic, proving that Delhi truly embraces all flavours.

**Popcorn Momos in GK:** Momo mania reached new heights with this crunchy, buttery twist. Found at a GK corner, this snack became the ultimate winter indulgence, drawing food bloggers and crowds alike.

**Viral Cucumber Jar Salad:** Healthy eating met Instagram aesthetics with this layered cucumber salad in a jar. With its vibrant colours and zesty dressing, it became a favourite for fitness enthusiasts and food photographers.



## CELEB VIRAL FOOD COMBOS



**Deepika Padukone's Ema Datshi**  
Deepika's love for the Bhutanese cheesy chilli dish *Ema Datshi* had people flocking to Tibetan restaurants to experience its fiery, creamy magic.

**Shradha Kapoor's Varan Bhaat**  
This Maharashtrian classic became a viral sensation as Shradha shared her family recipe. Fans across India tried recreating this simple yet comforting dish.

**Janhvi Kapoor's Idli and Chicken Curry**  
This unlikely combo went viral after Janhvi shared her love for it. Foodies everywhere couldn't resist trying it, and it quickly became a trending dish, with fans recreating it at home and experimenting with the combo in their own kitchens.

## FLAVOURS THAT TRAVELLED

As we say goodbye to 2024, we revisited the places that captured our hearts and taste buds (Travel page III), where every bite told a story. Here's to the flavours that made this year's travels truly special.

### Banaras #malaiyo #tamarchaat

Banaras delivered on all fronts this year, especially with its food. The winter-special *Malaiyo*, a frothy dessert that melts in your mouth, became a seasonal must-try. Meanwhile, the tangy and spicy *Tamatar Chaat* delighted foodies with its zesty flavours, making it the city's street-food superstar.

### Kashmir #kahwa #roganjosh

The "Paradise on Earth" showcased its culinary treasures alongside its natural beauty in 2024. *Kahwa*, the traditional spiced tea and the aromatic *Rogan Josh* were must-haves for travellers seeking warmth and flavour amidst the snow-draped landscapes.

### Ladakh #thukpa #buttertea

Ladakh's dishes weren't just delicious, they were soul-soothing. The hearty *Thukpa*, a noodle soup packed with vegetables and meat, became a favourite, while the creamy, salty *Butter Tea* was a comforting companion in the chilly weather.

### Goa #porkvindaloo #crabxecxec

Goa's cuisine stole the spotlight in 2024 with its bold and flavourful offerings. The spicy and tangy *Pork Vindaloo*, *Crab Xec Xec* and fiery *Prawns Balchao* cemented their place as iconic dishes, bringing joy to every table.

### Lakshadweep #muskaavab

The smoky and succulent *Mus Kaavab* paired perfectly with the aromatic, coconut-infused *Tuna Curry*, making every bite a celebration of coastal flavours. Each meal offered a taste of island life, blending the sea's bounty with vibrant flavours.



## ALL-TIME FAVOURITE FOOD STREETS OF DELHI

Let's remember Delhi's iconic street food, a delight for food lovers. Delhi's street food scene never fails to impress.  
**Chandni Chowk:** This winter, Chandni Chowk dazzled with iconic *dahi bhallas*, *daulat ki chaat* and hot *jalebis* paired with *creamy rabri*.  
**Kamla Nagar:** A shopper's paradise, the area also shone for its unbeatable *chole*

*bhature* and *Sharma Ji's kachoris*.  
**Lodhi Colony:** *Anna Durga South Indian* offered perfect *dosas* and *idlis*, earning its spot as a social media favourite.  
**Connaught Place & Janpath:** From *Jain Chawal Wale's* iconic *rajma rice* to *mini samosas* and *Wenger's* timeless baked treats, CP and Janpath were unmissable.





"LIVE LIFE WITH NO EXCUSES, TRAVEL WITH NO REGRET"  
— OSCAR WILDE


## WANDERLUST OF INDIAN DESTINATIONS

**KASHMIR**



**#winterwonderland #switzerlandofindia**  
Kashmir, often called "Paradise on Earth," boasts breathtaking natural beauty with vibrant autumn foliage, crystal-clear lakes reflecting the snow-capped peaks, and verdant valleys nestled amidst majestic mountains. This pretty landscape, with its serene charm, makes Kashmir a truly unforgettable travel destination.


**BANARAS**



**#gangaarti #kashivishwanath**  
Banaras or Varanasi or Kashi, a sacred city in Uttar Pradesh and it holds immense significance in Hinduism. It is a renowned pilgrimage site, deeply intertwined with traditions of death and mourning. The city was known for the most visited and trending places in India in 2024.


2024 has been all about travel, realising the importance of travel, be it solo or in groups. Travel in every way is a gateway to self-discovery and deeper connections with the world around us, writes **ABHI SINGHAL**

**LADAKH**



**#pangonglake #kargil**  
Ladakh also known as Little Tibet, is a breathtaking region in India soared with snow-capped mountains, frozen lakes, ancient Buddhist monasteries perched on dramatic cliffs, and vibrant festivals filled with music and dance. Ladakh is one of the most loved places in 2024.

**LAKSHADWEEP**



**#tropicalparadise #islandescape**  
Lakshadweep, a pure archipelago in the Arabian Sea, is a true beauty on Earth. Pristine white sand beaches lapped by clear turquoise waters, coral reefs teeming with marine life, and lush coconut palms swaying gently in the breeze. Lakshadweep offers a unique blend of natural beauty, and cultural richness.

**GOA**




**#goadiaries #beachlover**  
Goa, a coastal paradise in India, is a vibrant blend of Portuguese heritage and Indian culture. There are pristine beaches lined with swaying palm trees, azure waters perfect for swimming and watersports, delicious seafood, and a lively nightlife scene.



## #NEWYEARGETAWAYS

### FOR TROPICAL CLIMATE LOVERS

**GUWAHATI**



From Guwahati you can expect a cool and pleasant weather in the north east on the New Year and can plan a getaway around visiting Kamakhya Temple.


**KERALA**



Kerala, "God's Own Country," can work as a perfect New Year's getaway helping in rejuvenating yourself amidst serene backwater cruises, and lush greenery.


### FOR WINTER LOVERS

**MANALI**




Manali has started receiving the snowfall and has become a white paradise. It is the perfect getaway, offering snow-covered peaks and cosy cafes.

**AULI**



Auli as a destination is beautiful and scenic and has snowfall predictions on 27th December and after, making it a perfect destination for your new year.

**MUKTESHWAR**



Mukteshwar is an untouched beauty to help you find yourself and peace this new year. The charming trails and dense forests make it ideal.





**YOUR WEEK AHEAD**

MADHU KOTIYA



**ARIES** March 21-April 19

This week holds significant potential for financial and business success. You are poised to make impactful decisions that could lead to considerable gains, especially from real estate investments. Those involved in trading, finance, or property management may find their efforts yielding substantial rewards due to their dedication and hard work. Expect unexpected opportunities to arise, presenting offers that may surprise you with their favorable terms. Your ability to maintain connections primarily through digital means will be crucial, as your schedule may not allow for face-to-face interactions. Toward the week's end, you might find yourself drawn more towards spiritual activities. Engaging in worship, charitable acts, and assisting those in need could provide a profound sense of fulfillment. Exercise caution with financial transactions during this time to ensure everything proceeds smoothly.

**Lucky number 11 | Lucky colour Amber**  
**Lucky day** Sunday



**LEO** July 23-Aug 22

This week starts on a high note for you, as recent efforts begin to show promising progress. You're deeply engaged and pushing forward with vigor, bolstered by the support and encouragement from your close ones. Partnerships, in particular, are flourishing, bringing satisfying outcomes your way. As the week progresses, stay vigilant; some opposition may arise, prompting a need to rethink plans made with family. Unexpected commitments will emerge, demanding prioritization, which may shift your scheduled activities. Pay particular attention to your health and financial management. It's wise to consult a healthcare professional to stay on top of any potential issues and to handle financial matters with care to avoid overspending, safeguarding against future economic challenges.

**Lucky number 3 | Lucky colour White**  
**Lucky day** Friday



**SAGITTARIUS** Nov 22-Dec 21

You are known for your generosity and your willingness to invest in spiritual growth, as well as your interest in supporting charitable causes. Managing finances may become important soon, particularly regarding the educational needs of your children. Family matters may also demand more of your attention. This period calls for an understanding of how crucial balance is in managing life's various demands. Establishing a structured, disciplined approach will be essential to meet your obligations effectively. Any ongoing legal matters are likely to resolve favorably for you. Expect some joyful moments towards the end of the week, including long-awaited positive news. There might be opportunities for relocation or changes in your work environment that align with your preferences. Your reputation as a diligent individual will be reinforced in your community.

**Lucky number 6 | Lucky colour Yellow**  
**Lucky day** Saturday



**TAURUS** April 20-May 20

This week, you may find that your efforts at work are progressing more slowly than expected. Despite initiating projects and investing time, the outcomes may not be immediately apparent. Patience will be crucial during this period. Approach your tasks with the diligence of a farmer tending to crops, from planting to harvest. As the week progresses, anticipate some unexpected shifts that could positively impact your financial situation, with additional income sources emerging. For some, work-related travel or a favorable relocation might be on the horizon. Any funds previously extended to others are likely to be repaid. By week's end, you may find yourself indulging in fantastical thoughts and seeking material comforts, which might distract from your actual objectives. However, input from family will help steer you back towards practical paths.

**Lucky number 7 | Lucky colour Black**  
**Lucky day** Friday



**VIRGO** Aug 23-Sep 22

This week is pivotal for those who excel in critical thinking and analysis. You are approaching a decisive moment in an essential aspect of your life, which could significantly influence your future direction. This could pertain to either personal or professional realms. For some, an enticing professional opportunity with a promising offer might arise. Midweek, you may find yourself needing some form of healing or medical assistance. Recovery will bring you a sense of renewal and improved quality of life. However, towards the week's end, you may experience a dip in your energy levels. Emotional sensitivity could lead to conflicts, especially if family tensions are present. Your inclination to dissect situations logically could exacerbate these issues. This period calls for stepping back from conflicts and focusing on rest and personal rejuvenation.

**Lucky number 10 | Lucky colour Jade**  
**Lucky day** Sunday



**CAPRICORN** Dec 22-Jan 19

The week begins on a high note, marked by joyful gatherings and significant life events that bring friends and family together in celebration. As the week progresses, you'll find yourself driven by a surge of determination and resilience, pushing you to dedicate yourself diligently to your pursuits. Despite encountering hurdles along the way, your inherent wisdom enables you to navigate through them effectively. A spiritual journey later in the week offers a profound sense of solace, clarifying any lingering doubts and fostering inner peace. Towards the weekend, financial mindfulness becomes crucial; recent oversights in spending may lead to a tight financial situation. This period calls for a reassessment of your budgeting strategies, possibly considering borrowing options or seeking assistance from close ones to stabilize your financial footing.

**Lucky number 17 | Lucky colour Parrot Green**  
**Lucky day** Thursday



**GEMINI** May 21-June 20

This week is set to be a dynamic one, marked by a series of shifts and transitions. It begins on a joyful note, with family and personal well-being bringing you considerable joy. Expect a surge in creativity and a flurry of new opportunities that could enhance your professional and financial landscape. Promising developments from distant places might bring uplifting news, and you might find yourself hosting or celebrating a significant event at home. As the week progresses, you'll find yourself contemplating necessary changes in your routine, diet, or overall lifestyle. This period of transformation is crucial for paving the way to a more fulfilling future. Towards the week's end, focus on financial and health matters becomes essential. Review any outstanding debts or financial obligations, and consider a health check-up to ensure everything is in order.

**Lucky number 2 | Lucky colour Lilac**  
**Lucky day** Monday



**LIBRA** Sep 23-Oct 22

Be mindful of negative influences that may be surrounding you. Emphasize honesty and fairness in your dealings to mitigate potential disruptions. There could be challenges arising from hidden agendas or unethical temptations that may put you in a difficult situation. It's essential to clear away these adverse energies to maintain your well-being. As the week progresses, expect a significant shift in your perspectives and convictions. This change will usher in surprising developments, helping you become more structured and responsible. You will find yourself being more attentive and caring towards others, particularly close relatives and friends. Toward the week's end, a profound personal experience might inspire you, boosting your resolve and strength to overcome any obstacles. This period could be pivotal in fostering a deeper connection with your spiritual self.

**Lucky number 8 | Lucky colour Opal**  
**Lucky day** Tuesday



**AQUARIUS** Jan 20-Feb 18

As the week begins, you may encounter challenges that disrupt your progress on an important project or assignment. These obstacles could lead to moments of doubt and frustration, tempting you to abandon your efforts. However, a resilient spirit within you will rise, empowering you to confront these challenges with renewed vigor. This determination will guide you to triumph and a sense of fulfillment. Midweek brings a wave of positivity that touches various aspects of your life, from financial gains and familial joy to impressive achievements by your children, perhaps even securing rewarding career opportunities. Your creativity will surge, filling you with enthusiasm and inspiring you to undertake new ventures. The week concludes on a reflective note, drawing you towards community and spiritual engagement.

**Lucky number 22 | Lucky colour Fuchsia**  
**Lucky day** Tuesday



**CANCER** June 21-July 22

This week starts with a sense of fulfillment and gratitude. Early on, you'll experience deep connections and a harmonious relationship with your partner, enhancing both your emotional bonds. Spiritual growth is also a highlight, allowing you to dedicate time to achieving your spiritual aspirations. As the week progresses, you might find yourself wrestling with intrusive thoughts or unexpected impulses that could challenge your peace of mind. However, guiding insights will help maintain your equilibrium. Towards the week's end, your creative energies will surge, paving the way for significant achievements. Expect an acceleration in professional endeavors and an increase in financial rewards. This period also brings personal joy, possibly from family or close relationships, with the potential for welcoming a new family member or celebrating a significant personal milestone.

**Lucky number 13 | Lucky colour Beige**  
**Lucky day** Tuesday



**SCORPIO** Oct 23-Nov 21

This week, some individuals may find themselves deeply focused on personal goals, seemingly blind to new prospects that may arise. Often, they prefer solitude, finding comfort in their own company. Despite this, they maintain connections through digital means such as online chats and calls, bridging the gap between isolation and social interaction. As the week progresses, a burst of creativity leads to a meaningful encounter with someone influential, poised to offer significant financial guidance. This period also hints at potential prosperity, prompting desires to embrace a fuller experience of life. Toward the week's close, transactions involving real estate are favorable. Strengthening relationships with family, particularly extended relatives, is advised. Children's needs come into focus, and for those residing afar, a brief return to one's roots may occur, coupled with constructive family discussions that promise beneficial outcomes.

**Lucky number 15 | Lucky colour Green**  
**Lucky day** Friday



**PISCES** Feb 19-March 20

Navigating through the early days of the week may feel challenging as concerns about investments could cause unease and disturb your peace of mind. This is a time to address your fears and manage stress carefully. However, as the week progresses, expect a shift in fortune. You'll find yourself in a position to reap the rewards of your earlier efforts, possibly through significant financial gains. This period also highlights generosity and charity, enhancing your sense of fulfillment. The week is particularly favorable for working individuals who balance multiple responsibilities with grace. Their resilience and nurturing qualities come to the forefront, possibly influenced by a positive female presence in their lives. Acknowledging and cherishing relationships with key figures like a mother, spouse, or elder sister could be crucial for personal growth.

**Lucky number 5 | Lucky colour Gray**  
**Lucky day** Wednesday

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# The Significance of Khar Maas



**K**har Maas, a revered period in the Vedic calendar, begins on December 15, 2024, when the Sun enters Sagittarius and concludes on January 14, 2025, with its transition into Capricorn, marking the celebration of Makar Sankranti. This month holds a unique spiritual essence, encouraging individuals to focus on inner growth, devotion, and alignment with divine energies. The origin of Khar Maas is rooted in an ancient story. It is said that the Sun God, Suryadev, drives his chariot, pulled by seven celestial horses, to maintain the cosmic cycle of day and night. One day, the horses, thirsty and weary, sought a break to drink water. To allow this, Suryadev temporarily replaced them with donkeys. The slower pace of the donkeys extended the journey to thirty days, giving rise to what we now call Khar Maas, as "Khar" means donkey in Sanskrit. This period is observed as a sacred time for reflection and devotion. However, traditions discourage undertaking new ventures or life events with long-term implications during this month. Weddings, engagements, housewarming ceremonies, groundbreaking rituals, and the establishment of new businesses are avoided. Instead, individuals are encouraged to turn their focus inward, prioritising spiritual practices over material pursuits.

Khar Maas is an ideal time for self-purification and strengthening one's connection to higher energies. Devotees often engage in tapasya (austerities), perform fire rituals (hawans), embark on pilgrimages, and undertake charitable acts. These activities are believed to cleanse the soul, resolve karmic imbalances, and invite divine blessings.

During Khar Maas, fasting is another common spiritual practice observed by many. Fasting is believed to purify the body and mind, allowing individuals to detach from material desires and focus on spiritual upliftment. Consuming sattvic food-pure, vegetarian meals devoid of onion and garlic-is encouraged during this time to maintain a calm and

balanced state of mind. Additionally, devotees are advised to recite sacred mantras like the Gayatri Mantra and meditate daily to enhance their connection with the divine. Acts of kindness, such as feeding the poor or supporting those in need, are also emphasised, as they not only cleanse negative karma but also reinforce the

spirit of compassion and service. To maximise the benefits of this spiritually charged month, several practices are traditionally followed. Offering water to the Sun every morning is a powerful ritual that signifies gratitude and invokes clarity and strength. Chanting the Aditya Hridaya Stotram, a hymn dedicated to Suryadev, is another common practice that fosters vitality and mental focus. In the evenings, lighting a ghee diya near Goddess Tulsi is believed to attract positivity, prosperity, and divine protection. Khar Maas serves as a reminder of the cyclical nature of life, urging us to embrace moments of pause and reflection. While the material world may temporarily slow down, the soul is given an opportunity to grow. This sacred period helps prepare individuals for new beginnings and auspicious endeavours that can commence after Makar Sankranti. As the Sun resumes its celestial journey with renewed vigor, the energy for material and spiritual success flows harmoniously once again. This month is a gift to recalibrate, focus on devotion, and nurture inner peace. By honouring the practices and teachings of Khar Maas, one can achieve a sense of spiritual fulfilment and create a strong foundation for future endeavours.

— She is a Life Coach and Founder of Soulful Wellness

**THE LIFE GUIDANCE**

**Seerat Kaur Marwaha**

Chanting the Aditya Hridaya Stotram, a hymn dedicated to Suryadev, is another common practice that fosters vitality and mental focus