

TRUMP THREATENS BRICS MAHABHARAT BEGINS IN MAHARASHTRA



AP ■ WEST PALM BEACH (FL)

President-elect Donald Trump on Saturday threatened 100 per cent tariffs against a bloc of nine nations if they act to undermine the United States' dollar. His threat was directed at countries in the so-called BRIC alliance, which consists of Brazil, Russia, India, China, South Africa, Egypt, Ethiopia, Iran, and the United Arab Emirates. Turkey, Azerbaijan and Malaysia have applied to become members and several other countries have expressed interest in joining.

While the US dollar is by far the most-used currency in global business and has survived past challenges to its preeminence, members of the alliance and other developing nations say they are fed up with America's dominance of the global financial system. The dollar represents roughly 58 per cent of the world's foreign exchange reserves, according to the IMF and major commodities like oil are still primarily bought and sold using dollars. The dollar's dominance is threatened, however, with BRICS' growing share of GDP and the alliance's

intent to trade in non-dollar currencies - a process known as de-dollarisation. Trump, in a Truth Social post, said: "We require a commitment from these Countries that they will neither create a new BRICS Currency, nor back any other Currency to replace the mighty U.S. Dollar or, they will face 100% Tariffs, and should expect to say goodbye to selling into the wonderful U.S. Economy." At a summit of BRIC nations in October, Russian President Vladimir Putin accused the US of "weaponising" the dollar and described it as a "big mistake."

"It's not us who refuse to use the dollar," Putin said at the time. "But if they don't let us work, what can we do? We are forced to search for alternatives." Russia has specifically pushed for the creation of a new payment system that would offer an alternative to the global bank messaging network, SWIFT, and allow Moscow to dodge Western sanctions and trade with partners. Trump said there is "no chance" BRICS will replace the US dollar in global trade and any country that tries to make that happen "should wave goodbye to America." Research shows that the US dollar's role as the primary global reserve currency is not threatened in the near future. An Atlantic Council model that assesses the dollar's place as the primary global reserve currency states the dollar is "secure in the near and medium term" and continues to dominate other currencies. Trump's latest tariff threat comes after he threatened to slap 25 per cent tariffs on everything imported from Mexico and Canada, and an additional 10 per cent tax on goods from China, as a way to force the countries to do more to halt the flow of illegal immigration and drugs into the US. He has since held a call with Mexican President Claudia Sheinbaum, who said Thursday she is confident that a tariff war with the United States can be averted. Canadian Prime Minister Justin Trudeau returned home Saturday after meeting Trump, without assurances the president-elect will back away from threatened tariffs on Canada.

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ MUMBAI

Maharashtra's outgoing Chief Minister (CM) Eknath Shinde on Sunday said the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) will take over the new CM and assured his full support while ruling out differences among Mahayuti allies over the government formation. Amid speculations that Shinde's son Shrikant Shinde might get the Deputy CM's post and Shiv Sena is keen on the Home portfolio, Shinde said the Mahayuti allies, BJP, Nationalist Congress Party (NCP), and Shiv Sena, will decide the government formation through consensus. Notably, more than a week after the Mahayuti clinched a massive victory in Maharashtra polls with the BJP emerging as the single largest party with 132 seats, the new government is yet to be sworn in. BJP is moving cautiously as aspirations of its allies, especially Shiv Sena, are high after the massive poll victory. Interestingly, the BJP legislature party meeting to elect the leader, who will be the party's chief ministerial pick, is yet to be held, even though Shiv Sena and NCP allies have elected their respective leaders. The BJP has announced that the oath-taking ceremony of the new Mahayuti government will take place on December 5 evening at the Azad Maidan in south Mumbai and Prime Minister Narendra Modi will attend it. According to BJP sources, Devendra Fadnis, who has been CM twice and was Deputy CM in the last Eknath Shinde-led government, is the front-runner for the CM's post. A senior BJP leader said that the legislature party



meeting may be held on December 3 or 4. The Mahayuti constituents will jointly decide whether only the CM and Deputy CMs will take oath on December 5 or ministers will also be sworn in, a senior leader of the alliance said. Shinde had left for his native village in Satara district on Friday amid speculation that he was not happy with the way the new government was shaping up. He developed a high fever in his village. Talking to reporters in his village on Sunday before leaving for Mumbai, Shinde said that he has already talked about a decision on CM's post taken by the BJP leadership that will be acceptable to me and Shiv Sena and will have my full backing. On speculation that his son and Lok Sabha member Shrikant Shinde will be made a Deputy CM in the new government and whether Shiv Sena has staked the

claim for the home portfolio, Shinde replied, "Talks were on." A meeting took place in Delhi last week with (Union home minister) Amit Shah, and now we three alliance partners will discuss the nitty-gritty of government formation," he said. Responding to a query on his health, the Shiv Sena leader said he was fine now and had come to his native village to get some rest. "I always come to my village. Why should there be any confusion when I made my stand clear last week," he added. Senior BJP leader Raosaheb Danve on Sunday told a news channel that the name of the chief minister has been finalised and a confirmation is awaited from the party leadership. NCP chief Ajit Pawar on Saturday said the chief minister will be from the BJP, while there will be deputy CMs from NCP and Shiv Sena headed by Shinde. **Continued on page 8**

AAP and Congress turn arch rivals in Delhi

RAJESH KUMAR ■ NEW DELHI

A day after Delhi Congress president Devendra Yadav hinted that the party will go solo, Aam Aadmi Party (AAP) convener Arvind Kejriwal, on Sunday, announced that his party will not form an alliance with the Congress for the upcoming Delhi Assembly polls, scheduled to take place in February. Kejriwal's statement comes despite both parties being a part of the Opposition INDIA Bloc and having contested the Lok Sabha elections in Delhi together earlier this year. However, their joint effort yielded no results, with the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) winning all Lok Sabha seats in Delhi. Responding to a query during a press conference, Kejriwal made it clear, saying, "There will be no alliance in Delhi." This development is significant, as it clears the way for a triangular contest in the Delhi Assembly polls, with the AAP, Congress, and BJP vying for power. Kejriwal's decision also comes on the back of major poll drubbing of the



Maha Vikas Aghadi in Maharashtra this month, which Congress is also a part of, drawing criticism from its allies. The INDIA Bloc has adopted a flexible approach, contesting elections jointly in some states while going solo in others. According to AAP insiders, Congress is a divided house in Delhi so there will not be any split in Muslim and Scheduled Caste voters. "Muslim will vote for AAP as they have no option. Similarly a large part of Scheduled Caste voters will vote for AAP. To further strengthen its vote bank, AAP

has inducted stalwarts of Congress," insiders say. Besides, the AAP strategy is focused on the Congress vote bank here. The AAP and Congress had also attempted to form an alliance ahead of the Haryana Assembly polls in October but failed to reach a seat-sharing agreement despite multiple rounds of talks. The Congress and AAP had contested the Lok Sabha Elections this year in Delhi in alliance with each other under the umbrella of the INDIA Bloc. Both parties had even campaigned for each other. **Continued on page 8**

Chinmoy Krishna Das' bail hearing on December 3

PTI ■ DHAKA



A court in Bangladesh has set December 3 as the date for the bail hearing of Hindu leader Chinmoy Krishna Das arrested last week on sedition charges, according to a media report. Tuesday's hearing will be conducted by Metropolitan Sessions Judge Mohammad Saiful Islam, according to Additional Deputy Commissioner Mofizur Rahman of the Chattogram Metropolitan Police. A Chattogram court official said that the date for the hearing had already been set but the announcement was delayed due to a boycott and work abstention by lawyers on Wednesday and Thursday. The hearing will

take place on December 3, bdnews24.Com reported. Das, a spokesperson for the Bangladesh Sammilita Sanatani Jagran Jote, was arrested from Dhaka's Hazrat Shahjalal International Airport on Monday for alleged sedition. He was denied bail and sent to jail by a Chattogram court on Tuesday, triggering protests by his supporters. A lawyer was killed during violence in Bangladesh's southeastern port city of Chattogram over his arrest. On October 30, a sedition case was filed against 19 people, including Das, at Chattogram's Kotwali Police Station, accusing them of disrespecting Bangladesh's national flag in Chattogram's New Market area during a rally of the Hindu community. Bangladesh's authorities on Thursday ordered freezing for 30 days the bank accounts of 17 people associated with International Society for Krishna Consciousness (ISKCON), including its former member Das.



Waqf asked to provide property details

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

The Parliamentary Committee scrutinising the Waqf (Amendment) Bill has sought details from various State governments about the veracity and updated details of Waqf properties which, according to the Sachar committee, they had occupied in an unauthorised manner, sources said. The Parliamentary Committee, whose tenure has been extended by Lok Sabha till the last day of the next Budget Session, has also sought from the states details of the properties claimed by Waqf

boards exercising Section 40 of the Waqf Act. Section 40, an amendment effected during the Congress-led United Progressive Alliance (UPA) Government's tenure in 2013, is one of the most hotly contested features of the existing law as it has given Waqf boards the power to decide if any property belongs to the Waqf or not. The proposed law, which has faced flack from opposition parties and various Muslim groups for its alleged attempts to interfere in religious matters, has sought to curb this power while making a slew of other changes in the existing Act. **Continued on page 8**

DELHI AND DRUGS TO PART WAYS THIS DECADE, PROMISES LG

SAUMYA SHUKLA ■ NEW DELHI

The National Capital is witnessing a staggering increase in the circulation of illicit drugs. In 2024 so far, Delhi has witnessed over 6,000 per cent rise in cocaine seizures while more than 7,000 per cent rise in charas in comparison to 2023, reflecting on the increased mobility of drug traffickers in the city. During the current year till November 15, Delhi Police has arrested 1,520 Narco-offenders in 1,121 NDPS (Narcotic Drugs and Psychotropic Substances Act, 1985,) cases. It has recovered about 1293.3 kgs of cocaine in the given period as compared to 21.14 kgs of the drugs recovered in 2023, including the recent big seizure of Rs 7,000 Crores worth of cocaine in October. In comparison to 2023 when only 0.684 kgs of Charas was recovered, the police seized 50.5 kgs this year till November 15, a police officer said, adding that 73.3 kgs of heroin, 4257.3 kgs of Ganja, 103.7 kgs of Opium, and 80.5 kgs of poppy head were also recovered. In light of Delhi witnessing such a

surge in drugs and to prevent the public from falling in this trap, the Delhi Police on Sunday launched a 'One-Month Comprehensive Campaign as a Pilot Project' with the vision to eradicate drugs from the city within three years. With the campaign in action, the Delhi Police on Sunday claimed to have recovered Rs 3 Crore worth of Charas and dismantled an international drug syndicate involved in smuggling drugs worth crores into the country using the dark web, cryptocurrency and fake documents with the arrest of its mastermind. In the first instance of a sustained effort in making the city drug free, Delhi Police's Crime Branch dismantled a narco-syndicate indulged in supplying Charas with the arrest of five key operatives including three Nepal nationals. The syndicate was indulged in a supply of drugs from Nepal's Kasol, Himachal Pradesh to Delhi-NCR. A senior police official said that on November 20, a tip off was received regarding supply of Charas by a Nepal national in the Majnu ka Tila area, to a local drug



trafficker Mohd. Jameel. Accordingly, a raid was conducted and two persons namely 32-year-old Prem Thapa and 35-year-old Mohd Jameel were arrested, while they were dealing in Charas in a flat and 1192 grams of Charas classified as a commercial quantity under the NDPS Act was recovered from them. The investigation led to the arrest of three more traffickers including Ganga, who was indulged in supplying Charas at Sangam Vihar,

Wazirabad. She was nabbed with 712 grams of Charas and later on, 13,766 Kg Charas was recovered from her bed room of her house. Ankit Buddha alias Thakren was also arrested, who was arrested from Kasol in Himachal Pradesh and is the main source who used to provide Charas to Prem Thapa. Police also arrested Pradeep Kumar, who used to buy Charas from Prem Thapa and supply it to drug addicts of Faridabad and Ballabgarh. In the second instance,

the police nabbed mastermind Lokesh Dhingra on Friday, whose syndicate imported 48 kg of marijuana worth Rs 20-25 crore in over three months, strategically avoiding detection of commercial quantities of the contraband. According to the police, the illegally acquired assets worth Rs 1.5 Crore were also seized. Police started tailing members of the gang after a parcel containing 1.5 kg of hydroponic marijuana valued at Rs 1 Crore was seized at the RK Puram post office on October 18. More searches led to additional seizures worth Rs 2 Crore in transit. An FIR was registered under the NDPS Act, police said. "The mastermind Lokesh Dhingra alias Lohi and his associates, Vivek and Mansher Singh fled after the initial seizures. Vivek was arrested in November 2023 after returning from Thailand. Dhingra and Singh were traced to a Gurugram flat owned by one woman who was arrested for harbouring the fugitives," Deputy Commissioner of Police (crime branch) Satish Kumar said, adding that the syndicate used fake SIM cards, privacy tools and

fake IDs to avoid detection, distributing contraband in Noida and Gurugram. Dhingra, a habitual offender, has been detained and sent to jail, he said. The ninth State Level Committee meeting of National Narcotics Coordination Portal (NCCORD), was convened on November 20, at Delhi Secretariat. Subsequently, a review meeting was held on November 26, at Raj Niwas, Delhi, under the chairmanship of the LG where he emphasized upon inter-departmental coordination, timely reporting, and strict compliance with directives for making Delhi drug free in three years. In the campaign, they have decided that they will focus on "targeted locations for surveys, awareness programs, and raids including 200 hostels, 200 schools, 50 colleges, 200 pan shops, 200 pharmacy shops, 200 bars/pubs/clubs/restaurants, all shelter homes, all railway stations, three ISBTs, and other public places. It was also decided that there will be random checks on auto-rickshaws, taxi drivers, Courier/Parcel services, and e-Commerce Company(ies)

suppliers, to curb drug trafficking involvement." Police will also involve hostel wardens, school principals, and university administrators to prevent drug-related incidents on their premises. "The LG also directed to give away handsome Cash Rewards to the general public for providing information related to "Drug Trafficking", with the assurance to keep his name secret. He emphasized upon leveraging various platforms like print/visual media, social media, radio, and DTC buses/public transport to enhance public awareness," a police officer said. In the campaign, police will also collaborate with celebrities, influencers, NGOs, and community leaders to help ensure that the message resonates across all sections of society. All departments have been directed to appoint a Nodal Officer of the rank of Deputy Secretary or above, with clearly defined responsibilities. Further, all stakeholders will submit an Action Taken Report (ATR) by January 5, 2025, detailing the quantifiable outcomes of the December 2024 campaign.

Ajmer Dargah Survey: Ex-bureaucrats ask PM Modi to check 'ideological assault'

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

Days after a local court ordered a survey of the Ajmer Sharif dargah, a group of former bureaucrats and diplomats has written to Prime Minister Narendra Modi, seeking his intervention to halt all "illegal and pernicious" activities that are an "ideological assault" on India's civilisational heritage and pervert the idea of an inclusive country.



haste," they said. The contents of the letter were confirmed by two of the signatories to it. "It appears unimaginable, for example, that a local court should order a survey on the 12th-century dargah of the Sufi saint Khwaja Moinuddin Chishti -- one of the most sacred Sufi sites in Asia not just for Muslims but for all Indians who are proud of our syncretic and pluralist traditions."

Ajmer Dargah committee, the Union Ministry of Minority Affairs and the Archaeological Survey of India (ASI), after a petition was filed by Vishnu Gupta, national president of the Hindu Sena, claiming that the dargah was originally a Shiva temple. Successive prime ministers, including Modi, have sent "chadars" on the occasion of the annual Urs of the saint.

and unrestrained bulldozing of Muslim houses at the behest of chief ministers themselves, led by a ruthless local administration, the former diplomats added. About 1.54 lakh establishments have been hit and lakhs rendered homeless or bereft of their places of business, they said, adding that in most cases, the affected parties are Muslims.

SC to hear PIL challenging EC's decision to increase voter's count per polling booth

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

The Supreme Court is scheduled to hear on December 2 a PIL challenging the Election Commission's decision to increase the maximum number of voters per polling station from 1,200 to 1,500. A bench of Chief Justice Sanjiv Khanna and Justice Sanjay Kumar will take up the PIL filed by one Indu Prakash Singh, who has challenged two communications issued by the Election Commission in August 2024 increasing the number of voters per polling stations in each constituency across India.



Senior advocate Abhishek Singhvi, appearing for the petitioner, contended that increasing the number of voters from 1,200 to 1,500 would lead to the exclusion of underprivileged groups from the electoral process as it will take a longer time for an individual to cast their franchise. He had also submitted that longer queues at the polling station and longer waiting periods would dis-

would impact the voters during the assembly elections in Maharashtra and Jharkhand (since concluded) and Bihar and Delhi to be held next year. Singh said that elections are normally held for 11 hours and it takes around 60 to 90 seconds to cast one vote, and therefore 660 to 490 persons can cast their vote in a day at one polling station with one EVM. Considering the average voting percentage to be 65.70 per cent, it is perceivable that a polling station prepared to accept 1,000 electors sees around 650 turn up.

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Kolkata's RG Kar ex-principal helped two cartels procure hospital contracts: CBI

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

Former principal of Kolkata's RG Kar College and Hospital Sandip Ghosh allegedly helped two cartels in procuring hospital contracts, the agency has said in its recently filed chargesheet. The special court has taken the chargesheet on record but it is yet to take its cognisance because the West Bengal government has not provided sanction to prosecute Ghosh and other accused.



charge sheet. "This case was registered in compliance with the directions of Hon'ble High Court at Calcutta relating to financial irregularities in RG Kar Medical College & Hospital at Kolkata," the CBI Spokesperson said. The CBI has alleged that Ghosh and Pandey appointed several doctors as house staff in violation of the rules, they said. Ghosh helped two cartels -- one run by Singha and

was found dead in the chest department auditorium on August 10. It surfaced that she was allegedly raped and killed by a civic volunteer Sanjay Roy in the intervening night of August 9-10. Ghosh was also under scanner in the case for alleged delay in the probe. In between, the Calcutta High Court ordered a probe into alleged financial irregularities in hospital during his tenure. The High Court order came on a petition by the former deputy superintendent of the facility, Akhtar Ali, who prayed for a probe by the Enforcement Directorate (ED) into multiple counts of alleged financial misconduct at the institute during Gosh's tenure as its principal.

Eight CAG reports pending with Delhi Govt for laying before Assembly, HC told



PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

Eight reports pertaining to Delhi are pending with the city government for laying before the Legislative Assembly in accordance with the GNCTD Act, the Comptroller and Auditor General (CAG) of India has informed the Delhi High Court. The CAG has said according to the legal framework, the Delhi government has to place the audit reports submitted by it before the Assembly and it has in the past written to the principal secretary (finance), requesting him to do the same.

National Capital Territory of Delhi Act, 1991 and with regulations ... Enjoins upon the GNCTD to place the audit reports submitted by the Comptroller and Auditor General of India on the accounts of GNCTD in the Legislative Assembly of Delhi," it further said. The response informed that the reports from 2022 to 2024 pertain to finance audits, air pollution, "revenue, economic, social and general sector and PSUs", children in need of care and protection, liquor and public health. "Again, while forwarding Report No. 3 of 2024 of the CAG to the Principal Secretary (Finance) vide letter dated 19.09.2024, the Delhi Audit Office also reminded him about seven reports of CAG pending with Delhi government for laying them before the Legislative Assembly of the state," the reply said.

The petition, which has been filed by Leader of Opposition in the Delhi Assembly Vijender Gupta and Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) MLAs Mohan Singh Bisht, Om Prakash Sharma, Ajay Kumar Mahawar, Abhay Verma, Anil Kumar Bajpai and Jitendra Mahajan, is listed for hearing on Monday. The high court had, on October 29, issued notices to the Delhi government, the office of the Legislative Assembly speaker, the lieutenant governor (LG), the CAG and the accountant general (audit), Delhi and sought their responses to the peti-

Bofors: CBI to send LR to the US seeking information from private detective

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

The CBI will soon send a judicial request to the United States seeking information from private investigator Michael Hershman who had expressed willingness to share with Indian agencies crucial details about the Rs 64-crore Bofors bribery scandal of the 1980s, officials said Sunday. The Central Bureau of Investigation (CBI) has also informed a special court, which is hearing the agency's plea for further probe into the matter, about the developments.

A Letter Rogatory is a written request sent by the court of one country to the court of another country to obtain assistance in the investigation or prosecution of a criminal matter. While the Delhi High Court had exonerated former prime minister Rajiv Gandhi in 2004, a year later it quashed all charges against the remaining accused, including the Hinduja brothers, in the politically sensitive case. Italian businessman Ottavio Quattrocchi, the alleged middleman in the payoff case, was discharged in 2011 by a court which allowed the CBI to withdraw prosecution against him. The case involves allegations of a Rs 64-crore bribe in a Rs 1,437-crore deal with Swedish firm Bofors in the 1980s during the then Congress government for the supply of 400 155mm field howitzers, which



played a significant role in India's victory during the Kargil war. The case was closed in 2011. Hershman, head of the Fairfax Group, visited India in 2017 to attend a conference of private detectives. During his stay, he appeared on various platforms, alleging that the investigation into the scam was derailed by the Congress government and stated he was willing to share details with the CBI. The CBI took note of his claims in several interviews and announced in 2017 that

the matter would be investigated according to due process. The agency informed the special court that, following Hershman's revelations, it plans to reopen the investigation. The CBI had previously sent letters and reminders to US authorities on November 8, 2023, December 21, 2023, May 13, 2024, and August 14, 2024, but received no information, with the US authorities requesting additional time. The central agency has now opted to pursue the LR route, where a competent court sends a formal request for information to the relevant authorities in the US, subject to clearance from the Indian government. The CBI had registered the case in 1990, three years after a Swedish radio channel had alleged that bribes were paid by Bofors to politicians and defence officials of India to

clinch the deal. The allegations created a big scandal for the Rajiv Gandhi Government and have been used by rival parties to target the Congress. The CBI filed the chargesheets in 1999 and 2000. The Delhi High Court had exonerated Rajiv Gandhi in 2004, nearly 13 years after he was assassinated by LTTE in a suicide attack. In 2005, the High Court quashed all charges against the remaining accused noting that the CBI failed to prove that the money transferred by Bofors to various agents by Quattrocchi was meant to be paid as a bribe to public servants in India. The CBI appealed against the 2005 decision in apex court in 2018 but it was dismissed on the grounds of delay. The Supreme Court, however, allowed it to raise all the points in an appeal filed by advocate Ajay Aggarwal in 2005.

No change in migrant status of Kashmiri Pandit women marrying non-migrants: J-K HC

PTI ■ JAMMU

The High Court of Jammu & Kashmir and Ladakh has observed that there will be no change in the migrant status of Kashmiri Pandit women even if they marry non-migrants, upholding a Central Administrative Tribunal (CAT) order in favour of two women selected under PM employment package. The two women -- Seema Koul and Vishalini Koul -- had moved the high court in 2018 after their provisional selection to the post of legal assistant in the department of disaster management relief, rehabilitation and re-construction under the PM package for Kashmiri migrants in December 1, 2017 forfeited on the ground that they have lost their migrant status having married non-migrant persons. "One question of public importance that arises before this court is whether a woman who has been given a migrant status on account of the suffering endured by her and her fami-



ly on account of which they were forced to leave their home and hearth in the Kashmir Valley... could be discriminated and would stand to lose the said status only on account of fact that she had got married to a non-migrant? "Holding this would be going against the nature of human beings. Respondents herein, who are ladies and on account of no fault of theirs, had to leave their place of original residence in Kashmir Valley, cannot be expected to remain unmarried only to secure a job in the Kashmir Valley as a migrant," a division bench of Justices Atul Sreedharan and Mohammad Yousuf Wani said in a seven-page order last month. It is also reasonable to

Society will perish if population growth rate goes below 2.1: Bhagwat

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NAGPUR

RSS chief Mohan Bhagwat stressed the importance of family and said if the population growth rate of a society goes below 2.1, then that society will perish by itself. Addressing a gathering at the 'Kathale Kul (clan) Sannelan' in Nagpur, he said "kutumb" (family) is part of the society and every family is a unit. "Decreasing population is a matter of concern because the Loksankhya Shastra says that if we go below 2.1, then that society perishes, no one will destroy it, it will perish by itself," he said. "The population policy of our country, which was decided around 1998 or 2002, says that the population growth rate should not be below 2.1," the RSS chief said. "We need more than two, that is three (as population growth



rate), that's what the population science says. This number is important because it (society) should survive," he said. "A decline in population is a matter of concern. Modern demographic studies indicate that when the population of a community falls below a fertility rate of 2.1, that society faces extinction. It does not need external threats to vanish; it disappears on its own. Many languages and societies have ceased to exist due to this. Therefore, our population must not fall below 2.1," said RSS Chief.

FIRST COLUMN

LEARNING MUST GO ON

Learning opens the doors of possibilities, if it is stopped we are closing that door and impeding our own growth



SHAINY SHARMA

Learning is an essential and lifelong process. It is a cornerstone of human growth and evolution. However, beyond the mechanics of acquiring knowledge lies the nuanced art of learning - an approach that emphasises curiosity, creativity, adaptability and a passion for discovery. Curiosity - the word says by itself is the fuel for lifelong learning. At its core, the art of learning involves more than the accumulation of facts and skills. It is a dynamic process that integrates intellectual, emotional and experiential dimensions. Learning becomes artful when it is purposeful, joyful and deeply connected to an individual's values and aspirations. Unlike a rigid, standardised approach, the art of learning recognises that everyone has unique strengths, interests and ways of understanding the world. It encourages learners to embrace their individuality, explore diverse perspectives and find meaning in the learning process for knowledge doesn't only come from formal education or reading books rather it comes from life, conversations, experiences and unexpected encounters. Individuals should stay open to new perspectives, whether from different cultures, professions or age groups. A growth mindset, as popularised by Carol Dweck, is the belief that intelligence and abilities can be developed through dedication and hard work which contrasts with a fixed mindset that assumes that the abilities are static. With a growth mindset, setbacks are often seen as learning opportunities rather than failures while challenges are embraced as part



of the learning process. No matter how much one knows, there's always room to grow. Staying humble, and being open to feedback, criticism and constructive input from others can help an individual improve and refine their understanding. Another important factor that enhances the art of learning is the art of passion. Learners who pursue subjects that resonate with their interests, enter a state of flow, where effort feels effortless, and the process becomes intrinsically rewarding. Passion sustains motivation and fosters deeper engagement, leading to mastery. Surrounding oneself with like-minded individuals who prioritise learning, engaging in discussions, attending workshops or collaborating on projects challenges an individual to learn and grow. There is no denying that the most brilliant minds ask questions that others may take for granted. One must cultivate a habit of asking 'Why' and 'How' and not just about abstract ideas but in everyday situations too for these questions push the boundaries of one's thinking and can lead to deeper insights. It is always when one embraces learning as a lifelong practice, that can one open oneself to a world of possibilities, ideas and opportunities for personal as well as professional transformation. Understanding learning as art transforms it from a mundane task into a profound journey of self-exploration and mastery for developing a passion for learning that will never cease to grow. (The writer is an educator; views are personal)

Freebies: A winning strategy or economic pitfall?



UTTAM GUPTA

The growing trend of offering freebies in elections raises significant concerns about financial sustainability, governance and its impact on voters' mindset

A major factor contributing to the success of the respective political party in the just concluded elections in Maharashtra and Jharkhand was freebies - an acronym for "something given free of charge" - particularly those targeted at women. In Maharashtra, the BJP-led Mahayuti alliance launched the Ladki Bahin cash benefit scheme that offered Rs 1,500 a month to every woman with a family income of less than Rs 2,50,000 annually, in the age bracket of 21 to 65 years. The amount was subsequently increased to Rs 2,500 per month. In Jharkhand, under Mukhyamantri Maiyan Samman Yojna (MMSY) Hemant Soren's JMM-Congress-RJD government had initially promised to give Rs 1000 per month to all women in the age group 18-25 years. The amount was later increased to Rs 2500 per month. The domineering role of freebies in winning elections is visible in almost every State Assembly election held since 2020 when former Delhi Chief Minister Arvind Kejriwal came up with this brand of politics followed by Punjab in 2022 where the Aam Aadmi Party or AAP promised depositing Rs 1000 per month in the account of every woman aged 18 or above. In Karnataka elections held in early 2023, Congress had promised five guarantees including the much trumpeted Gruha Lakshmi under which every woman head of a house gets Rs 2000 a month. In elections held later in 2023, in Madhya Pradesh, BJP promised Rs 1,250 per month under Ladli Behna Yojana; the amount to be gradually hiked to Rs 3,000 per month. In Chhattisgarh, it promised Rs 12,000 per year to married women under the 'Mahtari Vandan Scheme'. In Odisha, under the Subhadra Yojana, the BJP gives eligible women Rs 10,000 per year, in two instalments of Rs 5,000 each. In future elections, expect all parties to offer such freebies. Already, in the budget for 2024-25, Delhi finance minister Atishi announced the Mukhyamantri Mahila Samman Yojana (MMSY) under which, the AAP government will give Rs 1000 per month to all the women above the age of 18 in the national capital. Now, Arvind Kejriwal has announced six Revidis (another name for freebies) including free power, free water, free education, free healthcare and pilgrimage for the elderly. Freebies win elections but these lead to a host of negative outcomes. The most damaging is the abetment to corruption. The Union Government's standards of financial propriety lay down inter alia that "no authority shall exercise its powers of sanctioning expenditure to pass an order which will be directly or indirectly, to its advantage; and the expenditure from public moneys should not be incurred for the benefit of a particular person or a section of the people unless a claim for the amount could be enforced in a court of law or the expenditure is in pursuance of a recognised policy or custom". The reckless spending of the taxpayer's money on freebies is neither a recognised policy nor is sanctioned in a court of law. It is blatant financial irregularity that amounts to bribing voters using public money solely for gaining advantage in electoral politics. Such a corrupt practice is much worse than the one that involves



IN ODISHA, UNDER THE SUBHADRA YOJANA, THE BJP GIVES ELIGIBLE WOMEN RS 10,000 PER YEAR, IN TWO INSTALMENTS OF RS 5,000 EACH. IN FUTURE ELECTIONS, EXPECT ALL PARTIES TO OFFER SUCH FREEBIES

an individual candidate distributing cash using his own money to garner votes. Second, unlike 'normal' budget expenses which are planned and backed by well-orchestrated efforts to garner revenue, additional financial liabilities imposed by the freebies promised in the election manifesto affect the budgetary position of the State in a totally 'uncontrolled' and 'unplanned' manner. There being no corresponding revenue generation against this liability (this being unplanned), this will be at the cost of slashing other essential expenditures including development. Alternatively, this will result in additional borrowings and the resultant increase in debt to an unsustainable level. In Punjab, the freebies promised by AAP led to an additional expenditure of about Rs 20,000 crore per annum. Unable to foot the bill from its budget, Chief Minister Bhagwant Mann had to approach the Central government to help it raise around Rs 50,000 crore. In Delhi, giving Rs 1000 per month or Rs 12,000 annually to each woman above 18 years for a total of 6.7 million women would cost the exchequer Rs 8000 crore per annum. Already, the State government faces a fiscal deficit or FD - excess of total expenditure over total revenue - of Rs 18,000 crore during 2024-25 which is 80 per cent higher than the FD for 2023-24 at Rs 10,000 crore. This is despite a steep reduction of over 30 per cent in capital expenditure. The situation has come to

such a pass that CM Atishi has recently forwarded a request to the Centre seeking a loan of Rs 10,000 crore from the National Small Savings Fund (NSSF). In Karnataka, the five guarantees have punched a hole of over Rs 60,000 crore a year in the State budget leading to a doubling of its FD to over Rs 122,500 crore. The precariousness of the situation can be seen from a comment by the Deputy CM 'The government has no money to give to the MLAs for carrying out development work; courtesy the poll guarantees'. In MP, at the current rate of Rs 1250 per month to 12.5 million beneficiaries, the Ladli Behna Yojana costs the state exchequer about Rs 18,750 crore per annum. This will go up to Rs 45,000 crore per annum as the quantum of assistance eventually goes up to Rs 3,000 per month. In Maharashtra, the Ladki Bahin Scheme will dent the State exchequer by Rs 46,000 crore annually. Other states Jharkhand, Odisha etc are also feeling the pricks of promised freebies. Third, unlike a normal welfare scheme which has a sunset date, the freebies offered by winning parties have none. So, these will continue to be given 'eternally' - no matter which party rules - making perpetual holes in State budgets. Fourth, the money for freebies comes from taxpayers' pockets ('future' tax payers in case, the government borrows). When they know that taxes are used to give doles to all and sundry, it

may even trigger non-compliance amongst them. Finally, assured of financial help to meet most of their basic needs 'perpetually', the freebies cult is changing the mindset of people in a way that makes them complacent towards work. This undermines the very foundation of economic growth. Left to themselves, political parties will never shun freebies. Can the Supreme Court (SC) force them? In an order in S Subramaniam Balaji vs the Government of Tamil Nadu & Ors in July 2013, the SC had observed that the distribution of freebies of any kind influences all people. "It shakes the root of free and fair elections to a large degree." Yet, it held "The promises in the election manifesto cannot be construed as 'corrupt practice' under the Representation of People Act (RPA), or any other prevailing law and, hence, distribution of freebies can't be stopped when the ruling party uses public funds for this purpose through the passage of Appropriation Acts in the state Assembly". The SC hasn't changed its stance even as on January 25, 2022, hearing a PIL on 'freebies', it observed "This is no doubt a serious issue, budget for freebies is going above the regular Budget. This disturbs the level playing field". These exhortations won't help. It should direct the government to enact a law on curbing freebies. (The writer is a policy analyst; views expressed are personal)

Political stability: A catalyst for India's renewable energy ambitions

India is poised to play a pivotal role in the global transition to sustainable energy but it must have political will to sustain the momentum

Domestic political stability or lack of it can have a considerable impact on the development of renewable energy projects and investment in the sector. A stable government is always considered as a growth enabler whereas an unstable political landscape can derail the growth engine. With political stability, India now India forges ahead towards ambitious renewable energy ambitions. Recently, the issues surrounding climate financing and global emissions were once again at the forefront of the 29th Conference of Parties (COP29) in Baku. The Indian government was in a strong position to challenge developed nations on climate change, carbon emissions, and green energy investment



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because of political stability and notable advancements in renewable energy generation. For any nation, socio-economic development depends on political stability which plays a role of catalyst. Especially for developing countries like India, where renewable energy projects demand huge investments, a stable government is much

needed. Political stability provides the long-term vision and policy continuity needed for large-scale renewable projects with long gestation periods. Political stability provides consistent policy and regulatory frameworks that favour and incentivize both domestic and international stakeholders to invest without fear of abrupt policy changes. With a decadal political stability and policy push, India has made significant progress and achieved a milestone of 200 gigawatts (GW) in non-fossil fuel capacity. However, it still faces gaps to meet the ambitious targets it has set for 2030: 319 GW in solar power and 110 GW in wind energy. As of October 2024, India's installed solar capacity stands at only 90.76 GW, and wind

capacity at 47.36 GW, highlighting a gap of over 200 GW that must be addressed within the next six years. Meeting these targets requires political stability to ensure consistent policies, reliable financing, and sustained foreign investments to fuel India's renewable ambitions. Since the Modi government took office in 2014, India introduced ambitious targets and policies aimed at expanding renewable energy capacity. Key initiatives include the National Solar Mission, which set the stage for India's solar capacity expansion, and the Pradhan Mantri Kisan Urja Suraksha evam Utthaan Mahabhayan (PM-KUSUM), promoting solar energy adoption in rural areas. The Production Linked Incentive



(PLI) Scheme incentivized domestic manufacturing of solar panels and batteries, reducing reliance on imports and creating jobs. Additionally, the government's commitment to phasing down coal and setting a target of 500 GW of non-fossil fuel capacity by 2030 reflects a strategic shift towards a sustainable energy mix, reinforcing investor confidence and

cementing India's role in the global renewable energy transition. Investors' confidence is the key. A stable government can attract foreign investments by creating a transparent, reliable business environment with minimal bureaucratic red tape. In contrast, political instability or uncertainty can lead to a fluctuating exchange rate, deter foreign direct investment (FDI), and increase pro-

ject costs. India's Nationally Determined Contributions (NDCs) and renewable energy targets could be delayed if there are abrupt shifts in political agendas. Delays or changes in policy can lead to project uncertainty, forcing investors to reassess risks and potentially redirect funds to more stable markets. Indian states' thrust on renewable energy needs to be in sync with the Centre's policies and priorities. States with stable governments and favourable renewable policies attract more investments, while politically volatile states face challenges in attracting projects due to higher risks. Rajasthan, Gujarat, Karnataka, Tamil Nadu, Andhra Pradesh, Madhya Pradesh, Madhya Pradesh, and Maharashtra are leading

states in the Renewable Energy sector and these states made significant progress with policy consistency. With political stability at national and state levels, India is expected to close the gap in its renewable energy targets soon and contribute meaningfully to global climate goals. Against the backdrop of the COP29 meeting and with political stability, further policy reforms and a robust regulatory framework would push both domestic and foreign investments in the sector. Hopefully, the country is all set to achieve its renewable energy ambitions and contribute to the global effort against climate change. (The writer is director SgurrEnergy India; views are personal)



Skincare in Winter

With the dropping temperature and humidity in winter, the skin undergoes changes too and becomes dry and dull. Even it can have some sign of premature aging if not well cared for and so it deserves utmost attention. Naturally, the skin's sebum production lowers in winters, which is further exponentially increased by low humidity levels and chilly dry air.

SKINCARE TIPS FOR WINTER SEASON



BODY'S HYDRATION INSIDE OUT: When the weather outside is very chilly and the humidity levels drop, skin health gets affected as its protective barrier gets damaged and it loses its moisture. For retaining the skin's hydration, keep it hydrated both inside and out. Aim for at least 8-10 glasses of water each day to keep it glowy and supple. And to protect the skin from hot air indoors, probably due to the usage of heat systems, use a HEPA filter humidifier that keeps the surrounding air moist.

HYDRATING MOISTURIZER: Moisturizer functions to keep the skin's moisture locked in to refrain it from getting dry. Winters make the skin more prone to dryness, so prefer a rich moisturizer that has occlusive agents namely petrolatum, dimethicone or lanolin. *Shea Butter* or *hyaluronic acid* enriched creams also work wonders.



NOURISHING CLEANSER: Winter season needs proper cleansing to remove dirt, dust and other environmental



PROTECTIVE SKINCARE MEASURES CAN HELP YOU TACKLE DRYNESS, DULLNESS, AND PREMATURE AGEING IN WINTERS, SAYS RUPIKA SINGH

pollutants from the skin but one thing that needs to be taken care of is to prevent the skin from getting dry. So for this purpose, use a cleanser that is gentle and devoid of any strong chemicals that can be damaging to the skin's protective barrier. Preferably use cleansers enriched with hydrating compounds such as *glycerin*, *hyaluronic acid*, *ceramides* etc.

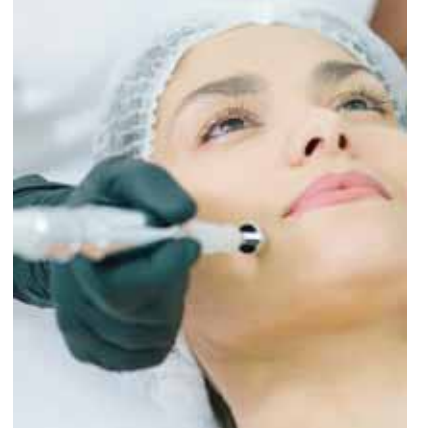
GENTLE EXFOLIATION: Skin needs exfoliation for maintaining its suppleness and radiance. This process removes the dead skin cells and enhances cell turnover to grow new well nourished cells. But in winters, exfoliation should be



limited to once a week and no harsh chemical agents should be used. Since chemical exfoliants are gentler on the skin than physical ones, prefer chemical exfoliants namely *alpha hydroxy acids* (AHAs) and *beta hydroxy acids* (BHAs).
NEVER SKIP SUNSCREEN: Seemingly meaningless, winter days also necessitate the need of sunscreen as no matter the day may be cloudy, the harmful UV rays of the sun can penetrate through the clouds and reach your skin. Go for a broad spectrum sunscreen that has a minimum SPF of 30.



USE CALMING INGREDIENTS: When the skin gets too dry from cold winds and low humidity of the weather, prefer the application of ingredients that soothes the skin. These include *niacinamide*, *aloe vera*, *chamomile extract* etc. When the skin gets dehydrated and dry, it also gets extra sensitive and gets irritated easily. For dealing with this, avoid any product that has harsh chemicals or fragrances in



it or is alcohol based.
VISIT A WELL-QUALIFIED AND TRAINED DERMATOLOGIST: For everlasting hydrated skin in winters, you need a specialised dermatologist consultant who can well evaluate your skin needs and suggest tailored skincare regime as per your skin type and requirements. For extremely dry skin, your dermat may recommend hydrating facial treatments that infuse moisture into the deeper layers of the skin and is not just limited to the surface. These include *Hydra Facials*, *Collagen-boosting facials*, *oxygen infusion therapy* etc. The dry and dehydrated skin, due to loss of its protective barrier in winters, can be well dealt with proper management. Combat the winter skin challenges by using gentle cleansers, rich moisturizers, daily sunscreen application and adequate hydration to get a supple skin.
— The author is a MBBS, MD, Dermatologist and Founder of *Akiya Aesthetics*



AVOCADO: NUTRITIOUS WINTER DELIGHT

By KAVITA DEVGAN

As the chill of winter sets in, our taste buds crave indulgent and hearty flavours to match the cozy season. Amidst the festive feasts and culinary celebrations, there's often a compromise on health. What if we tell you that there's a way to enjoy the richness of winter feasts without sacrificing nutrition. Enter the versatile and nutrient-packed *avocado*—a super food that can elevate your winter recipes while supporting your health.

Known for its creamy texture and subtle flavour, the avocado is more than just a trendy ingredient. It's a powerhouse of essential nutrients, offering heart-healthy monounsaturated fats that help regulate cholesterol levels and promote cardiovascular health. Rich in vitamins such as E, C, B6, and minerals like potassium, avocados are a fantastic addition to a winter diet, ensuring you stay energised and nourished.

AVOCADOS IN WINTERS

While avocados are often associated with summer dishes, their health benefits and versatility make them ideal for winter too. The creamy texture and mild flavour blend seamlessly with rich, warming recipes. Moreover, their nutrient density supports your body's immunity during the colder months. Avocados also help in maintaining skin health which is a crucial benefit during winter when dryness and



dullness are common. The fruit's high content of healthy fats and antioxidants like vitamin E ensures your skin stays hydrated and glowing despite the harsh weather.

WAYS TO USE AVOCADOS IN WINTER FEASTS

HEARTY AVOCADO SOUPS: Start your meal with a creamy avocado soup. Blend ripe avocados with warm vegetable stock, garlic, and a dash of cream for a comforting appetizer. For a twist, add roasted cumin or smoked paprika to infuse depth and warmth into your bowl.

AVOCADO-STUFFED BAKES: Use avocados as a stuffing base for bell peppers or mushrooms. Mix the avocado with quinoa, feta cheese, and herbs, and bake until golden. This dish is both filling and packed with nutrients, making it perfect for a cozy winter dinner.

AVOCADO IN DESSERTS:



Avocados aren't limited to savoury dishes. Their creamy consistency makes them an excellent ingredient for desserts. Try an avocado chocolate mousse by blending avocados with cocoa powder, honey, and a splash of vanilla. The result will be a decadent dessert that's guilt-free and loaded with healthy fats.

AVOCADO IN WINTER SALADS: Winter salads don't have to be boring. Toss avocado chunks with roasted root vegetables, nuts, and a zesty dressing of olive oil and lemon for a nutritious side dish that compliments any meal.

AVOCADO TOAST WITH A WINTER TWIST: Take your classic avocado toast to the next level by adding seasonal toppings like sautéed mushrooms, pomegranate seeds, or even spiced roasted nuts.

A Super food for the Festive Table- This winter, let avocados be the star of your festive table. They not only add a touch of elegance but also ensure you strike a balance between indulgence and health. Whether you're preparing a lavish dinner or a cozy brunch, avocados can seamlessly blend into your recipes, offering both flavour and nutrition.

The Green Ally for Your Wellness- The World Avocado Organisation champions the avocado as a perfect partner for a healthy lifestyle. By incorporating it into your winter menu, you're embracing a super food that caters to taste and well-being. This winter, let the humble avocado transform your culinary experience, proving that eating healthy doesn't mean compromising on flavour or festivity.

— The author is a nutritionist and has used resources from the World Avocado Organisation

17TH EDITION OF PHARMA EXPO CONCLUDES



The 17th edition of CPHI & PMEC India, organised by Informa Markets in India took place at the India Expo Centre, Greater Noida, Delhi-NCR. Over 50,000 global industry professionals, including key decision-makers, gathered to explore new partnerships and growth opportunities. The expo featured forward-thinking discussions on sustainability, digital transformation, and the future of pharma, with a special focus on empowering women in the industry. Photo: PNS



Sarvodaya Hospital, Faridabad achieved medical breakthrough by treating a 5-month-old baby for congenital hearing impairment making him the youngest in India to undergo a cochlear implant surgery. Photo: PNS

