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**WORLD 9**  
BIDEN COMMUTES ROUGHLY 1,500 SENTENCES, PARDONS 39 PEOPLE IN BIGGEST SINGLE-DAY ACT OF CLEMENCY

## One Nation, One Election... one decision

**PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■**  
NEW DELHI

The Centre's call for 'One Nation, One Election' inched closer to realise its dreams of simultaneous polls by paving the way to table the proposal in the Parliament next week after the Union Cabinet on Thursday approved two bills, including one to amend the Constitution to implement 'One Nation, One Election'. Sources said the Cabinet chaired by Prime Minister Narendra Modi gave nod to draft legislations to hold simultaneous polls to the Lok Sabha and Legislative Assemblies only.

While a high-level committee led by former president Ram Nath Kovind had also proposed holding the municipality and panchayat polls along with the national and state elections in a phased manner, the Cabinet decided not to touch the subject currently.

The Constitution Amendment Bill to hold simultaneous polls to the Lok Sabha and State Assemblies will not require ratification by at least 50 per cent of the states, the sources noted. Another Constitution Bill proposed by the Kovind panel was aimed at creating provisions to hold simultaneous elections to municipalities and panchayats, along with the elections to the Lok Sabha and State Legislative Assemblies, by inserting a new Article 324A. It would have required ratification by half of the State Assemblies.



File photo: PTI

But the Union Cabinet has kept the local body polls out of its plan. The second Bill will be an ordinary one to amend provisions in three laws dealing with Union Territories that have Legislative Assemblies, Puducherry, Delhi and Jammu and Kashmir, to align the terms of these Houses with other legislative Assemblies and the Lok Sabha as proposed in the Constitution Amendment Bill. The statutes it proposes to amend are the Government of National Capital Territory of Delhi Act-1991, the Government of Union Territories Act-1963 and the Jammu and Kashmir Reorganisation Act-2019. The proposed Bill will be an

ordinary legislation, not requiring a change in the Constitution and will also not need ratification by the states. The Government is keen on holding wider consultations on bills that are likely to be referred to a parliamentary committee. The sources said the Government also wants to consult the speakers of various state legislative Assemblies through the committee. Moving ahead with its 'One Nation, One Election' plan, the Government in September accepted the recommendations of the high-level committee for holding simultaneous polls for the Lok Sabha, state Assemblies and local bodies in a phased manner. In its report submitted to the

Government in March, just before the general election was announced, the panel recommended implementing 'One Nation, One Election' in two phases. While the ruling Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) and its allies are pushing for simultaneous polls, several opposition parties have opposed the idea. The Government is of the view that simultaneous polls will reduce expenditure in the long run and different parts of the country will not be under the Model Code of Conduct throughout the year due to various polls. Simultaneous polls were held in the country between 1951 and 1967. The concept of simultaneous elections has featured in many reports and studies since 1983, essentially

implying a return to the previous practice of conducting polls concurrently. Congress reiterated its opposition to the very idea of simultaneous polls and accused the Government of trying to divert attention from "questions being raised on the electoral integrity of the democratic system".

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### ELECTIONS FOR THE LOK SABHA AND ALL STATE ASSEMBLIES CAN BE HELD TOGETHER:

- For synchronising the Lok Sabha and Assembly elections, the President shall notify the date of the first sitting of the Lok Sabha after a general election as the "appointed date".
- Tenure of all State Assemblies formed via polls after the "appointed date" and before the expiry of the full term of the Lok Sabha will only be for the period ending up to the subsequent parliamentary polls. After this one-time transitory measure, all Lok Sabha and Assembly polls will be held simultaneously.
- Fresh elections could be held to constitute a new Lok Sabha in the event of a hung House or a no-confidence motion or any such event.
- Where fresh elections are held for the House of the People (Lok Sabha), the tenure of the House will be "only for the unexpired (remaining) term of the immediately preceding full term of the House".
- When fresh elections are held for state legislative Assemblies, then such new Assemblies — unless sooner dissolved — shall continue up to the end of the full term of the Lok Sabha.



AAP National Convener Arvind Kejriwal launches the 'Mukhya Mantri Mahila Samman Yojna' to give a monthly assistance of Rs 1,000 to women in Delhi. Photos: Ranjan Dimri/The Pioneer

## Eye on Polls, Kejriwal announces Mukhya Mantri Mahila Samman Yojna

**RAJESH KUMAR ■ NEW DELHI**

With the Assembly polls drawing closer, after giving five 'revdis' (freebies) including free DTC bus rides to women, Aam Aadmi Party (AAP) national convener Arvind Kejriwal on Thursday announced his sixth freebie, of giving monthly assistance of Rs 1,000 to women in Delhi each month, under the 'Mukhya Mantri Mahila Samman' Yojna. He also promised the amount would be raised to Rs 2,100 if the AAP government returned to power. The scheme was approved by the Delhi Cabinet despite objections by the Planning Department and Finance Department. The scheme needs Rs 4,560 Crore annually for the year 2025-26. The scheme was initially announced in the 2024-25 Budget with an allocation of Rs 2,000 Crore. The scheme, however, seemed to have hit the bureaucratic

logjam with the Finance department flagging budgetary constraints. The scheme is on the lines of 'Mahi Ladki Bahin Yojana' in Maharashtra, 'Ladli Behna Yojna' in Madhya Pradesh, 'Grahakshmi' scheme of Kerala, 'Kalaignar Magalir Uruman' of Tamil Nadu and 'Laxmir Bhandar' of West Bengal that played a major role for the ruling party to defeat anti-incumbency factor. Addressing a press conference along with Chief Minister Atishi, Kejriwal announced the Delhi Cabinet has approved the scheme and women can begin their registration from Friday. However, he clarified the elections are likely to be announced soon and therefore the money could be credited in beneficiaries' accounts only after the polls as the date for the crucial polls would be announced in the next 10 to 15 days.

Delhi Chief Minister Atishi, meanwhile, said if the Model Code of Conduct comes into force after January 13, the first installment will be transferred into the bank accounts of eligible women before elections. The Planning Department in its noting said that as against the estimated Revenue Receipts of Rs 65034.69 Crore during 2024-25, total expenditure of Rs 77700 crore (including Expenditure on Programs/ Projects and Other Expenditure) is projected and the gap between receipts and total expenditure i.e. deficit is proposed to be covered by NSSF Loan' and unspent balance. As the opening Loan is about to exhausted, therefore, implementation' of proposed new scheme involves huge amount of funds i.e. Rs 4560 crore through Loan is not appropriate and good for the financial health of the Government.

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## No surveys, suits related to Places of Worship Act till hearing over: SC

**PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■**  
NEW DELHI

In an important development, the Supreme Court on Thursday restrained all courts from entertaining fresh lawsuits and passing any effective interim or final orders in pending cases seeking survey or to reclaim religious places, especially mosques and dargahs. Observing the court couldn't decide the matter without the Centre's response, the Bench comprising Chief Justice Sanjiv Khanna and Justices Sanjay Kumar and KV Viswanathan asked the Government to file its reply to the pleas and cross petitions in four weeks. It also granted four weeks to other parties to file their rejoinder after the Centre filed its reply.

"As the matter is sub-judice in this court, we deem it appropriate that no fresh suit would be registered and proceedings are undertaken till further orders of this court," the CJI-led Bench said. The order stalls proceedings in about 18 lawsuits filed by various Hindu parties seeking survey to ascertain original religious character of 10 mosques including Gyanvapi at Varanasi, Shahi Idgah Masjid at Mathura and Shahi Jama Masjid at Sambhal where four persons' lives were



snuffed out in clashes. The special Bench was hearing about six petitions, including the lead one filed by lawyer Ashwini Upadhyay and BJP leader Subramanian Swamy, challenging various provisions of the Places of Worship (Special Provisions) Act, 1991. The 1991 law prohibits conversion of any place of worship and provides for the maintenance of the religious character of any place of worship as it existed on August 15, 1947. However, the dispute relating to Ram Janmabhoomi-Babri Masjid at Ayodhya was kept out of its purview. There are several cross petitions which seek strict implementation of the 1991 law to maintain communal harmony and to preserve the present status of mosques, sought to be reclaimed by Hindus on the ground that they were temples before

invaders razed them. The Bench made it clear that it would be examining the "vires (legality), contours and ambit" of the 1991 Law and it was imperative to ask other courts to "stay off their hands" till it passed any further orders. "In pending suits, the courts will not pass any effective interim or final order, including order of survey, till further orders," the Bench said. Senior advocate J Sai Deepak, appearing for a Hindu party, opposed the order restraining all other courts and said the parties should have been heard before such a direction. The CJI said it was quite natural to ask courts to not to pass any order as the Supreme Court was hearing the larger issue. The Bench said if parties insisted then, the matter could be sent to a High Court. "Can the trial courts overreach the Supreme Court," asked the Bench and said the apex court was already dealing with the validity of the law. Notably, the Bench had issued notice to parties, including the Centre, on the lead petition in September, 2022. The Bench also appointed nodal counsel for assisting it in the hearing on the pleas which would be listed after eight weeks.

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## All is not well in the House

**DEEPAK KUMAR JHA ■ NEW DELHI**

In a peculiar move, the ruling Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) on Thursday jumped to the Well, and aisle of the Rajya Sabha protesting against the Opposition, who too were on their feet, trading charges over a no-trust motion brought against Chairman Jagdeep Dhankhar. While a legislative business was scheduled to be tabled by Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman when the upper house resumed post lunch, BJP MPs immediately raised slogans on the allegations of the Congress leadership's "links" with billionaire investor George Soros. Though Lok Sabha after morning two adjournments resumed post lunch and continued till late evening smoothly discussing a Bill on Disaster Management Amendment Bill, Rajya Sabha witnessed yet another 12th day of ruckus, and this time members of the Treasury Benches were more aggressive than the Opposition who until last week were on their feet. As Dhankhar rejected notices by the Opposition when the House started in the morning amidst sloganeering by the Congress, Leader of House Union minister JP Nadda rose to speak and strongly condemned Congress president, and Leader of Opposition Mallikarjun Kharge for criticising the Chairman at a Press conference outside the House on Wednesday. Citing a rule, Nadda said questioning or criticising a ruling of the Chairman amounts to contempt of both the House and the Chair. "At a press conference on Wednesday, Khargeji criticised the Chairman. This is objectionable and condemnable. It sets a wrong precedent.



Union Minister Giriraj Singh staged a protest over Congress leader Sonia Gandhi's alleged links with an organisation funded by the George Soros Foundation. PTI

This needs to be condemned by one and all," Nadda said. Refuting Kharge's allegation made at the press conference that he was not given an opportunity to speak in the House, he said letters were written by the Chairman to the Leader of Opposition (LoP) time and again, asking him to participate and come to the Chairman's chamber. But Kharge did not go to the Chairman's chamber and also did not attend the last meeting of the Business Advisory Committee, he said. "The Congress has even tried to demean the constitutional post by criticising 'the Chair as a cheerleader' on its official social media handle", Nadda pointed out. Nadda then gave ammunition to the Congress as soon as he touched upon the relationship between George Soros and (Congress leader) Sonia Gandhi who were present in the House triggering a

protest by the Opposition leaders. The Chairman gave the floor to Kharge to respond to Nadda's remarks but the Congress leader could not speak much as the members of the treasury benches were on their feet, sloganeering. "They want to divert attention from the main issue," Kharge said amid intense sloganeering from the treasury benches. Kharge urged the Chair to bring the House in order, but Dhankhar adjourned the proceedings till 2 pm. As the House reassembled at 2 pm, the Trinamool Congress (TMC) sought permission to raise a point of order on the Bangladesh issue to which the Chair said it was not a point of order prompting the party members to raise slogans. Dhankhar then asked former prime minister HD Deve Gowda to speak, however his speech was lost in the din.

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## NDMC presents surplus budget of ₹463.40 Crore

**RAJESH KUMAR ■ NEW DELHI**

In a big relief to the residents of New Delhi, the New Delhi Municipal Council (NDMC) did not hike the property tax rate in Lutyens' Delhi. The NDMC budget proposal tabled in the council, proposes to setting up a 'Veerangna Museum' by Comprehensive Conservation of Gole Market Heritage Building and its adjoining areas, night/staggered timing of cleaning of public spaces, new design of school uniforms, tablets for students, smart parking, mist spray kits on poles for clean air and two



Photos: Ranjan Dimri/The Pioneer

foot over bridges at AIIMS Gate No.1, Aurobindo Marg and Delhi High Court near Gate No.5. Presenting a surplus budget of Rs Rs 463.40 Crore projected in 2025-26, the NDMC chairman Keshav Chandra announced that there will not be any hike in the current rates of property tax for the year 2025-26. The council is expecting to collect Property Tax of Rs. 1150 Crore in Revised Estimates 2024-25 and Rs. 1290 Crore in BE 2025-26. According to the budget document, the total receipts of the Budget Estimates (BE) 2025-26 are Rs. 5770.60 Crore against Rs. 5319.75 Crore provided in Revised Estimate 2024-25. The total actual receipts in 2023-24 were Rs. 5005.05 Crore. The BE 2025-26 for the revenue receipts are Rs. 5100.32 Crore against Rs. 4730.31 Crore provided in RE 2024-25 and actual of Rs. 4417.12 Crore in 2023-24.

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## Grandmaster D Gukesh is youngest-ever world champion Centre needs 2,000 more IAS, IPS!

**PTI ■ SINGAPORE**

Indian Grandmaster D Gukesh on Thursday became the youngest World Chess Champion at 18 years, after beating title-holder Ding Liren in the last game of a nerve-racking showdown to herald a new era of dominance for the country's chess players. Taking forward the incredible legacy of the great Viswanathan Anand, Gukesh became only the second Indian to clinch the coveted prize after the iconic player, who owned the crown five times in his career. After settling into "semi-retirement", the 55-year-old Anand, incidentally, played a pivotal role in shaping Gukesh at his chess academy in Chennai. Gukesh secured the requisite 7.5 points as against 6.5 of his Chinese rival after winning the 14th and last classical time control game of the match that seemed headed for a draw for most part. As winner, he will walk away with a whopping USD 1.3 million (approx Rs 11.03 Crore) from the



India's D Gukesh reacts after beating title-holder China's Ding Liren in the 14th and last game of the FIDE World Chess Championship 2024, in Singapore. PTI

2.5 million prize purse. "I was dreaming this moment for the last 10 years. I am happy that I realised the dream (and made it) into reality," the soft-spoken Chennai-lad told reporters after the historic triumph here. "I got a bit emotional because I was not expecting to win. But then I got a chance to press on," he added. The triumph was expectedly hailed across India with Prime Minister Narendra Modi hailing it as "historic and exemplary". "This is the result of his unparalleled talent, hard work and unwavering determination," PM Modi posted on X. The reticent teenager grinned widely and raised his arms in celebration after the victory, a stark contrast from the poker face he usually sports while playing. Even on Thursday, when the analysts had proclaimed that the match, in all likelihood, would go into a tie-breaker, Gukesh's face hardly gave anything away as he gained the upper-hand.

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**PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■**  
NEW DELHI

The Centre, on Thursday, informed the Parliament about a shortage of Government officers at the top level, mentioning that there are 1,316 and 586 vacant posts of Indian Administrative Service (IAS) and Indian Police Service (IPS). Union Minister Jitendra Singh said that, out of the total sanctioned strength of 6,858 IAS, there were 5,542 officers in-position, as on January 1, 2024, in a written reply to the Rajya Sabha. There were 4,469 IPS officers working against their sanctioned strength of 5,055, Singh, the Minister of State for Personnel told the RS. Of the 1,316 vacant posts of

IAS, 794 were meant for direct recruitment, and 522 were promotion posts, he said. Of the 586 vacant IPS posts, 209 were of direct recruitment, and 377 were promotion posts, the Minister said. There are 2,151 Indian Forest Service (IFS) officers in-position, against their sanctioned strength of 3,193, Singh said. Of the 1,042 vacant IFS posts, 503 were for direct recruitment and 539 promotion posts, he added. The IAS, IPS and IFS officers are selected through the Civil Services examination conducted by the Union Public Service Commission (UPSC) annually. The minister, also shared details of appointments made to IAS, IPS and IFS from General, Scheduled Castes (SCs),

Scheduled Tribes (STs) and Other Backward Classes (OBCs) during the last five years. During the 2022 civil services examination (CSE) year, 75 General, 45 OBC, 29 SC and 13 ST appointments were made in the IAS. Similarly, 83 General, 53 OBC, 31 SC and 13 ST were appointed in the IPS during the same period. A total of 43 General, 51 OBC, 22 SC and 11 ST appointments were made in the IFS during CSE 2024, according to the data shared by the minister. The Government also stated that Central ministries and departments are directed from time-to-time to fill up vacancies in a time-bound manner.

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# Modi to launch major development projects in Prayagraj today

## CM Adityanath takes stock of preparations

PNS ■ MAHAKUMBH NAGAR

Prime Minister Narendra Modi will perform religious rituals and inaugurate several development projects worth Rs 7,000 crore in Prayagraj as part of the government's efforts to enhance infrastructure ahead of the Maha Kumbh 2025.

According to an official statement, the prime minister is scheduled to arrive in Prayagraj around 12:15 pm. His visit will begin with a ceremonial puja and darshan at the holy Sangam, the confluence of the Ganga, Yamuna, and Saraswati rivers. He will then perform puja at the historic Akshay Vata Vriksh, followed by visits to Hanuman Mandir and Saraswati Koop for further religious observances. He will also tour the Maha Kumbh exhibition site, providing an opportunity to showcase preparations for the upcoming Kumbh Mela, and inaugurate multiple development projects worth approximately Rs 5,500 crore, aimed at bolstering the city's infrastructure.

These projects are primarily geared toward improving infrastructure for the Maha Kumbh 2025, with key initiatives including the construction of 10 new Road Over Bridges (RoBs) and rivers, permanent ghats, and riverfront roads, all

designed to enhance connectivity and ease of travel in and around Prayagraj. Modi will also inaugurate projects aimed at preventing untreated sewage from flowing into the Ganga. These include systems for the interception, tapping, diversion, and treatment of minor drains that currently discharge into the river. Additionally, he will launch several vital infrastructure projects related to drinking water and power supply in the region, further improving the city's basic amenities. As part of efforts to enhance spiritual tourism and facilitate the movement of devotees, Modi will inaugurate major temple corridors, including the Bharadwaj Ashram corridor, Shringverpur Dham corridor, Akshayvat corridor, and Hanuman Mandir corridor. These corridors will ensure smoother access to sacred sites for pilgrims and tourists.

To further streamline communication for devotees attending the Mahakumbh Mela, the prime minister will also launch the Kumbh SahAI'yak chatbot, a digital assistant designed to provide real-time updates and guidance about the events surrounding the mela, the state-of-the-art, and on Thursday, Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath took stock of the preparations for Modi's visit to Prayagraj. The CM conducted a detailed ground inspection of Mahakumbh Nagar and key locations such as the Sangam Nose, where PM Modi will perform rituals. He provided directives to offi-



Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath taking stock of preparations in Prayagraj ahead of Prime Minister Narendra Modi's visit

cial to ensure seamless execution of the event. The chief minister also inspected various important sites, including the temporary 100-bed hospital built in Sector One Parade, Akshay Vat, Saraswati Koop, and the Lete Hanuman Temple. At the temple, CM Yogi paid obeisance to the deity amidst Vedic chanting, emphasising the spiritual significance of the event. During his hospital inspection, CM Yogi reviewed the emergency ward, ICU, OPD, waiting area, main ward, female ward,

children's ward, and operation theatre. The doctors briefed him about the advanced facilities available at the hospital, including the use of AI-powered cameras in the ICU and the high-tech AI messaging flow system. He was also given a detailed overview of the state-of-the-art laboratory established in the hospital. The chief minister expressed satisfaction and appreciation for these innovations. He expressed satisfaction with the arrangements but stressed the need for proper staffing,

availability of medicines, and enhanced ventilation. The temporary hospital, set up for Maha Kumbh 2025, includes a 10-bed ICU operated with support from the Cantt Board and Medanta doctors. PM Modi's visit on Friday will feature Ganga Aarti, a public address, and worship at Sangam Nose, underscoring the monumental preparations for the grand event. After inspecting the hospital, CM Yogi Adityanath proceeded to Kila Ghat to review the newly constructed jetty. He directed officials to ensure

adequate facilities for devotees, including bathing arrangements while maintaining robust security measures. He then visited Sangam Nose, where PM Modi is set to perform rituals on Friday. Mela Officer Vijay Kiran Anand briefed the CM on the arrangements for the PM's cruise tour. CM Yogi conducted a thorough inspection, provided essential guidelines, and emphasised maintaining the Ganga's cleanliness. The CM continued his review at the Akshay Vat Corridor inside the Prayagraj Fort, arriving by e-cart.

He inspected the ongoing Smart City development work, appreciated the corridor's beautification, and admired highlights such as the child form statue of Shri Krishna and the Sapt Rishis' artwork. During the visit, army officials presented the CM with a portrait of Akshay Vat. Yogi also offered prayers at Akshay Vat and had a photo session, expressing his satisfaction with the progress. Next, CM Yogi visited the Bade Hanuman Mandir Corridor on the Sangam coast, where Phase-1 development is underway by the Prayagraj Development Authority (PDA). He reviewed the progress, performed aarti, and prayed for the well-being and prosperity of all citizens, accompanied by temple Mahant Balbir Giri Maharaj. The PDA vice-chairman presented the layout plan for the temple corridor, and the CM urged timely completion by accelerating work. Finally, CM Yogi reached Saraswati Koop, where he offered flowers at the statue of Goddess Saraswati in the courtyard. After visiting Saraswati

Koop, CM Yogi Adityanath reached the Authority Office to inspect the Salori Drain purification work in Sector 6 using the Geo Tube method. This innovative technology treats sewer and drain water by reducing 50-60% of BOD levels before sending it to the STP. The city's 22 untapped drains will be treated through this process, ensuring cleaner discharge into the river. The trial run has been successful, with operations at full capacity since January 1. CM Yogi emphasised that no untreated sewer water should be allowed into the river and directed officials to ensure STPs operate efficiently throughout the fair, ensuring convenience for attendees. The CM then inspected arrangements at the Akharas in Sector 20. Yogi was accompanied by Deputy CM Keshav Prasad Maurya, Jal Shakti Minister Swatantra Dev Singh, Industrial Development Minister Nand Gopal Gupta Nandi, Tourism Minister Jaiver Singh and former minister and MLA Siddharth Singh along with other leaders and officials.

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## Govt to set up 'Har Ghar Jal' village

PNS ■ MAHAKUMBH NAGAR

The Uttar Pradesh government is set to establish a unique 'Har Ghar Jal' village at Maha Kumbh 2025. Spanning a 40,000-square-foot area and themed 'Solution to Drinking Water: The Identity of My Village', the village will feature a Jal Mandir, symbolising the life-giving essence of water and emphasising the importance of conservation. The initiative will narrate the inspiring journey of providing tap water to every household in Bundelkhand under the Jal Jeevan Mission. Devotees, tourists, and Kalsipias will witness inspiring transformation stories of 'New Villages' in a 'New Uttar Pradesh' as part of a 'New India'.

Under the leadership of Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath, the Rural Water Supply

and Namami Gange Department is preparing an immersive exhibition highlighting these achievements. The exhibition, running from January 5 to February 26, will feature 51 programmes and provide a platform for rural women of Bundelkhand to share firsthand accounts of the region's transformation. Once drought-stricken, Bundelkhand now

### MAHA KUMBH 2025

has access to pure drinking water, solving a decades-old crisis. Clean water has revitalised lives in villages like Banda, Jhansi, and Chitrakoot, where once marriages were delayed due to water scarcity. Women from Mahoba and Lalitpur, who once suffered severe health challenges due to carrying water, will narrate their stories

of empowerment under the double-engine government, an official statement said. In Bal Vihari, a village on the border of Madhya Pradesh, adjacent to Lalitpur, residents once relied on a snake-infested well for drinking water. Thanks to the Modi-Yogi government, these villagers now have access to safe drinking water and will also share their experiences at Maha Kumbh, the statement added. The exhibition will provide information in Hindi, English, Bengali, Telugu, and Marathi to ensure accessibility for the diverse visitors attending Maha Kumbh. Additionally, a dedicated book will compile success stories of Vindhya-Bundelkhand's transformation under the Jal Jeevan Mission, serving as a testament to the region's remarkable progress.

## Special arrangements for female devotees

**Mahakumbh Nagarar (PNS):** Committed to making Maha Kumbh 2025 the grandest event in Sanatan Dharma, the Uttar Pradesh government is ensuring a warm and well-organised welcome for pilgrims from across the globe. In line with CM Yogi Adityanath's vision, special arrangements are being made to enhance the safety and comfort of female devotees, an official statement said. SDM, Mahakumbh Nagar, Abhinav Pathak said that 12 special units are being set up to cater to women pilgrims at the Sangam. Each unit will be 25 metres long and 6 metres wide, equipped with changing rooms to ensure convenience after rituals and bathing. Additionally, old and dilapidated boats are being removed from the Sangam area, replaced with newly constructed floating jetties. These jetties are being adorned with vibrant flowers to add an aesthetic charm. Ahead of Prime Minister Narendra Modi's visit, Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath personally reviewed the preparations in Mahakumbh Nagar on Thursday. Following his directives, arrangements are being made at the Sangam for seamless rituals and worship. To save devotees from facing any difficulties, Brahmans, priests, and pandas will be present at the venue to guide and assist in performing rituals.

## CM Yogi asks officials to improve revenue collection in mining

PNS ■ LUCKNOW

Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath reviewed the performance of the Geology and Mining Department on Wednesday and issued important instructions to officials. He highlighted that revenue collection for the financial year 2024-25 stood at Rs 2,407.20 crore, with potential for further growth. The CM instructed departmental and district-level officers to work proactively to improve revenue collection. He directed that accountability for revenue collection should be fixed for district magistrates and district mining officers. He pointed out significant opportunities for revenue growth in mining activities in

districts like Sonbhadra, Banda, Kaushambi, and Mahoba. He also instructed officials to analyse districts with low revenue collection and implement measures to increase revenue. He called for expediting decisions on pending applications at the government, departmental, and district levels. Additionally, he suggested exploring other ways to boost revenue generation. The CM issued strict directives to prevent illegal mining in river catchment areas, emphasising the use of technology for effective enforcement. He instructed that vehicles operating in approved mining zones must be equipped with Vehicle Tracking Systems (VTS) to ensure that mining activities are confined to autho-

rised areas. This will also simplify monitoring for transporters. The chief minister said that API integrations have been done with Uttarakhand, Haryana, Rajasthan, and Madhya Pradesh to check the legality of vehicles transporting sub-minerals from other states to the state. To curb illegal mining, he directed district-level task forces to conduct regular raids, ensuring the presence of departmental, administrative, and police officials during operations. He also mandated proper videography of these raids to maintain transparency and accountability. The CM emphasised the need for accountability among officials at various levels within the

department. He directed that all pending matters at the departmental level be resolved promptly. He instructed that work plans for the year be prepared between June and August to facilitate timely and efficient execution. Addressing transport officials, he stressed the need for swift actions to prevent road accidents and ordered strict measures to ensure overloaded vehicles are not parked along roadsides. He mentioned that 55 check gates have been established in districts to curb tax evasion and overloading. He directed the installation of weigh-in-motion systems at these gates and insisted that overloading be stopped right at the source.

## UP Congress plans to gherao assembly

**Lucknow (PNS):** The Uttar Pradesh Congress is preparing to demonstrate its strength during the upcoming assembly session beginning on Monday. Despite having only two MLAs in the House, Congress has called on its party workers to gather in Lucknow on December 18 as part of a new strategy. They plan to stage a protest by gheraoing Vidhan Sabha. Addressing mediapersons on Thursday, Congress state president Ajay Rai stated that there is widespread devastation and chaos across the state. He accused the government of allowing riots, fake police encounters, and the mistreatment of women to escalate. Rai further claimed that the government remains silent and that even policemen are engaging in harassment under its orders. The Congress intends to gherao the assembly to protest these issues. Rai also stressed that opposition leaders should cooperate in this

protest against the government's policies. In addition, Rai criticised the practice of giving major work contracts in Uttar Pradesh to contractors from Gujarat instead of local ones. He alleged that Gujarat-based companies have monopolised the state's contracts, negatively impacting the quality of work. Since these companies complete their projects and leave, it becomes difficult to hold them accountable for any subpar work, he added. Party MLA and Leader of Congress in the State Assembly, Aradhana Mishra, also addressed the media, claiming that Yogi Adityanath's government has failed to address key issues such as farmers' concerns and youth unemployment. She claimed that the BJP is not answering these critical questions in the assembly and is refusing to address the public's concerns.

## Govt expediting construction of Anganwadi centres

PNS ■ LUCKNOW

In its ongoing pursuit to ensure the holistic development of women and children across Uttar Pradesh, addressing their health needs, the Uttar Pradesh government is implementing various initiatives aimed at upgrading and modernising Anganwadi centres. As part of this effort, Anganwadi centres are being shifted from rented premises to government-owned buildings. Over the past six years, the state has witnessed the construction of more than 13,000 Anganwadi centres. Additionally, the construction of over 8,000 centres is currently underway, reflecting the government's focus on enhancing infrastructure and delivering better services to communities, an official statement said.

Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath's dedication to the growth and well-being of women and children has given Anganwadi centres a renewed significance among the public, the statement added. In coordination with the Women and Child Development and Panchayati Raj departments, the government is ensuring that all Anganwadi centres operate from quality-built premises. To achieve this, the government is utilising the MGNREGA scheme to accelerate the construction of permanent centres, replacing those operating in rented spaces. Under the MGNREGA scheme, the Yogi government has significantly advanced the construction of Anganwadi centres to improve facilities for women and children, the statement added. In the financial year 2023-24,

a total of 1,981 centres were completed. This year, over 1,122 centres have already been constructed, with Rs 13,262.15 lakh spent on the initiative so far. Currently, construction work is ongoing for more than 8,000 additional centres. Notably, the state government is transforming Anganwadi centres into advanced facilities modelled after pre-primary schools. The focus is on providing early education through play and fostering holistic development during children's formative years. These centres are being equipped with modern amenities, including educational materials, smart TVs, and air conditioning for summers. Dedicated play areas, tables, chairs, and illustrated books are being provided to enhance the learning environment.

**IDFC FIRST Bank Limited**  
(erstwhile Capital First Limited and amalgamated with IDFC Bank Limited)  
CIN : L65110TN2014PLC097792  
Registered Office: - KRM Towers, 8th Floor, Harrington Road, Chetpet, Chennai-600031.  
Tel: +91 44 4564 4000 | Fax: +91 44 4564 4022

**APPENDIX IV [Rule 8(1)] POSSESSION NOTICE (For immovable property)**

Whereas the undersigned being the Authorised Officer of the IDFC FIRST Bank Limited (erstwhile Capital First Limited and amalgamated with IDFC Bank Limited) under the Securitization and Reconstruction of Financial Assets and Enforcement of Security Interest Act, 2002 and in exercise of powers conferred under section 13(12) read with rule 3 of the Security Interest (Enforcement) Rules, 2002 issued a demand notice dated 17.08.2024 calling upon the borrower, co-borrowers and guarantors **1. AKEEL AHAMAD, 2. RAZIA KHANAM**, to repay the amount mentioned in the notice being **Rs. 38,19,164.22/- (Rupees Thirty Eight Lac Nineteen Thousand One Hundred Sixty Four and Twenty Two Paise Only)** as on 17.08.2024 within 60 days from the date of receipt of the said Demand Notice.

The borrowers having failed to repay the amount, notice is hereby given to the borrower and the public in general that the undersigned has taken Symbolic Possession of the property described herein below in exercise of powers conferred on him under sub-section (4) of section 13 of Act read with rule 8 of the Security Interest (Enforcement) Rules, 2002 on this 09th day of DEC 2024. The borrowers in particular and the public in general is hereby cautioned not to deal with the property and any dealings with the property will be subject to the charge of THE IDFC FIRST Bank Limited (erstwhile Capital First Limited and amalgamated with IDFC Bank Limited) for an amount of **Rs. 38,19,164.22/- (Rupees Thirty Eight Lac Nineteen Thousand One Hundred Sixty Four and Twenty Two Paise Only)** and interest thereon. The borrower's attention is invited to provisions of sub-section (8) of Section 13 of the Act, in respect of time available, to redeem the secured assets.

**DESCRIPTION OF THE IMMOVABLE PROPERTIES.**

**ALL THAT PIECE AND PARCEL OF ENTIRE FIRST FLOOR OF HOUSE NO. 79/94-A, COVERED AREA 74.31 SQ. MTRS. WITH UNDIVIDED LAND SHARE 19.39 SQ. MTRS., SITUATED AT BANSMANDI, KANPUR NAGAR, UTTAR PRADESH-208003, AND BOUNDED AS: EAST: 8 FT. WIDE ROAD, WEST: 4 FT. WIDE ROAD NORTH: 8 FT. WIDE ROAD, SOUTH: HOUSE NO. 79/95 & 79/94.**

**Date: 09-12-2024**  
**Place: UTTAR PRADESH**  
**Loan Account No: 32097093**

**Authorised Officer**  
**IDFC FIRST Bank Limited (erstwhile Capital First Limited and amalgamated with IDFC Bank Limited)**

**ARYAVART BANK** (भारत सरकार, उत्तर प्रदेश सरकार एवं बैंक ऑफ इंडिया का संयुक्त उद्यम)  
(A Joint Undertaking of Govt. of India, U.P. Govt. & Bank of India)

**Notice Under Section-13(2) of The Securitisation And Reconstruction of Financial Assets And Enforcement of Security Interest Act, 2002. (SARFAESI Act)**

Authorized Officer, Aryavart Bank, Regional Office - Lucknow, have issued Demand Notice under Section-13(2) of Securitization and Reconstruction of Financial Assets and Enforcement of Security Interest Act, 2002 through Registered /Speed post. The contents of the same are inter alia the defaults committed by you in the payment of outstanding amount including principal interest and other charges etc. The outstanding dues are mentioned here-in-below:

Sl. No.	Name & Address of the Borrowers/Guarantors/Branch	Description of the property	Date of Demand Notice	Amount of Notice
1.	<b>Borrower/Mortgagor:</b> Smt. Sarita Verma W/o Shri Nirmal Kumar Verma, 872, S. Saraiya Tola, Madiyaon Gaon, Jankipuram Lucknow-226021 <b>Co-Borrower:</b> Shri. Nirmal Kumar Verma S/o Shri Ram Kumar Verma, 872, S. Saraiya Tola, Madiyaon Gaon, Jankipuram Lucknow-226021 <b>Guarantor:</b> 1. Shri. Ajeet Kumar S/o Shri. Om Prakash, Plot No. 9, Takrohli, Indira Nagar, Lucknow-226016 2. Shri. Arvind Kumar Mishra S/o Shri. Laxmi Shankar Mishra, Aman Gaon, Chinhat Lucknow-227105 <b>Branch: Amrai</b>	<b>Residential Property:</b> All part and parcel of the property situated at Plot part of Gata No. 442/2, situated at Village-Madiyaon, Pargan-Mahona, Tehsil-Bakshi ka Talab, District-Lucknow, <b>TITLE HOLDER-</b> Smt. Sarita Verma W/o Shri Nirmal Kumar Verma, Details of Property As Per Sale Deed Dated 10.07.2018, <b>Boundaries:</b> East: Rasta 20' Wide Road, West: Plot Rajeev, North: Plot Anjani Verma, South: Part Land Seller <b>Area: 858 Sq. feet, 79.739 Sq.mt.</b>	30.11.2024	Rs. 4,04,365.22 + Interest & Expenses etc.
2.	<b>Mortgagor &amp; Guarantor:</b> Shri Hafizur Rehman S/o Shri Mumtiazur Rehman, 433/771/003, Ram Nagar, Krishna Puri, Balaganj, Ward-Garhi Pir Khan, Lucknow-226003 <b>Borrower:</b> M/s Tanzeela Zari Arts, Prop: Shri Muzeebur Rehman S/o Shri Hafeezur Rehman, 433/771/003, Ram Nagar, Krishna Puri, Balaganj, Lucknow Pin-226003 <b>Borrower:</b> Shri Muzeebur Rahmah S/o Shri Hafizur Rahman, 433/771/003, Ram Nagar, Krishna Puri, Ward-Garhi Pir Khan, Balaganj Lucknow-226003 <b>Guarantor:</b> Shri Mohd. Irfan S/o Late Mohd. Usman, 411,117 Bholanath Kunwa & 329 Keesamjan, Krishnapuri Lucknow-226024 <b>Branch: Rakabganj</b>	<b>Residential Property:</b> Part of land in purani abadi, Ram Nagar, Ward Garhi Pir Khan, District-Lucknow, Now House No. 433/771/003, Moh-Ramnagar, ward-garhi pir kha, Lucknow, <b>TITLE HOLDER-</b> Shri Hafizur Rahman S/o Shri Mumtiazur Rahman, Details of Property As Per Sale Deed Dated 07.09.2009, <b>Boundaries:</b> East: Nala, West: House of Babu, North: Road 15 feet Wide, South: Arragi deegar <b>Area: 900 Sq. Feet, 83.643 sq.mt</b>	30.11.2024	Rs. 8,02,035.31 + Interest & Expenses etc.
3.	<b>Mortgagor &amp; Guarantor:</b> Shri Shama Praveen W/o Shri Sanowar Ali, 655 G/3/1540, Adil Nagar, Ganney ka Purwa, Kurhi Road Lucknow-226022 <b>Borrower:</b> Shri Abdul Fahad S/o Shri Sanowar Ali, House No. 655G/11, Adil Nagar, Tedhi Puliya, Lucknow Pin-226022 <b>Guarantor:</b> Shri Azimuddin Quraishi S/o Late Sarfuddin Quraishi, 655/25A, Alkapuri Colony Kurhi Road, Gudamba Lucknow-226022 <b>Branch: Kalyanpur</b>	<b>Residential Property:</b> Shop No. 43 & 44, UGF, Awadh Complex, Village-Adil Nagar, Ward-Shankar purwa, District-Lucknow, <b>TITLE HOLDER-</b> Smt. Shama Praveen W/o Shri Sanowar Ali, Details of Property As Per Sale Deed Dated 30.10.2012, <b>Boundaries:</b> East: Shop Rakash Chaurasia, West: Common Passage 7' Wide, North: Common Passage 8' Wide, South: Shop Prashant Kumar <b>Area: 232.5 Sq. Feet 21.60 sq.mt</b>	30.11.2024	Rs. 2,95,902.50 + Interest & Expenses etc.

Further with reasons, we believe that you are avoiding the service of said Demand Notice issued under the Act hence, we are now constrained to make this publication of demand notice, as required u/s-13(2) of said Act, the Rule-3 of the Security Interest (Enforcement) Rules, 2002. You are hereby called upon to pay Aryavart Bank, within a period of 60 days from the date of publication of this Demand Notice with the aforesaid amount alongwith further interest, cost, incidental expenses, charges etc., failing which, we Aryavart Bank will take necessary action under the provisions of Section-13(4) of sale thereof. Further, you are prohibited u/s-13(13) of the said Act from transferring either by way of sale/lease etc. and encumber in any other way, the aforesaid secured asset.

**Date : 13.12.2024** **Place : Lucknow** **Authorised Officer**

# 14,072 degrees to be conferred at BHU convocation tomorrow

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ VARANASI

The Banaras Hindu University (BHU) is all set to hold its 104th convocation on December 14 where 14,072 degrees will be conferred on graduating students. The main ceremony will take place in Swatantrata Bhawan from 9.30 am onwards. Speaking to media persons during the convocation press conference on Thursday at the Central Registry, Vice-Chancellor (V-C) Prof Sudhir Kumar Jain informed that a total of 544 medals will be presented to students across institutes and faculties apart from medals to 30 meritorious students from the dais at the main function. Prof Jain said convocation marks an important occasion of transitioning from a student to an alumnus. "Students receiving their degree at the convocation cherish that moment throughout their lives. He appealed to the graduating stu-



BHU Vice-Chancellor Prof SK Jain addressing a press conference in Varanasi on Thursday.

The BHU students and alumni in particular share a very special bond with the university. This is because we at BHU not only teach and nurture values and ethics, but also practice it, being part of the BHU family," he said. The V-C called upon the alumni of BHU to be part of the growth story of the varsity by actively associating with the university. He appealed to the graduating stu-

ents as well as the alumni to join BHU's alumni portal [www.alumni.bhu.in](http://www.alumni.bhu.in). The V-C also informed that the 104th convocation is going to be special in terms of the degrees the university will be conferring this time. He said, "We are introducing a verification system for degrees under which Quick Response (QR) code will be featured on them, allowing employers and educational institutions to perform instant verifications." The QR code will contain identification information about the students, such as their name, enrolment number, course or stream etc. Furthermore, photocopies of the degree will be marked as 'COPY', preventing unauthorised duplication. The introduction of the safety features in degrees marks a major headway towards integrating digital technologies in the functioning of the university. He said Jay Chaudhary, a lead-

ing global entrepreneur and a prominent figure in the security technology sector, will be the chief guest of the convocation ceremony. CEO, Chairman and Founder of Zscaler, Jay Chaudhary obtained his Bachelor of Technology in Electronics Engineering from the Institute of Technology (Now IIT-BHU) of the varsity in the year 1980. An acclaimed innovator in the security technology field, he has introduced solutions addressing the need for securely enabling emerging technology trends. He has founded a series of successful companies, including AirDefense, CipherTrust, CoreHarbor, and SecureIT. This year a total of 8,110 students are receiving undergraduate degrees, while 5,074 students are being presented post-graduate degrees. 867 PhD, and 21 MPhil degrees will also be conferred during the convocation event, Prof Jain added.

# Provide complete list of all hotels, dharamshalas: DM

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ VARANASI

In view of the needs of the tourists and devotees coming to Varanasi a meeting related to the recognition of paying guest/homestay was held here on Thursday under the chairmanship of District Magistrate (DM) S Rajalingam in which he agreed on various points. A time limit of one month from the day of application was fixed for granting recognition. The Tourism department was instructed not to keep any file pending unnecessarily. All the designated departments, including Tourism, LIU, police station concerned, Varanasi Development Authority (VDA) and Varanasi Municipal Corporation (VMC) were asked to run the application for recognition parallelly. The district magistrate also instructed acknowledgement must be given along with the



District Magistrate S Rajalingam giving guidelines for paying guest/homestay in Varanasi on Thursday.

application and without any leniency in violation of the rules and conditions of recognition, the stay house concerned will be sealed. The DM asked the VDA and VMC officers to do proper investigation in paying guest/homestay places. He directed the Additional District Magistrate (Protocol)

to provide the complete list of all hotels, dharamshalas, paying guest houses and homestays located in the city along with the number of rooms and phone numbers so that proper arrangements for accommodation can be made according to the large number of devotees coming in view of the upcoming Kumbh.

ADM (Protocol), VDA Secretary, Deputy Director (Tourism), VMC officials were present in the meeting. INAUGURATED: A solo exhibition titled 'We the (Discarded) People: Welfare or Warfare?' by Lebanese American Fulbright artist Chawky Frenn was inaugurated on Wednesday at the Exhibition Gallery of Bharat Kala Bhawan, BHU. This exhibition, curated by Prof Pradosh Mishra, presents a compelling series of works that delve into themes of unity, identity and collective will. While the series initially draws inspiration from the American populace and the concept of nationhood, its deeper significance transcends national boundaries and historical contexts. Frenn's work extends beyond a specific cultural narrative to resonate with a global audience, highlighting shared human experiences.

# Mukund: Public welfare works done by Lokmata are unprecedented

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ VARANASI

Sah Karyawah of Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS) Mukund said Lokmata Ahilyabai Holkar did the work of awakening faith and self-respect in Indian society through the renovation of temples and ghats. Addressing the Lokmata Ahilyabai Holkar Tricentenary Celebration programme at Swatantrata Bhawan in BHU here on Wednesday evening, he said the public welfare works done by Lokmata are unprecedented. He said "less government more governance" was the mantra of the Lokmata regime as it was a period of excellent governance with minimum facilities. The RSS leader said the government which solves every problem of its subjects was called "Punyashlok". "One should learn the lessons of 'Matritva, Netritva aur Kritisva Dhama' (motherhood, leadership and duty of action from the life of Lokmata (Ahilyabai Holkar)", he said, adding that in today's time, seeing the erosion of 'motherhood', it becomes necessary to remember Lokmata. He said by looking at the women of Europe and India in

a comparative manner, it is known that the status of Indian women was relatively better in politics, administration and religious-cultural fields and the biggest example of this is Ahilyabai Holkar herself. Talking about the equality of women and men, Mukund said this society needs motherhood as much as masculinity. "Today economists say that women have a great contribution to the GDP of the nation", he said. According to him, at present, more than 1.3 lakh Seva Karya (service works) are being run by the RSS across India in which women are ahead. In these works, the ability to make decisions is much stronger in the mother's power than in men. "Mothers are far ahead of men in sensitivity and concentration", he said. Special guest Uday Singh Raje Holkar, descendant of Lokmata, said the life of Punyashlok Ahilyabai was not ordinary. "In her own lifetime she had to see the death of her mother-in-law, father-in-law, husband, son and daughter. Her father-in-law Malhar Rao Holkar stopped her from committing 'Sati' with her husband. Lokmata constructed ghats,

dharamshalas and renovated temples from her 'stridhan'. "She was not only a skilled administrator but also a spiritual woman and her handwritings Shrimad Bhagwat Gita is preserved in Bhopal Museum", he added. Special guest retired Lieutenant General Dr Madhuri Kanitkar said that today's young generation should take inspiration from the life struggle of Lokmata Ahilyabai. "The future of the country lies in the hands of the young generation", he said. National president of Lokmata Ahilyabai Holkar Tricentenary Celebration Committee Prof Chandrakala Padia presided over the programme. It began with the guests on the stage offering flowers and lighting lamps on the oil painting of Lokmata Ahilyabai and the statue of Mahamana Pt Madan Mohan Malaviya. Mangalcharan was presented by Venkataraman Ghanpathi and the students of the Faculty of Music and Performing Arts, BHU, sang the Kulgeet. The guests were introduced and welcomed by Pranth Sampark Pramukh of RSS Deendaryak Pandey. Organising committee member Dr Neerja Madhav

introduced the topic. On the occasion, the students of Nivedita Shiksha Sadan staged a dance drama 'Woh Ahilya Hai' brought alive the life of Lokmata while the students of Sant Atulanand staged a short play presenting the story of the establishment of Kashi Vishwanath Temple. The special issue of 'Chetana Pravah' of RSS (Kashi Prant), focusing on Lokmata was released. Along with this, Gunjan Nanda's book 'Devi Ahilyabai: Maheshwar se Mokshadayini Kashi Tak' was also released. In the programme, a painting exhibition related to Lokmata was also organised in the gallery of Swatantrata Bhawan. On this occasion RSS Gauseva coordinator Ajit Mohapatra, Samajik Samarsata (social harmony) coordinator Ravindra Kilkote, Executive Member of Pragma Pravah Ramashish, Kshetra Seva Pramukh Yudhveer, Kshetra Paryavaran (Environment) coordinator Ajay, State Sangchalak Angraj, Prant Pracharak Ramesh, Dr Hemant Gupta, Nagendra, Prof Om Prakash Singh etc were also present. The programme was jointly conducted by Dr Bhavana Trivedi and Gunjan Nanda.

# Youth killed

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ KANPUR

A bike-borne youth was killed while his two friends were seriously injured when a speeding loader hit them in front of the Ordnance Factory under Armapore police station late on Wednesday night. The loader driver escaped from the spot after the incident. Police have impounded both the vehicles and started a probe in the matter. The injured are undergoing treatment at the hospital. SHO Armapore said Shalu (20) of Vijay Nagar, Raja (25) of near Mahatma Gandhi School, Vijay Nagar and Ajay Gautam (20) of Ambedkar Nagar, Vijay Nagar, were seriously injured in the incident. Ajay Gautam who was driving the bike fell unconscious on the spot due to serious head injury. He succumbed to his injury during treatment at the LLR (Hallet) hospital, while the condition of Raja in the ICU was also stated to be critical. Raids were on in search of the absconding loader driver. The body of Ajay Gautam had been sent for autopsy. On the basis of complaint, FIR will be lodged and action will be taken, he said. In another incident, a labourer was runover by a dumper in the Vidhnu police station area late Wednesday night. The incident took place when he was crossing the highway.

# Farmers urged to take advantage of schemes

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ VARANASI

A block level seminar on Rabi crop season was organised in Badgaon development block here on Thursday under the strengthening of agricultural information system and farmer awareness programme. The programme was started by lighting the lamp by the chief guest and general secretary of Kisan Morcha Deepak Singh. In his address, Singh requested the farmers to take advantage of the schemes running in their interest. Besides, marigold flower seeds, nano urea were distributed free of cost to 35 progressive farmers. District Agriculture Officer Sangam Singh Maurya, who was presiding over the programme, requested the farmers that farmers must register in the Prime Minister Crop Insurance Scheme because if the crop is destroyed due to natural disaster, then the farmers can get compensation for it. The last date for registration is December 31. Along with

this, solar pumps are being installed by the Agriculture department on 60 per cent subsidy and farmers can save electricity by installing solar pumps. District Horticulture Officer Subhash Kumar gave detailed information about the various schemes of the Horticulture department and Veterinary Officer Ashish Kumar Singh gave detailed information about the various schemes of the Animal Husbandry department. The scientist from Krishi Vigyan Kendra Dr Rahul Singh gave the farmers detailed information about wheat, gram, pea and mustard cultivation along with contemporary information on agriculture. Vice-president of Kisan Morcha Haushila Pandey, Vipin Rai (Mandal vice-president Kathirao), Ashok Pal (Assistant Development Officer Agriculture Baraagon), Roshan Kumar, Virendra Kumar etc were present apart from prominent farmers Tufani, Nandlal Mishra, Haushila Prasad, Ramchandra, Gulabchand etc.

# Minister resolves problems of people

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ VARANASI

Uttar Pradesh Minister of State (Independent Charge) for Stamp and Court Fee Ravindra Jaiswal on Thursday conducted a public hearing in the Prime Minister's Parliamentary Office located in Jawahar Nagar (Ravindrपुरी) and resolved the problems of the people by meeting them. Many people of the area attended the public hearing and raised their issues regarding police, electricity, road and others. The minister directed the Managing Director of Purvanchal Vidut Vitran Nigam Limited to underground the dilapidated wires of some areas. Regarding the disposal of many complaint letters, he gave written and telephonic instructions to the officers of the Police department and senior officers of the Municipal Corporation. He directed the departmental officers concerned to take immediate action and solve the problems of the public.

# Meritorious students felicitated

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ KANPUR

The Dr Virendra Swarup Institute of Computer Studies and Dayanand Academy of Management organised their annual function 'Srijan-2024' at Kidwai Nagar branch on Thursday. Around 300 students of VSICS, DAMS and Dr Virendra Swarup Institute of Professional Studies pursuing MCA, MBA, BCA and BBA took part in cultural programmes and competitions — fashion show, group dance, singing and playing an instrument with enthusiasm. Secretary Gaurvendra Swarup along with the Executive Director Dr Arpit Awasthi inaugurated the programme by lighting the ceremonial lamp and releasing balloons in



The meritorious students felicitated at the annual function 'Srijan-2024' on Thursday.

the sky. Meritorious students were felicitated with the prizes and certificates on this occasion. They included Mansi Mishra, Rishabh Srivastava, Kanak Mishra, Sachin Agarwal (VSICS), Aditi Dubey, Astha Dwivedi, Gyanendra Singh (DAMS) and Isha Chatani

(VSIPS). Executive Director Dr Arpit Awasthi praised the performance of students and wished them a bright future. The members of the Board of Management Ranjit Singh, Dr Pragma Awasthi, Principal Sandeep Singh Chandel and all faculty members were present.

# Boy hit by car, dies

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ PRAYAGRAJ

A minor boy was killed when a speeding car coming from Andawa hit him while he was playing near his house under the Jhansi police station area here on Thursday. On getting information about the incident the police took the body of the deceased into possession and sent it for post-mortem examination. The family rushed the injured child to the district hospital where the doctors declared him dead. His family members are shell-shocked and inconsolable. Jhansi police station in charge Upendra Pratap Singh said the driver managed to escape.

# Future plans of IIVR discussed

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ VARANASI

The quinquennial review meeting was held at Indian Institute of Vegetable Research (IIVR) at its Shahanshpur campus here on Wednesday in which progress, achievements of IIVR (2018-24) besides future plans of IIVR were discussed. In the meeting held under the chairmanship of former Vice-Chancellor of Kerala Agricultural University Dr P Rajendran, Executive Director Dr Nagendra Rai gave information about the achievements of IIVR. On behalf of the departments of the institute, Dr Anant Bahadur, Dr AN Singh and Dr Jagesh Tiwari highlighted the achievements and gave details of the work done in IIVR. On this occasion, Chairman of



QRT Dr Rajendran raised important issues for agriculture and especially vegetable crops on which scientists and policy makers need to think. These issues included the need to establish a seed network for availability of good seeds to farmers, the need for availability of mini kits of seeds for urban horticulture and the need to focus on the development of a pollen bank to

increase hybrid seed production. Member of the committee from Bidhan Chandra Agricultural University (West Bengal) Dr Pranab Hazra stressed the need to motivate youth to become entrepreneurs in the value chain related to vegetables. Member and Deputy Director of the Indian Council of Medical Research (Hyderabad) Dr K Bhaskaracharya stressed the need to provide new technologies to vegetable producers by developing a database of nutrients in vegetables and a decision support system for farmers. Dr Harikesh Bahadur Singh stressed the need to focus on microbial measures to reduce the use of chemicals by farmers in vegetables and to focus on the promotion of

organic farming. Dr KP Singh advised to run proper training programmes to take high quality technology to farmers. Principal scientist Dr Neeraj Singh presented details of the work being done by the institute in the interest of farmers. Dr Rajesh Kumar, Chairman of All India Coordinated Research Project (AICRP) presented the report on the work of the countrywide vegetable projects to the team. Team member secretary Dr RK Dubey took the team members on a tour of the vegetable production research field and laboratories and gave details of the work done on the suggestions of the previous committee. Dr Rajesh Kumar proposed the vote of thanks.

# Kovind stresses on youth participation in raising awareness about burning issues

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ KANPUR

The Sir Padampat Singhania Education Centre (SPSEC) commemorated 140 years of JK Organisation, 100 years of JK Cotton and 42 years of SPSEC with a sterling show in its premises on Wednesday. The distinguished chief guest for the day was former President Ram Nath Kovind. State Minister for Information and Technology Ajit Pal Singh was also present. First of all he visited the exhibition put up by budding scientists and technologists and was inquisitive and appreciative of the creative projects and efforts put in by the Singhanias. Tge Shri Govind Hari Singhania Centre for Advanced Learning (COAL), an extended skill school of SPSEC, that aims to foster modern technology integrated with liberal arts, performing arts and sciences, made the exhibition exquisite with various projects and live presentations.

The science exhibition was a true reflection of students' creativity, hard work and dedication. The captivating JK temple model made out of cardboard and recycled paper with solar working fountains made by class IX students stole the show. The AI powered, autonomous, tree-planting robot- SAPROBOT made by class X students was designed to restore India's ecosystems by automating reforestation, reflecting the annual theme of the school- Sustainable Kanpur. The Physics models by class XI portrayed a range of fundamental principles and innovative technologies highlighting the application of physics in developing sustainable and efficient technologies for the future. A comprehensive approach that aims to transform Kanpur into a model of sustainability and environmental responsibility was also presented by the students. The exhibition depicted students' creations in Science,



Former President Ram Nath Kovind being felicitated by the Chairman of JK Organisation Abhishek Singhania with a memento.

Vedic mathematics, Art and Sculpture, and Music and Dance. The learners of robotics showcased the unique robo dog, drones and UAVs and remote-controlled plane and car. The students of 3D printing depicted a plethora of cultural and religious items, creative designs and recreational models. The students of Meditation-Charkha showed their skills of meditation and mindfulness through the art of

spinning the wheel. After the national anthem the programme commenced with the ceremonial lighting of the lamp. The chief guest planted a sapling and ingeniated the annual theme of Sustainability: Cleaner and Greener Kanpur. His message of planting a sapling was a humble call for conserving the environment. Speaking on the occasion, Ram Nath Kovind expressed his admiration expressing utmost

marvel for the students, teachers and the management for orchestrating a profoundly message-driven programme. He enlightened the pupils on the importance of youth participating in creating awareness among the masses about the burning issues. Director, JK Organisation, Abhishek Singhania extended the welcome address to the dignitaries and expressed his heartfelt gratitude to the chief

guest. Chairperson Manorama Govind Hari Singhania expressed her pride in the journey that the group had embarked upon years ago. She depicted her earnest feelings of gratitude towards all for sharing the momentous occasion of the organisation accomplishing 140 years of achievement and growth. The prize distribution ceremony acknowledged toppers from all streams — Science, Commerce and Humanities with a total scholarship of ₹5,50,000 under the Shri Govind Hari Singhania Scholarship Award. Chief guest Ram Nath Kovind felicitated the stream toppers Arnay Gupta, Prarthana Singh, Asees Singh Sehgal and Mannika Jain with a scholarship of ₹50,000 each. The Manorama Govind Hari Singhania Fellowship for Aspiring Authors was awarded to three authors of the school, Abhiram Tiwari (class VI) for his book 'Last Corner of the Universe;

Anushka Sharma (class VIII) for 'Whisper of the Nature' and Avika Singh (class XII) for 'Anything Good'. Special awards, including the Lady Anusuiya Singhania Memorial Award and Sensational Sports Star Award, were conferred on students. The Outstanding Student of the Year (Alumni Award) was presented. The Founder Chairman's Gold Medal Award was also conferred on an exemplary scholar. The teachers Mehak Sial, Mamta Kapoor, Rashmi Gidwani and Neha Mishra were also felicitated for completing 10 years of service. The Best Teacher Award was given to Kirti Sharma. The vote of thanks was delivered by Vice-Chairman Partho P Kar. The compères were Avika Singh (class XII) and Kartavya Gupta (class XI) while Abhi Singh and Tanmay Shukla (both class XII) and Aavanya Mehrotra (class XI), portrayed the steep growth of the school throughout the year through

the Annual School Report. Ramayana, the Eternal Saga, a dance drama portrayed the heart touching journey of Lord Rama from his childhood, to his exile and the triumphant return to Ayodhya. Shivoham: The Cosmic Chant enthused a spirit of positivity and spirituality among the spectators. The song 'We are the World' by the school choir touched the hearts of listeners. The vocalists Vatsala Bajpai (class XII), and Aradhya Gupta (class IX), mesmerised the gathering with their ragas while Ojas Bajpai (class VII) enthralled the audience with his 'ghazal' and Navya Shukla (class VII) with her poem. School chairperson Manorama Govind Hari Singhania, Director JK Organisation, Abhishek Singhania, Vice-Chairperson, Varsha Singhania and Vice-Chairman Partho P Kar graced the occasion. School principal Bhawna Gupta spearheaded the event.

# India's air pollution cost 1.5 Million lives annually, claims new study

**PIONEER NEWS SERVICE**  
NEW DELHI

Long-term exposure to fine particulate matter (PM2.5) pollution, a significant environmental and health hazard across India, has claimed a staggering 1.5 million lives reported annually between 2009 and 2019, as per a recent study published in *The Lancet Planetary Health* journal.

Highlighting the severe health impacts of toxic pollutants on the citizens, researchers found that the entire 1.4 billion population of the

country lives in areas with PM2.5 levels exceeding the WHO recommended threshold of five micrograms per cubic meter for a yearly average.

The study by the Consortium for Climate, Health, and Air Pollution Research in India (CHAIR-India) also highlighted that nearly 82 per cent of the population, or about 1.1 billion people, resided in regions where the PM2.5 levels surpassed the Indian National Ambient Air Quality Standards, which set a limit of 40 micrograms per cubic meter annually. PM2.5 refers to fine particulate mat-

ter measuring less than 2.5 microns in diameter, and exposure to these pollutants is linked to a range of health problems, including respiratory and cardiovascular diseases. PM2.5 air pollution comes from the burning of fossil fuels and biomass in sectors such as transportation, residential homes, coal-burning power plants, industrial activities, and wildfires. These emissions not only impact people's health but also contribute to the greenhouse gases that are warming the planet. The study observed a significant correlation between PM2.5 pollution



A commuter walks to their office amid low visibility due to smog in New Delhi.

levels and mortality rates, with a 10-micron per cubic meter increase in yearly pollution linked to an 8.6 per cent rise in annual deaths. The researchers from CHAIR-India, a global consortium of academic institutions including Ashoka University, Karolinska Institutet (Sweden), Harvard University, and Ben-Gurion University (Israel) used data from satellite observations and over 1,000 ground-monitoring stations, and also gathered death statistics from the Civil Registration System.

The findings underscore the wide-spread nature of PM2.5 exposure across the country. While the lowest annual PM2.5 level recorded in Lower Subansiri district, Arunachal Pradesh, at 11.2 microns per cubic meter in 2019, the highest levels were recorded in Ghaziabad, Uttar Pradesh, and Delhi, where PM2.5 concentrations soared to 119 microns per cubic meter in 2016.

The study reveals the pressing need for robust air quality monitoring and stricter pollution control measures in India, given the country's large and consistent exposure to harmful air pollutants.

## Shah to visit Naxal-affected areas of Chhattisgarh



**PIONEER NEWS SERVICE**  
NEW DELHI

Union Home Minister Amit Shah will be on a three-day visit to Chhattisgarh's Naxal-affected areas from December 14 during which he will review the law-and-order situation in the state and interact with surrendered Naxals and locals, sources said on Thursday. Last week, Chhattisgarh Chief Minister Vishnu Dev Sai met Shah here and conveyed to him that the Bastar and Kondagaon districts, once infested by Naxals, were completely free from the extremists and operations were on to wipe them out from other areas. The Union home minister will be on a visit to Chhattisgarh from December 14-16 during which he will participate in various programmes related to

security and peace, sources said. Besides chairing a security review meeting in Raipur, Shah will also present the President's Colour Award to the Chhattisgarh Police. He will travel to Jagdalpur, where he will hold interaction with surrendered Naxals, locals and intellectuals, they said. The Union home minister will also attend the closing ceremony of the Bastar olympics and pay tributes to martyrs in Jagdalpur besides meeting the families of the victims of left-wing extremism. Shah will visit security camps and oversee developmental works besides having lunch with jawans of security forces there.

'President's Colour' is expected to boost the morale of Chhattisgarh Police after their excellent work in tackling the Naxals over the years, the sources said. This medal will give new impetus to the sense of duty of these police personnel who are committed to the service and security of the people of the state, they said. "Under the leadership of Prime Minister Narendra Modi, operations are being conducted against Naxalism with a 'Zero Tolerance' policy and ultra-modern methods," a source said.

## Bihar registers officials on skill building platform

**PIONEER NEWS SERVICE**  
NEW DELHI

The Bihar government has onboarded over 2.4 lakh officials on an online training platform, according to an official statement issued on Thursday. Under the Mission Karmayogi initiative, an MoU was signed on October 7 between the Capacity Building Commission (CBC), Karmayogi Bharat (a special purpose vehicle), and the Bihar Institute of Public Administration and Rural Development (BIPARD). This agreement aims to strengthen the capabilities of government officials and employees in Bihar so that all public servants can become role-based instead of rule-based, said the statement issued by the Personnel Ministry. This will be achieved through the iGOT (integrated government online training) Karmayogi platform, which is a flagship digital initiative aimed at empowering government servants. It will also function as a robust e-learning hub, the statement said. Development for Bihar's civil servants, ultimately ensuring better public service delivery, the statement said.

# Road accidents on the rise, says Gadkari

**PIONEER NEWS SERVICE**  
NEW DELHI

Union Road Transport and Highways Minister Nitin Gadkari on Thursday said here "When I go to attend international conferences where there is a discussion on road accidents, I try to hide my face." He also underlined that he had set a target to reduce accidents by 50 per cent when he first took charge as the Road Transport and Highways Minister. During a discussion on road accidents in Lok Sabha, "Forget about reducing the number of accidents, I have no hesitation to admit that it has been increased. When I go to attend international conferences where there is a discussion on road accidents, I try to hide my face." He was replying to a supplementary question during the Question Hour. The minister said for things to improve



The minister added, "When I go to attend international conferences where there is a discussion on road accidents, I try to hide my face."

human behaviour in India has to change, society has to change and rule of law has to be respected. Gadkari said he and his family met with a major accident some years ago and he needed to be hospitalised for a long time. "By the grace of God, I and my

family were saved. So I have my personal experience of accidents." He said parking of trucks on road is a major cause for accidents and many of the trucks don't follow lane discipline. The minister said he has ordered for following international standards in

making bus body in India. There has to be a hammer near a bus window so that it can be broken easily in case of accidents, he said.

Earlier, Gadkari said road accidents claim 1.78 lakh lives annually in the country and 60 per cent of the victims are in the age group of 18-34 years. He said while Uttar Pradesh leads the chart among states, Delhi tops the list for cities. In UP, over 23,000 people (or 13.7 per cent of the total deaths due to road accidents) died, followed by Tamil Nadu with over 18,000 (10.6 per cent) deaths.

In Maharashtra, the figure stands at over 15,000 (or nine per cent of the total deaths), followed by Madhya Pradesh with over 13,000 (eight per cent) deaths.

Delhi leads the city chart with over 1,400 deaths, followed by Bengaluru with 915 deaths. Jaipur registers 850 deaths due to road accidents.

## CISF security personnel sanctioned for Noida and Navi Mumbai airports

**PIONEER NEWS SERVICE**  
NEW DELHI

The Union government has sanctioned a combined strength of more than 2,800 Central Industrial Security Force (CISF) personnel to guard two soon-to-be operational international airports in Noida and in Maharashtra's Navi Mumbai, official sources said Thursday.

The ministry of home affairs (MHA), under whose command the CISF works, had sanctioned 1,840 posts for the Navi Mumbai airport and 1,030 for the Noida International Airport (NIA) in Uttar Pradesh. The total CISF manpower sanctioned for providing a counter-terrorist cover to the two upcoming airports is 2,870. The sanction of the Central Industrial Security Force (CISF) manpower is for the first phase of operationalisation of the two airports. The force's strength will be enhanced once these airports finish phase II, sources said. The security units, to be headed by Deputy Inspector General rank officers, will take charge once the infrastructure to install security gadgets and other logistics get ready at both the facilities. Being developed by the Adani

Group, the Navi Mumbai International Airport project will be completed in five phases and will have a total handling capacity of 9 crore passengers per annum. The first phase will have a capacity to handle 2 crore passengers per annum. Commercial operations at this airport, second in the Mumbai Metropolitan Region after the Chhatrapati Shivaji Maharaj International Airport, are expected to begin by March-April 2025.

The NIA greenfield facility is being built in the Jewar area of Gautam Buddha Nagar district in Uttar Pradesh, about 75 km from Delhi, and will be the national capital region's second international civil aviation facility after the Indira Gandhi International (IGI) Airport. It is also expected to get operational for passenger operations by April next year. The CISF is the national civil aviation security force that guards 68 airports at present. It provides a counter-terrorist cover to these facilities, thronged by lakhs of domestic and international passengers every day. The force frisks passengers, checks their baggage and undertakes anti-sabotage, counter-terrorist and counter-hijack checks in coordination with other agencies.

## Sagarika moves privilege motion against Rijiju for derogatory remarks



Ghose said, "Mr. Kiren Rijiju, instead of doing his best to run Parliament smoothly, has chosen to repeatedly insult the Opposition."

**PIONEER NEWS SERVICE**  
NEW DELHI

'Trinamool Congress' Rajya Sabha MP Sagarika Ghose on Thursday submitted a privilege motion notice against Parliamentary Affairs Minister Kiren Rijiju for making a derogatory remark against opposition leaders in the Upper House. The notice has been signed by 60 leaders from opposition parties, a source said.

instead of doing his best to run Parliament smoothly, has chosen to repeatedly insult the opposition," Ghose told reporters. "Rijiju has insulted opposition members and used personal terms both inside and outside Parliament. This is totally unbecoming of the high office he holds and amounts to total misuse of his position," TMC's deputy leader in the Rajya Sabha said. She said she had moved a privilege motion against Rijiju for abusing his office with his "diatribes and unparliamentary language" against opposition. The motion has been signed by senior leaders of all

opposition parties, she added. Opposition MPs are "not worthy of being in the House", Rijiju said on Wednesday while hitting out at opposition parties over their attacks on Vice President and Rajya Sabha Chairman Jagdeep Dhankhar. "If you cannot respect the chair you have no right to be a member of this House," Rijiju said. Sixty MPs from the opposition INDIA bloc on Tuesday submitted a notice in the Rajya Sabha for moving a no-confidence motion against Dhankhar. They have accused him of being "extremely partisan" in his role as the chairman of the Upper House.

## TMC pitches for Didi to lead INDIA

**SAUGAR SENGUPTA** ■ KOLKATA

The Trinamool Congress (TMC) has said that West Bengal Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee is more interested in dislodging the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) government at the Centre than leading the Indian National Democratic Inclusive Alliance (INDIA). Close on the heels of some senior INDIA leaders advocating Banerjee's cause for leading the opposition alliance, senior TMC leader Kunal Ghose said that "Mamata Banerjee has made it clear that she is not interested in any chair in Delhi. She is more interested in building an alternative platform which can defeat the BJP". Curiously, instead of dwelling on

the Banerjee's cause that was recently upheld by her party MP Sagarika Ghose and often discussed in the TMC mouthpiece Jago Bangla, Ghose tended to shift the fulcrum of discussion on the Congress' failure to lead the Opposition in Haryana, Rajasthan, Madhya Pradesh and more recently Maharashtra saying a time had come when the Congress party should start doing some self-inspection on the causes of its repeated failures. Incidentally the Bengal Chief Minister who has been touring East Midnapore earlier expressed gratitude to the senior INDIA leaders for reposing faith on her but avoided making any assertive statement on the contentious issue. "I am grateful to all the leaders

who have honoured me. I wish good health to all of them. May they be well, may their party be well. May India be well," she said in a brief statement. However voicing her frustration post INDIA's repeated defeats in a number of States as also in Delhi Banerjee had said "I created the 'INDIA' alliance. If those leading it cannot manage it well, then give me a chance. I am ready to lead the alliance from Bengal." Early this week senior INDIA leader and RJD patriarch Lalu Yadav once known for his unwavering faith in Rahul Gandhi said "Mamata Banerjee should be chosen as the leader of the 'INDIA' alliance. There's no point in Congress opposing this. She should be made the leader."

## Fadnavis reaches Delhi for Cabinet expansion talks

**TN RAGHUNATHA** ■ MUMBAI

Maharashtra chief minister Devendra Fadnavis will undertake first-ever expansion of his new Cabinet during the weekend, ahead of the brief three-day winter session beginning in Nagpur on December 16. Ahead of the State Cabinet expansion, Fadnavis met Prime Minister Narendra Modi, Union Ministers Amit Shah, Nitin Gadkari, Rajnath Singh and National BJP president JP Nadra in New Delhi.

During his two-day visit to the national capital, Fadnavis made courtesy calls to President Droupadi Murmu and Vice President Jagdeep Dhankhar. He also met Union Minister of State Murlidhar Mohol and BJP National General Secretary Vinod Tawde at Maharashtra Sadan. During his meeting with Shah, Fadnavis is understood to have discussed matters relating to the impending State Cabinet expansion. "It was an absolute pleasure to meet and interact with Hon Union and Cooperation Minister Amit Shah at his residence in New Delhi. Also presented him a 'murti' of Swatantrya Veer Vinayak Damodar Savarkar," Fadnavis wrote on "X". After his meeting with the Prime Minister, Fadnavis remarked on "X": "Extremely thankful to Hon PM Narendra Modi ji for your valuable time, guidance, bless-



ings and standing firm behind Maharashtra. In the last 10 years, with your support Maharashtra is Number 1 in almost every sector and now aims to take this journey of VIKAS to the next level under your leadership and guidance. You have always been an inspiration to crores of BJP Karyakartas like us to work even harder". Talking separately to the media, Fadnavis said: "I had a good meeting with the Prime Minister and issues related to Maharashtra were discussed. He extended full support to the state government". During the meeting with Shah, Fadnavis is understood to have discussed various issues relating

to Maharashtra, including the impending State Cabinet expansion and portfolio allocations. Interacting with the media, Fadnavis said: "Our list of ministers would be finalised by the BJP high-command. On the other hand, Shinde Saheb would take a call on Shiv Sena members to be inducted in the ministry. Ajit Dada Pawar will decide on who will be there from his party in the State Cabinet". Interestingly enough, Fadnavis and deputy chief minister Ajit Pawar are in New Delhi. However, deputy chief minister Eknath Shinde has chosen not to accompany Fadnavis to the national capital. Sources close to Shinde attributed Shinde's decision to accom-

pany Fadnavis to New Delhi is that he is not happy with the portfolio allocations proposed by Fadnavis. For, the ruling BJP is not willing to give important portfolios like Home, Urban Development and Revenue to the Shiv Sena (Shinde), a thing that has not gone well with Shinde who was demanding one or two of the three major portfolios. Asked if Shinde had chosen not to accompany him to the national capital because he was upset with the portfolio allocations proposed by the BJP, Fadnavis said: "My purpose of visit is different...Ajit Dada's purpose and engagements are different...Shinde Saheb has some work in Mumbai."

On his part, Ajit Pawar said that he along with his wife and Rajya Sabha member Sunetra Pawar, NCP Working President Prafulla Patel and state party president Sunil Tatkar met NCP (SP) supremo Sharad Pawar and his wife Pratibha Pawar. "Today is (Pawar) Saheb's birthday... Tomorrow is Kaki's (Pratibha Patil's) birthday...we all wished them...some relations are beyond politics... (late Congress stalwart and first Chief Minister) Yashwantrao Chavan has taught us how to do cultured politics and we try to follow him," said Pawar. Queried if politics was discussed, Ajit Pawar said: "Pawar Saheb discussed issues related to Maharashtra... right from Parbhani violence to Parliament disruption, state cabinet expansion among others." Meanwhile, Fadnavis, Shinde and Ajit Pawar have reported arrived at a consensus on the size and division of the State Cabinet. Since the Maharashtra Assembly comprises 288 members, there will be a maximum of 43 ministers in the State Cabinet -- a number that accounts for 15 per cent of total members in the lower House of the State Legislature. In the normal course, the BJP will get 21 ministerial berths in the 43-member Cabinet, while the Shiv Sena is entitled for 12 ministries and the Ajit Pawar-led NCP will have to be satisfied with 10 berths.

## Ajit Doval, Chinese counterpart to hold talks on border issue

**PIONEER NEWS SERVICE** ■ NEW DELHI

National Security Advisor(NSA) Ajit Doval and his Chinese counterpart Wang Yi, who is also foreign minister, will discuss later this month here all aspects of the boundary issue between the two nations. The likely meeting under the aegis of Special Representative(SR) talks, will take place as armies of India and China have disengaged a few weeks ago from the Line of Actual Control(LAC) in Ladakh after four years, sources said here on Thursday. The high-level talks between the two Special Representatives will mark the first parleys since the Galwan valley clash in 2020. The previous SR talks were held in December 2019. The upcoming dialogue comes in the wake of recent disengagement of troops from both the sides from friction points at Depsang and Demchok. The parleys may see a breakthrough in the broader resolution of the border dispute. The SR talks are expected to involve multilayered discussions aimed at defining and delineating the LAC more clearly, with the ultimate goal of achieving a lasting resolution. Sources indicate that the outcome of these talks will determine the timeline for the next Corps Commander-level meeting, which will focus on operational issues regarding the ongoing patrolling

and buffer zones to prevent further confrontations. India and China have engaged in a series of military and diplomatic efforts to de-escalate the situation along the LAC since 2020. The SR level talks represent a crucial opportunity for both nations to address their differences, enhance trust, and establish a more stable framework for managing their contested border. The SR talks come days after Defence Minister Rajnath Singh held talks with his Chinese counterpart Admiral Dong Jun in Vientiane, Lao PDR on November 20 on the sidelines of 11th ASEAN Defence Ministers' Meeting-Plus. This was the first meeting of the two Defence Ministers following the recent disengagement agreements, and the meeting of Prime Minister Narendra Modi and Chinese President Xi Jinping on the sidelines of BRICS summit. Rajnath highlighted the fact that amicable relations between India and China, the two largest nations in the world, would have positive implications for global peace and prosperity. Considering that both countries are and will continue to remain neighbours, he mentioned that "we need to focus on cooperation rather than conflict". Rajnath called for reflecting on the lessons learnt from the unfortunate border clashes of 2020, take measures to prevent recurrence of such events and safeguard peace and tranquility along the India-China border.



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PAPER WITH PASSION

## Empowering young innovators

Prime Minister Modi highlights the role of young minds in tackling real-world challenges with creativity and technology

The best way to predict the future is to invent it, said Alan Kay. And indeed how true it is for a nation. A nation that invents and finds solution to its problems marches on the path to progress. Echoing the same sentiment, Prime Minister Narendra Modi highlighted the pivotal role of innovation in nation-building during his interaction at the Smart India Hackathon (SIH) 2024, emphasising how young minds are shaping the future through creativity and technological ingenuity. The event, which included participation from over 1,300 student teams across India, showcased groundbreaking ideas aimed at solving real-world challenges. The SIH is a testament to the transformative power of education and innovation in building a self-reliant India. The event not only bridges the gap between academia and industry but also fosters a culture of collaboration and problem-solving. At the National Institute of Technology (NIT) Srinagar, which hosted the grand



finale of the software edition for the first time, 25 exceptional teams from 21 states convened to present their innovative solutions.

The hackathon addressed 250 problem statements submitted by 54 ministries, departments, state governments, public sector units (PSUs), and industries, covering sectors like healthcare, sustainability, education, disaster management and agriculture. With a 240 per cent increase in participation compared to the previous year, SIH 2024 is the largest edition to date, involving over 86,000 teams at the institute level and 49,000 at the national level. Among the standout participants was the 'Big

Brains Team' from NIT Srinagar, led by Syeeda Aiemn D Saleem. The team worked on an AI-powered Virtual Reality Friend, a tool designed to assist children with autism spectrum disorder and intellectual disabilities. The project, developed under the Ministry of Social Justice and Empowerment, aims to help children enhance social and interactive skills in a simulated environment. PM Modi lauded the team's empathetic approach, emphasising the global relevance of such solutions and their potential to transform lives. PM Modi's interaction with the participants highlighted his vision of leveraging local innovation to address global challenges. He stressed that solutions tailored for India's unique needs could resonate globally, contributing to the world's progress. "Every child has the right to grow and prosper, and innovative solutions like these ensure no one is left behind," he remarked. By providing a platform for young minds to explore, collaborate and innovate, the Smart India Hackathon is shaping the next generation of problem-solvers and leaders. As India aims to establish itself as a global innovation hub, initiatives like SIH play a crucial role in realising this vision, reaffirming the transformative power of education and technology in nation-building.

## PICTALK



Young women visit a snow covered park after snowfall in Shimla

## AI's boost to the spirit of service

From streamlining efforts to enhancing inclusivity, AI is reshaping how volunteers connect, contribute and make an impact



RAJDEEP PATHAK

Volunteering has long been a vital pillar of community development, social change, and global solidarity, offering individuals a meaningful way to contribute to society while fostering personal growth. In today's interconnected and fast-paced world, the concept of volunteering is undergoing a dynamic transformation, largely driven by advances in technology. The International Volunteer Day (IVD), celebrated globally on December 5, 2024, under the theme "Economic and Social Development," highlighted the pivotal role of volunteers in shaping a better world. Sub-themes emphasised their contributions to alleviating crises and supporting underprivileged populations affected by natural disasters, man-made crises, or socio-economic challenges. Volunteers have consistently been on the frontlines of crisis management, stepping in where governments and organisations often encounter limitations. Whether during pandemics, natural disasters, or humanitarian emergencies, their role remains indispensable, particularly for vulnerable populations. The advent of advanced technologies, particularly Artificial Intelligence (AI), is significantly reshaping the landscape of volunteerism. AI enhances the efficiency, inclusivity, and accessibility of volunteering initiatives, ensuring they have a far-reaching impact. By leveraging AI-driven tools, organisations are creating platforms that align volunteer skills with opportunities, reduce mismatches, and optimise efforts. This transformation not only improves the volunteer experience but also amplifies the positive outcomes for communities in need. AI-powered platforms such as "HelpFinder" are revolutionising how volunteers are matched with organisations. By analysing data on individual skills, interests, and locations, these platforms ensure that volunteers are placed where they can make the most meaningful contributions. This precision reduces mismatches, boosts retention rates, and fosters a sense of accomplishment among volunteers. During crises, AI-powered systems can quickly

analyse data to identify affected areas and volunteer availability, enabling swift deployment to critical zones. For example, during the COVID-19 pandemic, AI-driven platforms like "OneRescue" coordinated volunteer initiatives for contact tracing, mental health support, and supply distribution, proving invaluable in mitigating the crisis. Corporate social responsibility initiatives also benefit from AI. Tools like "Benevity" facilitate employee engagement by connecting them with volunteer opportunities that align with organisational goals. These solutions ensure streamlined coordination, impactful volunteering, and sustained enthusiasm among participants. AI-powered chatbots further enhance volunteer experiences by providing instant support, answering queries and assisting with training. In India, a nation of 1.45 billion people, the ethos of service is deeply ingrained in its culture. Family values, religious teachings, and community traditions emphasise the importance of helping others. Today, AI is augmenting these efforts. Chatbots are used to handle volunteer queries related to vaccination drives, maternal health, women's and children's safety, and more. In the UK, AI-driven systems have optimised food bank logistics and facilitated grocery deliveries to vulnerable indi-

viduals, demonstrating how technology empowers volunteers to make a tangible difference. Innovative applications like "Be My Eyes" enable volunteers to assist visually impaired individuals remotely, while platforms like "GoodSAM" connect trained volunteers with emergency services in real time. For example, volunteers alerted through GoodSAM can provide critical assistance such as CPR or use an Automated External Defibrillator (AED) before professional help arrives. Virtual volunteering has further expanded opportunities for professionals to contribute their expertise remotely. Platforms like "Catchafire" and the UN's Online Volunteering Service facilitate mentoring, legal advice, language translation, and more, breaking geographical barriers and making volunteering more inclusive. Digital tools have eliminated traditional obstacles to volunteering, such as physical distance, time constraints, and accessibility issues. People with disabilities, caregivers, or those in remote locations can now volunteer from their homes. This inclusivity aligns with the 2024 IVD theme, fostering collaboration among diverse communities toward the shared goal of economic and social development. By harnessing the right technology and resources, volun-

teers can work together to address pressing global challenges. In natural disasters like hurricanes, earthquakes, and floods, volunteers equipped with drones and AI tools can map affected areas and deliver supplies more efficiently. Apps like "Zello" enable seamless communication during emergencies, transforming smartphones into walkie-talkies for coordination. In efforts to combat poverty and hunger, volunteers support food banks, organise community kitchens, and deliver resources. Digital tools like "ShareTheMeal," a United Nations World Food Programme crowdfunding app, empower individuals to donate meals with a simple tap, making a significant impact on global hunger. Education is another critical sector where volunteering, supported by technology, has made remarkable strides. Online platforms have democratised access to education, reaching remote and underserved communities. Initiatives like "Code.org" empower volunteers to teach coding skills, equipping students with the tools needed for a technology-driven future. Gender-focused volunteer programmes address inequality by providing legal aid, counseling and advocacy for women's rights, further demonstrating the transformative power of volunteering.

(The writer is Programme Executive, Gandhi Smriti and Darshan Samiti; views are



AI ENHANCES THE EFFICIENCY, INCLUSIVITY AND ACCESSIBILITY OF VOLUNTEERING INITIATIVES, ENSURING THEY HAVE A FAR-REACHING IMPACT. BY LEVERAGING AI-DRIVEN TOOLS, ORGANISATIONS ARE CREATING PLATFORMS THAT ALIGN VOLUNTEER SKILLS WITH OPPORTUNITIES, REDUCE MISMATCHES AND OPTIMISE EFFORTS

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## LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

## INDIA'S SOFT POWER POLICY

Madam — The ongoing conflict in Gaza and Israel's military action against Hamas have drawn global attention. In this context, Israeli Ambassador to India, Reuven Azar, praised India's soft power policy, underlining its relevance in international diplomacy. He acknowledged that Israel, due to its heavy reliance on military strength, has lagged in areas like information management and public relations. India has strengthened its global position through diplomacy, cultural influence, and dialogue as key tools of soft power. Initiatives like yoga, cultural exchanges, and multilateral diplomacy have not only earned India international goodwill but also enhanced its global image. Despite its firm stance against terrorism, India has effectively combined dialogue and public relations to make its policies inspirational for the global community. In contrast, Israel's excessive reliance on military power weakens it in ideological battles, further complicated by adversarial propaganda from Arab media. Military strength alone is insufficient; tools of soft power, such as dialogue, empathy, and media management, are essential for long-term success. India's example demonstrates that balancing soft and hard power not only safeguards national interests but also garners global acceptance. Israel should take inspiration from India's strategy to refine its policies and strengthen its information and public relations framework.

R K Jain | Barwani

Madam — Apropos of the headlines 'Identify illegal Bangladeshi immigrants, orders LG' (December 11), it is welcome that prominent Ulemas and Muslim leaders have taken up the issue of illegal Bangladeshi immigrants with the government and thus depoliticised the issue in favour of the Muslim community, Delhi, and the entire country. There are countrywide agitations and

demonstrations against atrocities on Hindus in Bangladesh and Bangladeshi illegal immigrants. The issue of illegal immigrants, whether from Bangladesh, African countries, or any other country, being detrimental to the integrity of the country, law and order, and social fabric and homogeneity poses potential challenges of demographic change, crime control, drug menace, security, and anarchy. However, this is a very formidable challenge for the government to work out the strategy and implement it in view of the opposition from the immigrants and their local political harborers. A question will certainly arise why only in Delhi and why not in the entire country. There may be a spate of court cases as well in view of the large-scale illegal issue of identity cards of Aadhar, PAN, or BPL. It is, therefore, imperative that a nationwide strategy should be evolved and implemented firmly. Of course, the political parties following an appeasement agenda and vote bank politics will leave no stone unturned to disrupt it, but

it is a national priority and a security threat.

Vinod Johri | Delhi

## VOTERS' NAME DELETED

Madam — The deletion of the eligible voter's name before the election has encroached about the entire country and is intensifying terrifically. The senior AAP leader Sanjay Singh highlighted an application for the deletion of 3,800 voters' names in just the RK Puram constituency. Such incidents are frequently observed before polls, which wrest the voting rights and thwart them to contribute to choosing preferred leaders. It's an out-and-out violation of the Universal Adult Franchise" in the largest democratic country. It's a grave issue that demands urgent action. The EC must not turn into a complaint tool instead of a neutral body and deploy every effort to address it and ensure the voter's right.

Jakir Hussain | Kanpur

Send your feedback to: letterstopioneer@gmail.com

## The transformative role of interactive learning in education

This modern approach is not just a shift in teaching strategies but a leap toward preparing students for the dynamic demands of the future workforce

The landscape of education has evolved significantly, with technological advancements and the integration of AI, making interactive learning a favoured approach. Because interactive learning fosters engagement, critical thinking and long-term memory, it makes it possible for knowledge to be assimilated more thoroughly. This is unquestionably an improvement over the conventional approaches, which mostly emphasise rote memory and depend largely on textbook-based techniques. The abilities needed in today's dynamic environment are better suited for interactive learning. Passively absorbing knowledge using conventional teaching approaches results in surface learning, which is ultimately counterproductive. According to National Training Laboratories research, passive learning techniques like reading and lectures only have recall rates of 5-10 per cent. The Advent of Interactive Learning: A more hands-on approach is provided by interactive learning, which combines technology, teamwork,



and real-world problem-solving. This increases engagement and extends retention. Digital tools, project-based learning, and group discussions are all included in this approach's scope. Students in interactive classrooms outperformed those in traditional lectures by 6 per cent on examinations, according to Harvard University research. Here are some ways that interactive learning approaches work better than conventional strategies:

1. **Enhanced Retention:** According to National Training Laboratories research, active learning strategies like practice-by-doing and group discussions had higher retention rates, ranging from 50 to 75 per cent. Students may directly apply STEM principles

through hands-on experiences. According to research from the American Society for Engineering Education, pupils who participated in interactive STEM activities learned much more than those who received standard instruction.

2. **Encouraging Critical Thinking:** Interactive learning promotes creativity and critical thinking by allowing students to investigate other viewpoints and pose questions. According to a McKinsey & Company research, interactive learning environments foster critical thinking and reflection while increasing student engagement and fostering productive social interactions. Another immersive method of student engagement is gamification, which boosts students' incentive to tackle challenging issues and permits in-depth learning.

3. **Real-World Application:** Project-based learning, which links education to real-world issues and increases the applicability of information in practical contexts, is a crucial element of interactive learning. In contrast to students who studied using traditional

al techniques, students who participated in project-based programs demonstrated superior application of information to real-life circumstances, according to a 2022 research by Edutopia.

4. **Future Ready:** Through more engaging and relevant instruction, interactive learning equips students to overcome obstacles more effectively than traditional approaches ever could. To educate students for the uncertain and constantly changing times, education must emphasise abilities like problem-solving, teamwork, and flexibility in today's competitive labor market. Interactive approaches also boost motivation and encourage teamwork, which aids students in honing their communication and teamwork abilities. The global EdTech market is expected to grow to \$404 billion by 2025, according to EdTechXGlobal. Students that use an interactive learning technique not only perform better academically but are also better prepared to handle problems in the real world.

(The writer is Founder Zamit; views are personal)



AARUL MALAVIYA

## UNEP honours Madhav Gadgil



India's veteran ecologist and nature scientist Madhav Gadgil has been named as one of the six 'Champions of the Earth' by the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) for 2024. He is renowned for his seminal work in the ecologically fragile Western Ghats region of India, which is a unique global biodiversity hotspot. Gadgil made an extensive study on the Western Ghats region, chairing the Western

Ghats Ecology Expert Panel in 2011, and came out with a list of grim and grave findings for the Western Ghats region.

The panel's report, which is popularly known as the Gadgil report, recommended in 2011 that the entire hill range be declared an ecologically sensitive area and recommended a ban on mining, quarrying, industries, new thermal power plants, hydropower projects, and large-scale wind energy projects. Gadgil's bold and honest recommendations faced opposition from some of the state governments, political bigwigs, industries, and local communities. Braving all odds, he championed the protection of the earth and the environment. Gadgil's research has helped to protect marginalised people, promote community-driven conservation of ecosystems and influence policymaking at the highest level.

M Pradyu | Kannur



## FIRST COLUMN

## INDIA SHARES ITS VISION FOR WEST ASIA

The Manama Dialogue provided India with a platform to outline its vision for regional stability



KUMARDEEP BANARJEE

Even as Syria was undergoing huge regime change, with a possibility of leaving a long-lasting impact on the geo-political mix of West Asia, India's external affairs minister was delivering a lecture on the changing dynamics of international cooperation at the Manama Dialogue. The Manama dialogue is a platform to bring policy makers, and ministers to discuss and debate the strategic defence, security and foreign challenges of West Asia. The dialogue happening against the backdrop of the fast-changing narrative in Syria provided India with a unique opportunity to weigh on its most pressing concerns in and for the region. Syria has been ruled by the Assad dynasty for nearly 50 years. However, this dynastic rule converted the country, on the border of Turkey and Jordan into a brutal police state. Russia and Iran had been supportive of the Assad dynasty, for strategic reasons. Iran supported the regime, to build its axis of resistance against Israel, while Russia, has air force and naval bases in Syria. Global leaders are watching the Syria theatre closely even as Israel continues its war in the neighbourhood. The storming of Israeli troops in Gaza and Ukraine, distracted Russia, which led to the exit of Bashar Al Assad last week. However, what is of concern to many would be, the rise of rebel leader Abu Mohammed al-Jawfani, an ex-AI Qaeda member.

Syria despite the dynastic rule managed to maintain a secular political outlook where minorities and diverse groups did not feel any discrimination. Many fear that the rebel leader with AI Qaeda credentials, may push the state to a hardline Islamist nation. Almost every nation in the neighbourhood including Israel is watching the unfolding situation care-



fully. Delhi has been agnostic to the regime change, even though the Assad dynasty has been supportive of India's position on Kashmir, and its stance with Islamabad. Any unfriendly regime in the region would weaken India's position and could be a security concern as well.

Against this backdrop, the Manama dialogue, with several leaders from the West Asia and the Indo-Pacific, provided an important platform for engagement. Mentioning the ongoing conflicts impacting the region S Jaishankar said, "And this today would extend from Gaza to Lebanon and now to Syria as well. But at the same time, we have to be realistic about competing interests in this region... The second political-diplomatic cooperation that we can think of is really at a time when the world is polarised if not downright violent, how do you prevent an escalation of tensions, how do you prevent conflict from spreading further. In recent times, for all of us, the relationship or absence of it between Israel and Iran has been particularly a source of concern, so some of our diplomatic efforts has focused on that particular aspect. There has been the situation in the Red Sea as well. On a more positive note, the third aspect of the political-diplomatic, I would say, we are also looking at certain trend lines coming out of this region. We have been a supporter of the Abraham Accords and some years ago, we started a grouping called I2U2, which involves India, Israel, the US and the UAE. It is still at a relatively early stage and we certainly hope that in the coming days that its a group that will grow."

India in the past decade, has a trade-oriented foreign policy outlook, where, it knows that nothing binds countries more than an economic partnership. Mr Jaishankar mentioned that India has nearly \$170- 180 billion with the ten-member Gulf Cooperation Council and significant economic relations with countries in the Mediterranean. A new US president from January would also be a key benchmark to watch out for days to come. The relationships are most likely to be economic and based on mutual interests.

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

## The dawn of a new era: Syria's path forward

As Syria comes to terms with Assad's departure, the road ahead promises opportunities for renewal but is fraught with risks that will test the resolve of its new leadership



NISHAKANT OJHA



The fall of Bashar al-Assad's regime and the appointment of Mohammed al-Bashir as Syria's Prime Minister on December 10, 2024, mark a watershed moment in the nation's history, offering a mix of promise and uncertainty. This transition signals the end of an era defined by authoritarian rule, civil war and foreign interventions, ushering in a period of both opportunity and immense challenge. Assad's departure, driven by a combination of Russian withdrawal and external pressures, has created a power vacuum with significant implications. Mohammed al-Bashir, a moderate politician known for his diplomatic acumen, has pledged to prioritise national reconciliation and reconstruction. His leadership represents a shift from the autocratic governance of the past toward a more inclusive and reform-oriented approach. However, stabilising Syria remains an uphill battle.

Despite al-Bashir's efforts, large swathes of the country remain fragmented, with control divided among Kurdish forces, remnants of opposition groups, and radical elements. Moreover, millions of Syrians continue to suffer from displacement, poverty and inadequate access to basic services, underscoring the dire need for humanitarian aid and international support. Compounding these challenges is Syria's shattered economy, which demands both immediate stabilisation and long-term rebuilding strategies.

The role of covert operations by the Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) in the fall of Assad's regime cannot be overlooked. Since the early years of the Syrian Civil War, the CIA has employed programmes such as Operation Timber Sycamore to train and arm select rebel factions, aiming to counter Assad's government, which had strong backing from Russia and Iran. These operations evolved



PRIME MINISTER AL-BASHIR HAS OUTLINED A ROADMAP FOR SYRIA'S RECOVERY, FOCUSING ON POLITICAL, ECONOMIC, AND SOCIAL REFORMS

to include intelligence gathering, cyberattacks, and psychological warfare. Although they played a critical role in destabilising Assad's regime, the complexities of such interventions also fueled unintended consequences, such as the empowerment of extremist factions. For the US, this strategy yielded key geopolitical advantages, including weakening Iranian influence, reducing Russia's foothold in the region, and bolstering counterterrorism efforts.

Prime Minister al-Bashir has outlined a roadmap for Syria's recovery, focusing on political, economic, and social reforms. Politically, his plans include forming a transitional government representing Syria's diverse ethnic and political groups and drafting a new constitution that decentralises power and protects minority rights.

On the economic front, his administration is prioritising infrastructure development, attracting international investments, and combating corruption to lay the foundation for sustainable growth. Socially, reintegration programs aim to facilitate the return of displaced Syrians and rehabilitate former combatants, while expanded healthcare and education services seek to address the needs of the war-affected population.

The fall of Assad and the emergence of al-Bashir have far-reaching implications for the broader West Asia. Regionally, these developments could recalibrate power dynamics, reducing Iran's influence in Syria while opening avenues for normalisation with Israel, partic-

ularly in areas of border security and economic cooperation. On a global scale, Russia's diminished role in Syria marks a strategic loss for Moscow, while China may see opportunities to extend its Belt and Road Initiative into the region's reconstruction phase.

Russia's longstanding support for Assad, which began with its military intervention in 2015, faced significant challenges in recent years. Strained by its involvement in Ukraine and Western sanctions, Moscow has grappled with resource constraints, prompting a recalibration of its Middle Eastern strategy. Domestic criticism of prolonged military engagements has further pressured the Kremlin to scale back its commitments in Syria, leaving Assad vulnerable to internal and external pressures.

Globally, the Syrian transition carries profound security implications. The power vacuum left by Assad's fall risks a resurgence of extremist groups like ISIS and al-Qaeda, which could exploit the instability to regain strength and pose threats beyond Syria's borders. The ongoing refugee crisis also looms large, with continued instability potentially driving more Syrians to seek asylum abroad, challenging neighboring countries and Europe alike.

Additionally, proxy conflicts fueled by regional rivalries and superpower tensions threaten to entangle Syria in broader geopolitical frictions. The transition from Assad to al-Bashir represents a pivotal juncture in Syria's history, offering a chance for renewal amid deep-seated

challenges. While the road to stability and prosperity is fraught with obstacles, a coordinated international effort combined with meaningful domestic reform holds the potential to guide Syria toward a more peaceful and resilient future. The coming months will be decisive in determining whether this new chapter in Syria's turbulent narrative leads to lasting progress.

The transition from Bashar al-Assad's regime to Mohammed al-Bashir's leadership marks a critical turning point in Syria's history, offering a glimmer of hope amid a legacy of conflict and instability. Al-Bashir's vision for political reform, economic recovery, and social inclusion aims to chart a new course for a nation shattered by years of war. However, the challenges are immense: fragmented control, a dire humanitarian crisis, and a collapsed economy require urgent attention and sustained international support.

On the global stage, the fall of Assad has reshaped regional dynamics, reducing Iranian influence and opening new avenues for diplomacy while exposing Syria to the risks of renewed extremism and geopolitical competition. Whether Syria's new leadership can successfully navigate these complexities and steer the nation toward stability depends on the cohesion of its domestic efforts and the willingness of the international community to provide coordinated and meaningful support.

(The writer is an eminent expert on counter terrorism and West Asian affairs; views are personal)

## Bridging India's urban-rural divide: Empowering rural learners through skilling

India's vast diversity extends beyond culture and language, manifesting in unequal access to education, skilling and employment opportunities

India is a country with great linguistic, cultural, racial, social and economic diversity. People living in urban areas have access to opportunities for skilling, education and employment that are not easily available to people in semi-urban and rural areas. Over the last decade or two, there has been considerable growth and development in the skilling and education ecosystem due to a multitude of factors. Governments – both central and state – have realised that the only way India can benefit from its tremendous demographic dividend is by ensuring that individuals in the working age are equipped with the knowledge and skills required to thrive in increasingly global workplaces.



NAGESH SINGH

Central and state skilling entities have created massive systems that reach every district around India and make top-quality resources available to hitherto underserved audiences.

The corporate sector, leveraging the prevalent Corporate Social Responsibility laws, has also contributed significantly to this by collaborating with government agencies and supporting them with co-

funding, content, certification and job opportunities. The Directorate General of Training (Ministry of Skill Development and Entrepreneurship) manages a network of tens of thousands of institutions that collaborate with the corporate sector and civil society to make high-quality skilling available to hundreds of thousands of learners every year. All India Council for Technical Education, through its network of thousands of engineering institutions, offers cutting-edge training and internship opportunities to learners around India, irrespective of their location or socio-economic limitations. Edunet Foundation, for example, makes courseware and skills across the IT spectrum

available to learners across engineering colleges, National Skills Training Institutes and Industrial Training Institutes nationally, directly working with lakhs of learners every year.

These programs are offered in blended mode, leveraging classroom learning, synchronous video, online content and hands-on project work. While there is availability of skilling and education opportunities, there are several issues that limit the benefits of these programs.

The foremost problem is access to technology. Since the courses are offered in blended mode, learners need access to computers with high bandwidth internet connectivity and not just mobile phones. Almost every household in



India has access to mobile phones but larger devices that are more conducive to experiential learning in technology are not widely available. Both government and corporate stakeholders can make a huge difference by making current technology platforms available to learners in rural areas by donating and/or set-

ting up labs and digital libraries within the premises of existing educational institutions in these areas. The second issue is access to local employment. Most jobs – especially the technology-centric ones – are centred around major cities and towns. For learners who are unable to migrate for employ-

ment, this is a huge barrier. Additionally, of course, there are many problems associated with mass migration to urban areas. There is a need to create local career opportunities that allow people to gainfully work wherever they are, without the need to migrate to a larger city or town.

This may be done by a steady focus on entrepreneurship that creates jobs locally and helps in the development of rural areas. Rural micro-entrepreneurship, especially focused on agriculture and associated areas, can solve many of the problems associated with mass-migration and lopsided economic development. Local businesses, thus created, will drive the local economy and create local

employment.

A stronger focus on rural enterprise will help India by ensuring inclusive economic development. There are several programs by the government and the corporate sector that are trying to achieve this, but they need to be enhanced and made more potent with support from civil society. In an environment where rural learners have access to technology and employment opportunities, skilling initiatives by the government and the corporate sector will make a bigger impact. Learners will be able to learn and earn locally, thereby bridging the urban-rural divide.

(The writer is chairman, Edunet Foundation; views are personal)

# PM Modi to lay foundation stone for river linking project in MP

PTI ■ BHOPAL

Prime Minister Narendra Modi will lay the foundation stone of the Ken-Betwa river linking project in Madhya Pradesh on December 25, the birth anniversary of former PM Atal Bihari Vajpayee, said Chief Minister Mohan Yadav on Thursday.



Yadav was speaking to reporters on the completion of one year of his government in the state. On December 11, 2023, Yadav was formally elected as the BJP legislative party leader and took oath as the CM two days later. "On the 100th birth anniversary of former PM Atal Bihari Vajpayee, who dreamt of inter-connecting the country's rivers to augment water resources, PM Modi will lay the foundation stone of the ambitious Ken-Betwa National River Linking Project on December 25 in MP's Chhatarpur district," said Yadav. The project to link the Ken and Betwa rivers will benefit Chhatarpur, Panna, Tikamgarh, Niwadi, Damoh, Shivpuri, Datia, Raisen, Vidisha and Sagar districts of the state, he said.

Because of these joint efforts, the state has received investment proposals worth Rs 4 lakh crore which will generate 3 lakh jobs, he said. The CM said that on the completion of one year of the BJP government in MP, two programmes were launched to highlight the development works of his administration and link more eligible people with welfare schemes. 'Jankalyan Parv' (public welfare festival) and 'Mukhyamantri Jankalyan Abhiyan' (public welfare campaign) will run in December and January. During Janlakyam Parv, to be held between December 11 and December 26, foundation stones of several development works will be laid and several completed projects will be inaugurated, Yadav said. As part of the Jankalyan Abhiyan, which will run from December 11 to January 26, people from poor families, youths, farmers and women who are eligible for benefits under various welfare schemes will be identified through a survey and linked with these programmes, Yadav said. Under the state's popular 'Ladli Behna' scheme, Rs 19,212 crore has been given to 1.29 crore women, the CM said.

MP has also decided to implement the Parvati-Kalisindh-Chambal river linking project which will benefit Guna, Shivpuri, Sehore, Dewas, Rajgarh, Ujjain, Agar-Malwa, Indore, Shajapur, Mandasaur and Morena districts of the state, said Yadav. This project will provide water for irrigation in 6.13 lakh hectares in MP and PM Modi will lay its foundation stone on December 17 in Jaipur, Yadav said. Yadav said MP will observe 2025 as the 'Industries Year' and Modi will inaugurate the Global Investors Summit, which will be held in Bhopal on February 24-25. Ahead of the investors' meet, the state government has been organising Regional Industry Conclaves across MP and conducting roadshows and conferences in the state and abroad, he said.

Besides the 1,450-km-long 'Ram Van Gaman Path', the government has also decided to develop 'Shri Krishna Pathway' by connecting all places associated with Lord Krishna, including Sandipani Ashram, Narayana village, Ujjain, Janapav (Indore) and Amjhara (Dhar). Madhya Pradesh BJP president Vishnu Dutt Sharma and Deputy CMs Jagdish Devda and Rajendra Shukla also addressed the event.

# Saini pushes for stricter cleanliness in Gurugram

PARVESH SHARMA ■ GURUGRAM

Haryana Chief Minister Naib Singh Saini gave strict instructions to the concerned officials regarding cleanliness in Gurugram that cleanliness should be ensured in the city as per the cleanliness standards. "The public should not face any kind of problem. Special attention should be paid to cleanliness in the city so that Gurugram can be made clean and beautiful. He will inspect cleanliness during the next month's meeting," Saini said. The CM was chairing a meeting of the District Public Relations and Grievance Redressal Committee in Gurugram on Thursday. A total of 23 complaints were placed in the meeting, out of which 19 were settled on the spot. The remaining complaints were reserved for the next meeting and the officers were directed to bring

the status report with them. Saini said that the Haryana government is serious about public services. Officers of all departments should stay in the field and ensure that the services of their department are provided to the public. "The lax attitude of the officers towards public facilities will not be tolerated. If any kind of complaint is received from the common citizens, strict action will be taken against the concerned officer," he said. On this occasion, Union Minister of State Rao Indrajit Singh and Cabinet Minister Rao Narbir Singh, MLA Bimla Chaudhary, Mukesh Sharma, Tejpal Tanwar and various senior officials and dignitaries were present. Saini, taking suo motu cognizance of the quality of the treated water of all STPs, said that for a clean environment, the quality of the treated water of STPs should be checked regularly. Also, the officers should ensure that



after treatment, the water should be given to the farmers for agricultural work only after testing it in the lab. Taking cognizance of the complaint of illegal occupation of government land by some people in the village of Sarai Alawardi, the Chief Minister ordered the Municipal Corporation officials to vacate the land by removing all types of illegal occupation with immediate effect. A

community building should be constructed on this land so that people can get better facilities for organizing public functions. On the complaint related to musical fountains and illegal advertising material in Laser Valley, CM said that all the problems related to public lights, CCTV cameras and musical fountains around Laser Valley should be resolved.

# Congress releases Delhi candidate list

STAFF REPORTER ■ NEW DELHI

The Congress Thursday released its first list of 21 candidates for the Delhi Assembly polls, fielding city unit chief Devender Yadav from Badli and ex-MP Sandeep Dikshit from New Delhi. Delhi Chief Minister Arvind Kejriwal is the sitting MLA from New Delhi. The Congress also fielded ex-Delhi minister Haroon Yusuf from Ballimaran, ex-Delhi Congress chief Chaudhary Anil Kumar from Patparganj, national spokesperson Ragini Nayak from Wazirpur and Adarsh Shastri from Dwarka. Among the other candidates, Ali Mahndi will fight from Mustafabad, Abdul Rehman from Seelampur, Rohit Chaudhary from Nanngoli Jat and Praveen Jain from Shalimar Bagh.

# Railway, IIT-Guwahati collaborate on bridge monitoring technologies

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ GUWAHATI

A high level technical discussion and demonstration session was held between N.F.Railway and IIT-Guwahati at the NF Railway (Construction) Headquarters at Maligaon on Wednesday, wherein a number of state-of-the-art technologies for automated bridge monitoring and robotic underwater bridge maintenance were discussed, and detailed roadmap for collaboration between the two



esteemed institutions on this aspect was drawn up. According to a Press release by the NF Railway, one of the interesting technologies discussed during the session was an Advanced under water Inspection and Maintenance system of Railway Bridges, which will utilize robotics & AI based systems to address the unique challenges of underwater bridge maintenance, including detection of faults and retrofitting. Another major area of

discussion was a Command center based predictive maintenance System for automatic monitoring of Railway Bridges, which is a cutting edge initiative aimed at enhancing bridge safety through predictive analytics. The session was held in presence of General Manager, Northeast Frontier Railway Chetan Kumar Shrivastava, General Manager, Northeast Frontier Railway (Construction) Arun Kumar Chaudhary and other senior official of NF Railway.

# Grandmaster D Gukesh is youngest-ever...

From page 1

It was a momentary lapse of concentration by Liren in what seemed a drawn endgame and as it happened, the entire chess world was left in a state of shock. The players were just left with a rook and a bishop and Gukesh had two pawns against one trying to make a foray without much success.

However, the ability to keep pushing for more gave Gukesh a distinct advantage over the Chinese and the latter simply collapsed to give the title to Gukesh. Before Gukesh's feat on Thursday, the legendary Garry Kasparov of Russia was the youngest world champion when he won the title at the age of 22, dethroning Anatoly Karpov in 1985.

Gukesh had entered the match as the youngest ever challenger to the world crown after winning the Candidates tournament earlier this year. "Every chess player wants to live this dream. I am living my dream," said Gukesh.

Gukesh, who won the 14th game against Liren after 58 moves in four hours, is the 18th world chess champion overall. If Thursday's game was also drawn, the winner was to be decided in shorter duration tie-breaks on Friday. Gukesh had won the third and 11th rounds before Thursday's decisive game, while the 32-year-old Liren emerged victorious in the opening and 12th games.

All other games were drawn in the match. "I came here suddenly and I lost the first

game itself. Luckily while going back I had Vishy Sir (Anand) in the lift and he said 'I had only 11 games left you have 13'," Gukesh recalled. Anand was citing his 2006 first match over Veselin Topalov that he had eventually won after losing the first game. Interestingly, Anand had won that match in the last Classical (12th) game, with black pieces. Anand lost the title to Norwegian maverick Magnus Carlsen back in 2013.

It was on the 55th move that the dye was cast. Liren, leaving his sense of danger, went for a rook trade and Gukesh pawed him almost instantly. He knew that it was his title to lose and it took just three more moves before the Chinese called it a day.

STAFF REPORTER ■ NEW DELHI

A year after a security breach in Parliament that happened on the anniversary of the 2001 Parliament attack, sources in the Delhi Police said they have submitted clinching evidence and made a watertight case against the six accused.

The accused, involved in the incident which took place on December 13, 2023, have been booked under the stringent Unlawful Activities (Prevention) Act (UAPA). The

trial in the case is yet to start as the Delhi Police's probe is underway. But officials claim that they have sufficient evidence against the perpetrators, who were led by Karnataka resident Manoranjan D. The accused had launched a coordinated gas attack by opening colourful canisters both inside and outside the Parliament house during the Zero Hour. Manoranjan, along with Sagar Sharma, jumped into the Lok Sabha chamber from the

public gallery and opened the canisters that released a yellow gas in the House. Two others - Amol Shinde and Neelam Azad -- sprayed coloured gases from canisters outside the Parliament premises around the same time. They also shouted "tanashahi nahi chalegi (dictatorship will not be allowed)". Manoranjan, Sharma, Shinde and Azad were arrested on the same day as they were caught soon after their acts. Lalit Jha and Mahesh Kumawat were arrested on December 15 and

December 16 respectively. According to an official source, one main and two supplementary chargesheets have been filed against the six accused, who are lodged in the Tihar jail. They have been booked under sections 16 and 18 of the UAPA and provisions of the Indian Penal Code by the Delhi Police's anti-terror unit, Special Cell. "The forensic evidence submitted against the accused is sufficient to prove them guilty but the probe is

underway as some reports are still awaited from the FSL (Forensic Sciences Laboratory)," an official source said. The accused wanted to discredit India's democracy, gain instant global fame, usurp power and achieve "richness and glory" by targeting the "very symbol of democracy", according to the main chargesheet filed by the Delhi Police in court in June. The police probe has so far ruled out the involvement of any group or organisation in the security breach.

# One Nation, One Election... one decision

From page 1

"The Union Cabinet has cleared the Bill on One Nation One Election. The views of the Indian National Congress on this subject had been forcefully articulated by its President Mallikarjun Kharge ji on January 17, 2024. Nothing has happened since then to modify them," said Congress chief spokesman Jairam Ramesh. Opposition Bharat Rashtira Samithi (BRS) in Telangana stated that it needs more clarity on the 'One Nation, One Election' bill, which was approved by the Union Cabinet, before taking a stance on the issue. The BRS had supported the concept in 2017 when a meeting was convened on simultaneous polls, BRS Working President KT Rama Rao said.

# Centre needs 2,000 more IAS, IPS!...

From page 1

Singh said the "Government is aware that every ministry/department/PSU under central Government is facing staff shortage up to 30 to 60 per cent due to nil recruitment or very less recruitment since 2019. Vacant posts are being filled up in mission mode through the Rozgar Melas launched by Prime Minister Narendra Modi on October 22, 2022, he said. "13 Rozgar Melas have been held at Central level in 40-45 cities across various states/Union Territories. Several lakh appointment letters have been distributed in the Rozgar Melas by various

ministries/ departments, their attached organisations and CPSUs etc," he added. Instructions have been issued to all ministries/departments of the central Government to constitute an in-house committee for identification of backlog reserved vacancies, to study the root cause of such vacancies, to initiate measures to remove the factors causing such vacancies and to fill them up through special recruitment drives, he said. Further, each ministry/department is required to set up a Special Reservation Cell under the direct control of the Liaison Officer to assist her/him in discharge of duties, Singh added.

From page 1

Kharge then tried to raise a point of order. "The House is not in order. They are making reckless allegations. You are listening and encouraging..." Kharge told the Chair. Amid the 'din, the Chairman' adjourned the House for the day.

The Lok Sabha also sat for the entire duration of Question Hour on Thursday, but trouble broke out in the Zero Hour when the chair called Congress member Jothamani to speak leading to first adjournment. When the House resumed, noisy exchanges broke out between the Opposition and BJP members. As the Congress member made a reference to the alleged links between Adani and the BJP, presiding officer Jagdambika Pal said the businessman's name will not go on records, triggering protests from the opposition. Congress members sought to know whether the rule was selectively applicable for references made by opposition party members.

# NDMC presents surplus budget of ₹463.40 Crore

From page 1

The BE for revenue expenditure in 2025-26 are Rs. 4657.45 Crore against Rs. 4612.70 Crore provided in RE 2024-25 and actual of Rs. 4219.68 Crore in 2023-24. The capital expenditure is projected at Rs. 649.75 Crore in BE 2025-26 against Rs. 263.84 Crore in RE 2024-25 and actual of Rs. 144.20 Crore in 2023-24. The total revenue receipts from electricity distribution strategic business unit (EDSBU) have been projected in RE 2024-25 at Rs.1706.75 Crore as against actual Rs. 1533.22 Crore in the year 2023-24. The projections for BE 2025-26 are at Rs. 1811.91 crore. "The actual receipts in 2023-24 for Licence Fee from Municipal Properties stood at Rs. 905.41 crore. The Projections for RE 2024-25 are at Rs. 825.16 Crore and BE 2025-26 are at Rs.900.16 crore," said.

As part of our commitment to transparency, efficiency, and modern governance, he proposed transitioning to a 100 digital payment system in NDMC and Streamlined Digital Platforms by

expanding NDMC's existing digital payment channels, including NDMC's mobile app, online portals, and QR code systems at counters. The document said for convenience and safety of pedestrians, construction of two foot over bridges at AIIMS Gate No.1, Aurobindo Marg and Delhi High Court near Gate No.5, Shershah Road respectively are being taken up. The work is likely to be started in 2025-26. Based on positive response from the residents/visitors, a project of development of a roundabout opposite New Parliament is in process and likely to be completed in next FY 2025-26. The council has implemented a range of proactive environment improvement measures especially regarding air pollution. To mitigate the spread of dust, NDMC is also exploring the feasibility of an innovative idea of installation of mist spray on electrical poles in the area. According to the NDMC Budget, the color and digital design of the school uniform has been finalized by a committee. Fabric selection is in progress. Finalization of Redesigning of uniform is

being taken up with NIFT. The scheme is likely to be implemented in next 2025-26. NDMC plans to upgrade and convert its all existing PTUs/CTUs into state of the art designs having eco-friendly features and efficient disposal based management. The NDMC introduced a program for night cleaning and staggered times to achieve maximum efficiency with minimum disruption. The logic behind the move is that sanitary workers of the municipality will get enough time to clean the areas, which otherwise becomes cumbersome during routine working hours. It will reduce disruption to business activity and impediments to citizens and ensure the area is fresh and ready for activities. Heavy machinery and water jets could be used without interruption. The cleaning drive has already started as a pilot project in the Khan Market area and will be implemented in the entire NDMC area. To promote solar energy to reduce the power bills for the poor and middle class, NDMC encouraged local residents to install roof solar power grids.

NDMC has 234 Nos. of existing solar connections out of which 93 connections are of 3.12 MWp and 234 connections are of 11.30 MWp. A "landscape Architect will be engaged for designs/development of major gardens so as to make NDMC a horticulture city of the world," the Budget document said. The NDMC aims to achieve an efficient Parking Management System by upgrading the existing parking lots into Smart Parking by installing Intelligent Parking components and developing software etc. for a period of 10 years. The work will likely be started in the next FY 2025-26. In collaboration with Delhi Police, a Safe City Project has been initiated for mutual sharing of the CCTV camera feeds. The work laying of the lease line is at the awarding stage and is likely to be completed in FY 2025-26. The dark spots are also being identified and additional lights are being installed for the safety and security of women and other residents/commuters of the NDMC area, he said.

# Eye on Polls, Kejriwal announces Mukhya Mantri...

From page 1

As per Revised Estimates 2024-25, an amount of Rs 10995 crore is kept for various subsidy schemes and subsidy like expenditure (GIA to DTC and ways & means advance to DJB), which is around 14.15% of the total projected expenditure of Rs 77700 crore in RE 2024-25. After adding the amount of Rs 4560 crore of the proposed scheme, the budget for subsidy like schemes will be around 21% of the total expenditure. Therefore, after implementation of the

proposed scheme MMSY, there would be extra financial burden over finances of Delhi government in coming years and will hamper the capital expenditure to be incurred on the various developments. "Without a long-term vision, the scheme risks becoming an ineffective short-term measure that fails to deliver sustainable empowerment," it added. In its noting, the Finance Department said it is advised to not to bring the draft cabinet note before the Council of Ministers till a concrete scheme with

verifiable data and road map is prepared for consideration of the Council of Ministers. The observations by the Finance Department was rejected by the Delhi finance Minister who noted in the cabinet note that this scheme is extremely important for the empowerment of women of Delhi and Studies across the world from developing countries have shown that direct cash transfer to women has had a positive impact on all developmental indicators. The Finance Department also stated that the presence of a large migrant population in Delhi and difficulties in

identifying such persons will pose a significant problem in identifying such beneficiaries and may result in heavy burden on the public exchequer over time. "I had previously promised to give Rs 1,000 to every woman. But some women came to me and said that Rs 1,000 would not be sufficient due to inflation. Hence, Rs 2,100 will be deposited into the accounts of all women," he said at an event accompanied by Chief Minister Atishi. This proposal was passed in the cabinet meeting chaired by Atishi this morning, following

which the scheme has been implemented." "Where will the money come from? I am a magician. I am a magician of accounts. I know where to get the money from. How to spend it. If I say it, I will do it," Kejriwal said. Kejriwal also slammed the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP), saying he wanted to implement this scheme in March, when he was still the Chief Minister, but "they conspired and sent me to jail (in the alleged Delhi liquor policy case)". "After coming out of jail, I worked with Atishi ji so this scheme could start."

# No surveys, suits related to Places of Worship Act till hearing over: SC

From page 1

During the hearing, the Bench asked, "How many suits are pending now". One of the advocates said a total of 18 suits pertaining to 10 mosques were pending in several courts across the country. "Ultimately, we will have to hear the arguments," the Bench said, observing the primary issue was with regard to Section 3 and 4 of the 1991 law. While Section 3 deals with the bar of conversion of places of worship, Section 4

pertains to declaration of the religious character of certain places of worship and bar of jurisdiction of courts, etc. The Bench also allowed the pleas of various parties including Muslim bodies seeking to intervene in the proceedings. Various Muslim parties, including the Gyanvapi Mosque management committee, moved the apex court to oppose several pending petitions that challenge the constitutional validity of the 1991 law.

The mosque committee listed a series of contentious claims made over the years concerning various mosques and dargahs (shrines), including the Shahi Idgah Masjid in Mathura, the Quwwat-ul-Islam Mosque near Delhi's Qutub Minar, the Kamal Maula Mosque in Madhya Pradesh, and others. It therefore said the petitions challenging the Act were filed with "mischievous intent" to facilitate lawsuits against these religious sites, which the 1991 Act currently protected.



# Biden commutes roughly 1,500 sentences, pardons 39 people in biggest single-day act of clemency

AP ■ WASHINGTON

President Joe Biden is commuting the sentences of roughly 1,500 people who were released from prison and placed on home confinement during the coronavirus pandemic and is pardoning 39 Americans convicted of nonviolent crimes.

statement. "As president, I have the great privilege of extending mercy to people who have demonstrated remorse and rehabilitation, restoring opportunity for Americans to participate in daily life and contribute to their communities, and taking steps to remove sentencing disparities for non-violent offenders, especially those convicted of drug offenses."

during natural disasters; a church deacon who has worked as an addiction counsellor and youth counsellor; a doctoral student in molecular biosciences; and a decorated military veteran.

said on the campaign trail in 2020 that he wanted to end the death penalty but he never did, and now, with Trump coming back into office, it's likely executions will resume.

the violent Jan. 6 insurrection, said such a pardon from Biden would be "unnecessary," and that the president shouldn't be spending his waning days in office worrying about this.

AP ■ KYIV

Fighting around the key eastern Ukraine city of Pokrovsk is "extremely intense" after a monthlong Russian push, Ukraine's top military commander said, with analysts estimating Russian forces are now within just a few kilometres of the city.

glide bombs that blast fortifications to smithereens. Pokrovsk, which had a population of about 60,000 before Russia's full-scale invasion in February 2022, is one of Ukraine's main defensive strongholds and a key logistics hub in the Donetsk region.

Washington-based think tank said. Those losses "will temper their ability to translate these gains into more far-reaching offensive operations" in the months ahead, it said.

# Mujibur's 'Joy Bangla' no longer national slogan in Bangladesh

PTI ■ DHAKA

Bangladesh Supreme Court has stayed a High Court verdict that declared 'Joy Bangla' — popularised by Bangbandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman — as the country's national slogan.

Division headed by Chief Justice Syed Rezaul Karim passed the order following a leave to appeal petition filed by the government challenging the High Court judgement, newspaper Daily Star said on Wednesday.

take necessary steps so that the slogan is used at all state functions and academic institutions' assemblies.

# Israeli strikes on Gaza kill at least 33

AP ■ DEIR AL-BALAH (GAZA STRIP)

Israeli strikes pounded the Gaza Strip overnight and into Wednesday, with one attack ripping through a home where displaced people were sheltering in the isolated north.



Israeli soldiers stand next to armoured vehicles before crossing the security fence, moving towards the so-called Alpha Line that separates the Israeli-controlled Golan Heights from Syria, in the town of Majdal Shams. AP/PTI

central Gaza killed at least seven people, according to the Awda Hospital. The dead included two children, their parents and three other relatives, it said.

# Macron seeks political deal to name new PM, restore France's stability

AP ■ PARIS

French President Emmanuel Macron is seeking a political deal that would allow him to both name a new prime minister and "guarantee the stability of the country," following the resignation of ousted Prime Minister Michel Barnier, a spokesperson for the outgoing government said Wednesday.

no-confidence vote prompted by budget disputes in the National Assembly left France without a functioning government.

firm deadline for naming a new prime minister, she said. Since last week, Macron has held talks with politicians from the left and the right, including Socialist leaders who now appear as key in efforts to form a more stable government.

"talk to all political forces and build a budget that doesn't cross the red lines of each party," Le Pen said.

# Scottish Indian shadow minister calls for public messaging in Hindi

PTI ■ LONDON

A Scottish Indian member of the Scottish Parliament has called for the devolved administration to ensure public messaging and health campaigns are made available in Hindi, in recognition of Indians as the second-largest immigrant group in Scotland.

such information is available in alternative languages, Hindi is always one of them.

which was campaigning on vitamin D, including to reach that population, yet the information was in other languages but not in Hindi.

work part-time as a GP, says he decided to join the race to be elected in May 2021 as one of the first Indian-heritage MSPs for Glasgow Region to offer solutions.

# FBI Director Wray announces plan to resign, paves way for Trump nominee

PTI ■ WASHINGTON

FBI Director Christopher Wray has announced his decision to resign at the end of US President Joe Biden's term in January, paving the way for President-elect Donald Trump's nominee Indian-American Kash Patel to take charge of the country's top investigating agency.

FBI colleagues during a town hall here on Wednesday. On November 30, Trump nominated his loyalist and staunch supporter Patel as the next FBI director, thus cutting short Wray's 10-year term by three years.

while reinforcing the values and principles that are so important to how we do our work," Wray said.

"It will end the weaponisation of what has become known as the United States Department of Injustice," he said.

opened to him. We will now restore the rule of law for all Americans. Under the leadership of Christopher Wray, the FBI illegally raided my home, without cause, worked diligently on illegally impeaching and indicting me, and has done everything else to interfere with the success and future of America," he said.

qualified nominee to lead the FBI in the agency's history. "As everyone knows, I have great respect for the rank and file of the FBI, and they have great respect for me. They want to see these changes every bit as much as I do but, more importantly, the American people are demanding a strong, but fair, system of justice," he said.

Trump said. Attorney General Merrick B. Garland said Wray has served the country honourably and with integrity for decades, including for seven years as the director of the FBI under presidents of both parties.

a perilous new era with serious questions about its future. "I want to thank Director Wray for his service to our nation, and all the men and women of the FBI for their continued efforts to protect our security and liberty," he said.

# GNPA of PSBs declines to 3.12 per cent in Sept: FinMin

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

Gross non-performing assets (NPAs) of public sector banks (PSBs) have declined to a decade low of 3.12 per cent at the end of September 2024 from a peak of 14.98 per cent in March 2018 on the back of measures like the 4Rs - recognition, recapitalisation, resolution, and reform - taken by the government, the finance ministry said on Thursday.

Since 2015, the government implemented a comprehensive 4Rs strategy of recognising NPAs transparently, resolution and recovery, recapitalising PSBs, and reforms in the financial system to address the challenges faced by PSBs, it said. Capital adequacy ratio of PSBs improved 393 bps to reach 15.43 per cent in September 2024 from 11.45 per cent in March 2015, it said. During 2023-24, PSBs recorded the highest-ever aggregate net profit of



Rs 1.41 lakh crore against Rs 1.05 lakh crore in 2022-23, it said, adding that the figure was Rs 0.86 lakh crore in the first half of 2024-25.

In the last three years, PSBs have paid total dividend of Rs 61,964 crore, it said. "PSBs continue to expand their reach to every nook and corner of

the country to deepen financial inclusion. Their capital base has strengthened and their asset quality has improved. Now they are able to go to market and access capital instead of depending on the government for recapitalisation," it said.

To deepen financial inclusion in the country, 54 crore Jan Dhan accounts and more than 52 crore collateral-free loans under various flagship financial inclusion schemes - PM-Mudra, Stand-Up India, PM-SVANidhi, PM Vishwakarma - have been sanctioned, it said.

Under the Mudra scheme, 68 per cent of beneficiaries are women and under PM-SVANidhi scheme, 44 per cent of beneficiaries are women, the finance ministry said. The number of bank branches has gone up from 1,17,990 in March 2014 to 1,60,501 in September 2024. Of 1,60,501 branches, 1,00,686 are in rural and semi-urban (RUSU) areas, it said. KCC Scheme aims to provide the

short-term crop loan to farmers, it said, adding that the total number of operative KCC Accounts as on September 2024 stood at 7.71 crore with total outstanding of Rs. 9.88 lakh crore.

The Government of India (GoI) has consistently supported the MSME sector in terms of flow of credit at affordable rates through various initiatives, it said. "The MSME advances registered a CAGR of 15 per cent during the last three years. Total MSME advances as on March 31, 2024 stood at Rs 28.04 lakh crore, posted an annual growth of 17.2 per cent," it said. The gross advances of scheduled commercial banks, which grew from Rs 8.5 lakh crore to 61 lakh crore during 2004-2014, has significantly increased to Rs 175 lakh crore in March 2024, according to the finance ministry.

Besides, the government has also announced a slew of measures towards welfare of employees working in PSBs.



# IIP growth slows to 3.5 per cent in Oct: Govt data

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

India's industrial production (IIP) growth slowed to 3.5 per cent year-on-year in October 2024, mainly due to poor performance of mining, power and manufacturing, as per official data released on Thursday.

The IIP recorded a growth of 11.9 per cent in October 2023, according to a statement by the Ministry of Statistics & Programme Implementation.

However, on a sequential basis, the factory output in October 2024 rose to 3.5 per cent from 3.1 per cent in September and a contraction of 0.1 per cent in August this year.

The growth in the factory output, measured in terms of the IIP, in April-October worked out to be 4 per cent against 7 per cent in the year-ago period, the data showed. As per the data, the mining output growth decelerated to 0.9 per cent in October from 13.1 per cent expansion in the year-ago month.

The manufacturing sector's growth decelerated to 4.1 per cent in October from 10.6 per cent a year ago.

Similarly, in power generation, the output growth slowed sharply to 2 per cent from a 20.4 per cent growth a year ago.

As per use-based classification, the capital goods segment growth decelerated to 3.1 per cent in October 2024 from 21.7 per cent in the year-ago period. In October this year, consumer non-durables output growth slowed to 2.7 per cent compared to a 9.3 per cent growth in October 2023.

Consumer durable goods production grew by 5.9 per cent during the reporting month against a 15.9 per cent expansion in October 2023. According to the data, infrastructure/construction goods reported a growth of 4 per cent in October 2024, down from a 12.6 per cent expansion in the year-ago period.

The data also showed that the output of primary goods logged a 2.6 per cent growth in October this year against 11.4 per cent a year earlier. The expansion in the intermediate goods segment was 3.7 per cent in the month under review, lower than the 9.5 per cent a year ago.



# Auto component industry grows 11 per cent to ₹3.32 lakh Crore in Apr-Sept: ACMA

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

The automotive components industry grew 11 per cent year-on-year to Rs 3.32 lakh crore in the first half of the current fiscal, industry body ACMA said on Thursday.

The turnover of the automotive component industry in the April-September period of last fiscal stood at Rs 2.98 lakh crore.

"With vehicle sales across all segments reaching pre-pandemic levels and despite geopolitical challenges on the exports front, the auto components sector witnessed a steady growth in both domestic and international markets in the first half of FY2024-25," Automotive Component Manufacturers Association of India (ACMA) President Shradha Suri Marwah said.

She said the festive season brought significant sales across most segments of the vehicle industry. "However, reflecting on the past eight months of this fiscal year, while two-wheelers have shown promising growth, sales of passenger vehicles and commercial vehicles have been relatively moderate," she added.

On the exports front, with geological challenges, delivery time and freight costs have once again gone up, Marwah said. "That said, in value terms,

the industry remains in robust health, signalling stability and resilience amidst evolving market dynamics," she added.

The components industry continues to make investments for purposes of higher value addition, technology upgradation and localisation to stay relevant to both domestic and international customers, Marwah said.

ACMA Director General Vinnie Mehta said that with vehicle sales and exports displaying steady performance, the auto component industry demonstrated a growth of 11.3 per cent scaling a turnover of Rs 3.32 lakh crore in the first half of FY 2024-25.

Auto component supplies to all the segments - OEMs (original equipment manufacturers), exports as also the aftermarket remained steadfast, he added. Exports grew by 7 per cent to USD 11.1 billion (Rs 93.34 lakh crore) while imports grew by 4 per cent to USD 11 billion (Rs 92.05 lakh crore) with USD 150 million in surplus, the industry body said.

The aftermarket, estimated at Rs 47,416 crore, also witnessed a growth of 5 per cent year-on-year, it added. Similarly, component supplies to OEMs in the domestic market grew by 11 per cent year-on-year to Rs 2.83 lakh crore, ACMA said.

# India, UK talks on proposed trade agreement may start in Jan: Official

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

India and the UK are expected to hold the next round of talks for a proposed free trade agreement (FTA) in January to resolve the pending issues and close the negotiations, a senior official said on Thursday.

The talks for the proposed FTA began in January 2022. The 14th round of talks stalled as the two nations stepped into their general election cycles.

In November, an official statement said that the dates for the FTA talks in early 2025 would be finalised through diplomatic channels. The negotiations would resume the discussions from the progress achieved



previously and seek to bridge the gaps for expeditiously closing the trade deal. The next round of talks is likely to start at January-end, the official said.

The Indian industry is demanding greater access for

its skilled professionals from sectors like IT and healthcare in the UK market, besides market access for several goods at nil customs duty. On the other hand, the UK is seeking a significant cut in import duties on goods such

as scotch whiskey, electric vehicles, lamb meat, chocolates and certain confectionary items.

Britain is also looking for more opportunities for UK services in Indian markets in segments like telecommunications, legal and financial services (banking and insurance).

The two countries are also negotiating a bilateral investment treaty (BIT). There are 26 chapters in the agreement, which includes goods, services, investments and intellectual property rights.

The bilateral trade between India and the UK increased to USD 21.34 billion in 2023-24 from 20.36 billion in 2022-23.

# Cumulative capex of airports expected to grow 12 per cent at ₹60,000 Crore in three years: Report



PTI ■ MUMBAI

The cumulative capex (capital expenditure) of Indian airports is expected to grow 12 per cent at Rs 60,000 crore in the three years through FY27 from Rs 53,000 crore during 2022-2024, to add required infrastructure for about 65 million passengers per annum, ratings agency CRISIL said on Thursday. CRISIL said 70 per cent of this capex is expected to be funded through debt.

The ratings agency said its projections are based on a study of 11 private airports in the country that account for 60 per cent of the total passenger traffic in FY24.

In addition to the expected growth in passenger traffic, increase in tariffs and spending within the airport ecosystem will lift revenue of private Indian airports at an

average growth rate of 17 per cent between FY25 and FY27, it said.

That, coupled with improved funding access and a predictable regulatory regime, will support the strong credit profiles of private airports.

"The number of passengers at Indian airports is expected to clock a compounded annual growth rate (CAGR) of 8-9 per cent over fiscals 2025-2027 from 376 million last fiscal. Growth in domestic traffic, which comprises over 80 per cent of overall volume, will ride on rising demand from the business and leisure segments and government push to increase penetration of air travel," said Manish Gupta, Senior Director and Deputy Chief Ratings Officer, CRISIL Ratings.

As of July 2024, the government had operationalised 84 airports

and 579 routes under its regional connectivity UDAN scheme to increase regional penetration, CRISIL said, adding that while the impact is small at present, with air traffic in these airports contributing around 2 per cent of domestic air traffic, these regional routes are important as they provide feeder traffic to the metro airports.

International traffic will also grow, driven by increased business travel, easing visa requirements, and improving connectivity with airlines adding new routes, it said.

To cater to this growth, airport operators are investing in aviation-related infrastructure such as terminal buildings and runways to create room for increased passenger flow. Additionally, airports are developing non-aeronautical offerings such as lounge, car parking, food and beverage spaces and retail outlets, which will help increase revenue, too, the ratings agency said.

"Although around 70 per cent of capex is expected to be funded by debt, the credit profiles of private airports will remain strong over fiscals 2025-27 due to an average projected increase of 17 per cent in revenue of airports in the CRISIL Ratings study," CRISIL Ratings Director Ankit Hakhu said.

# Retailers urge FM and GST Council not to go for higher 35 per cent tax rate

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

Indian Sellers Collective, an umbrella body of trade associations and sellers across the country, has urged the finance minister and the GST Council not to accept some of GST rate rationalisation suggestions, including the proposal for inclusion of a special rate of 35 per cent on some products.

The sellers body is of the view that a fifth GST slab of 35 per cent on demerit goods such as aerated beverages, cigarettes and tobacco, and pricing-based rate structure will materially and fundamentally alter the country's GST framework with devastating outcomes.

These recommendations violate both the letter and the spirit that it will be a 'good and simple tax', Indian Sellers Collective said in a statement on Thursday ahead of the 55th GST Council meeting to be held on December 21, 2024 at Jaisalmer, Rajasthan. "On the contrary, it will hurt the profit margins of the retailers, lead to compliance nightmares and fuel a parallel economy. This move will primarily benefit Chinese producers who dominate the market of cheap products at



the cost of Indian producers," it said.

All the gains of the GST regime will be wiped out, with permanent damage to the vast age-old retailer network of India, if the GoM recommendations are adopted by the upcoming GST Council meeting, Abhay Raj Mishra, Member and National Coordinator, Indian Sellers Collective, said.

"A 35 per cent tax on demerit goods like tobacco and aerated beverages will exponentially grow their illicit market, and a large number of sellers will move out of the formal economy. A pricing-based rate structure will trigger either manipulation or re-engineering of business models to beat the system. For small and mid-tier sellers, this will mean compliance nightmares and a very high risk of litigation," he said.

# Gold rises ₹500 per 10 gm; silver at ₹97,000 per kg

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

Gold prices climbed Rs 500 to Rs 80,900 per 10 grams in the national capital on Thursday due to persistent buying by retailers and jewellers, according to the All India Sarafa Association. The precious metal of 99.9 per cent purity finished at Rs 80,400 per 10 grams in the previous trading session. The yellow metal has jumped nearly Rs 2,000 in the past three sessions.

Silver also rallied Rs 700 to Rs 97,000 per kg on Thursday. The white metal settled at Rs 96,300 per kg in the previous session. The price of gold of 99.5 per cent purity also surged Rs 500 to Rs 80,500 per 10 grams. It ended at Rs 80,000 per 10 grams on Wednesday. According to traders, persistent buying by jewellers and a firm trend in the international markets were among the factors that aided the rally in gold prices.

Meanwhile, in futures trade on the Multi Commodity Exchange (MCX), gold contracts for February delivery dipped Rs 114 or 0.14 per cent to Rs 78,888 per 10 grams.

# Green shoots on consumption growth, food inflation expected to come down: FICCI President

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

Green shoots are visible on the consumption front as food inflation has started receding, newly appointed FICCI President Harsha V Agarwal said. Food inflation is expected to come down to its normal level in the next two quarters, Agarwal said, adding that he is hopeful for a revival in consumption growth, aided by a good crop and increased spending by the government on the big-ticket infra projects and rural schemes in the December quarter. Government spending in the right areas - like increase in capex and ramping up infrastructure, rather than focusing on revenue expenditure - is helping the

overall economy, he said. "We are seeing some green shoots where we believe food inflation is coming down... It has to come back to normal. It might take maybe one quarter or so. But we are seeing situations where it is improving, and hence we are hopeful that consumption should increase," Agarwal told PTI. Government spending in the September quarter was low due to the general elections in the June quarter. However, it increased in the third quarter and is expected to continue in the fourth quarter as well, he said.

"Going forward, we see that increasing in Q3 and substantially in Q4. So cumulatively, with all these things, we are hopeful that

the consumption should improve going from here," he added. The government is focused a lot on the rural economy, which has done well in the second quarter.

"What we hear is the kharif production is also going to be good this year. So from that perspective, overall, we are quite optimistic from the rural front. And from that is where you know the consumption also is coming and it should increase," said Agarwal. Food inflation in India has been high in recent months, driven by rising prices of vegetables, fruits, oils, and fats. It has slowed down the consumption in urban areas, impacting purchase from the middle class.



"The government has been doing those kind of tax reforms as and where needed" to boost the consumption, Agarwal said. However, he added, "maybe

the salary has not gone up to the extent... That is why they are feeling the pinch." With cooling of inflation and increase in private investments, demand of

skilled jobs will increase, and overall things will become better, he said.

According to the latest Consumer Price Index (CPI) data released by the National Statistics Office (NSO) on Thursday, inflation in the food basket reduced to 9.04 per cent in November compared to 10.87 per cent in October.

Last week, while unveiling the bi-monthly monetary policy last week, former Reserve Bank of India Governor Shaktikanta Das said lingering food price pressures are likely to keep headline inflation elevated in the December quarter. Goenka, who is also Vice-Chairman & Managing Director of FMCG major Emami, said two segments --

rural and premium products -- are doing "much better". "The challenge is more in the area of the lower middle class, and middle class consumers, where the real hit is. And since the discretionary spend as a percentage is anyway, lower, any hit on the inflation has a direct impact," Agarwal said.

However, he was "very hopeful, once the inflation is under control, it should improve and things will be much better". Over the cement sector, which faced a decline in price in last two quarters YoY, Agarwal said, "their prices might be declining, but still, all the cement companies are making good profit." He further added it "may be because in the industry now,

consolidation is happening. Some of the larger players are fighting for the market share, etc."

Agarwal said government programmes, such as the Production Linked Incentive (PLI) scheme, have made a big difference in some key strategic sectors such as electronic, manufacturing of mobile phones, active pharmaceutical ingredients, etc.

"Going forward, what is important is India should not become like an assembly line... Like in electronics. How do we become self-resilient, even in terms of the components required for making electronics? So that may be another key focus area where the government can extend its PLI," he added.



# DEEP DIVE INTO KOLKATA'S PAST



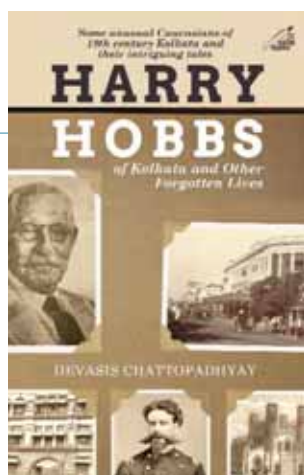
Devasis Chattopadhyay takes you through nine compelling stories of forgotten lives that shaped the cultural and historical history of Kolkata, writes **ABHI SINGHAL**

**H**arry Hobbs of *Kolkata and Other Forgotten Lives* is a compelling and richly detailed collection of nine meticulously researched stories that uncover the hidden aspects of Kolkata's past, many of which are unknown even to the city's residents and historians. Drawing on obscure and forgotten sources such as dusty old files, yellowed newspapers, private family papers, memoirs, and government archives, this book brings to life the untold stories of Kolkata's lesser-known figures and the city itself.

include an opera impresario, an entertainer, a piano tuner, a mercenary, a hotelier, a writer, a publisher, a lawyer, and even a real-life police detective turned crime writer. These characters, often forgotten by history, made remarkable contributions to the fabric of Kolkata during a time of upheaval and change. The book reflects on a significant period of transformation, when Kolkata's unique and syncretic

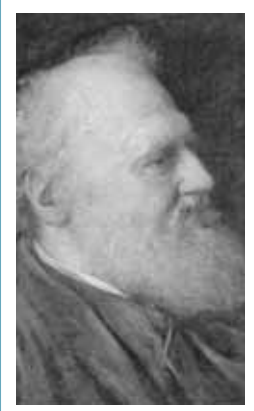
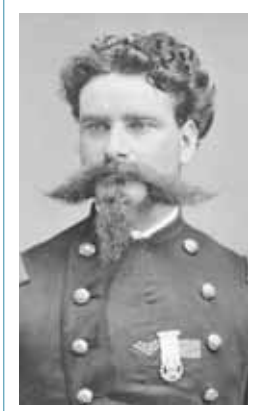
The book deep dives into the fascinating history of Kolkata, providing an unexplored jist of the city's origins. Some historians believe that Kolkata is mentioned in the Mahabharata, while others trace its roots back to the Mauryan and Gupta periods. The author, *Devasis Chattopadhyay*, then traces the transformation of the city into a metropolis, paying particular attention to its growth and changes in the 19th century. This period, marked by significant social, cultural, and economic shifts, is expertly and theoretically woven into the narrative.

*Chattopadhyay* focuses on the lives of protagonists who were often overlooked by mainstream history as the middle and junior civil or military officials, puisne judges, and a wide array of other fascinating individuals. These



### ABOUT THE BOOK

**Book:** Harry Hobbs of Kolkata and Other Forgotten Lives by Devasis Chattopadhyay  
**Publisher:** Niyogi Books Private Limited  
**Price:** ₹595 **Pages:** 316



identity was shaped, in part, by European and American settlers. It was an era when many of the things we now take for granted like the social norms, institutions, and innovations that were still in their infancy. Yet, the individuals featured in the book were instrumental in creating the cultural and historical landscape of the city. *Chattopadhyay's* narrative uncovers these hidden histories, offering a fresh perspective on Kolkata's past. One of the key figures in the book, Harry Hobbs, is also featured in the author's earlier work *Scoundrels and Scroungers*, where *Hobbs* noted that the principal cause of men's downfall up until the end of the 19th century was drinking. In his writings, he provides intriguing glimpses into a Kolkata of the past the one where European women worked as barmaids and a thriving but largely unspoken subterranean slave trade flourished. This was also a time when wealthy Bengali

Babus kept European concubines, and attending English theatre performances or listening to Italian opera was a common pastime among the city's elite. The book is divided into nine chapters, each focusing on a different historical figure: Major Harry H. Hobbs, The Shakespeare Family, Isaac Henry Townley Roberdeau, Richard Reid, Colonel Percy Wyndham, Shirley Tremearne, Henry Thoby Prinsep, David Nunez Cardozo, and others. Through these vivid and captivating stories, Harry Hobbs of Kolkata and Other Forgotten Lives provides a nuanced and fascinating portrait of Kolkata as a city in transition, shaped by diverse influences and inhabited by characters whose contributions to its rich history have long been forgotten. *Chattopadhyay's* work offers an enriching journey into the heart of Kolkata's past, illuminating the hidden lives that have shaped the city we know today.

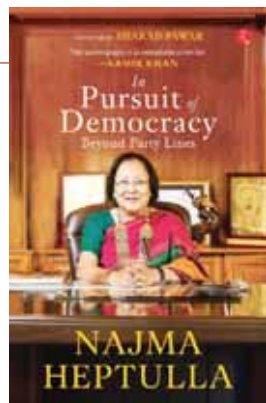
## Najma's journey through politics

By **ABHISHEK SONKAR**



Heptulla's writing style is direct and conversational. It feels like she is talking to you, recounting her life over a cup of tea. She avoids heavy political

jargon, making the book a breeze even if you're not well-versed in politics. The narrative flows smoothly between her professional milestones and



### ABOUT THE BOOK

**Book:** In Pursuit of Democracy: Beyond Party Lines by Najma Heptulla  
**Publisher:** Rupa Publications  
**Price:** ₹695

## A Transformative Journey

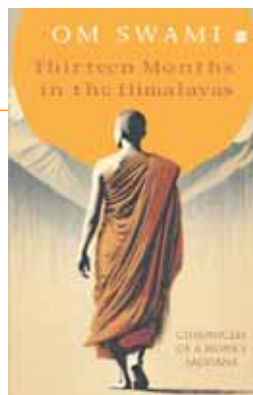
By **GYANESHWAR DAYAL**

**A** Transformative Journey of Faith, Endurance, and the Divine Om Swami's *Thirteen Months in the Himalayas* is a spellbinding account of one man's relentless pursuit of spiritual truth and divine connection. *Om Swami's Thirteen Months in the Himalayas* is an extraordinary account of one man's unwavering pursuit of spiritual truth and divine connection. Following his earlier memoir, 'If Truth Be Told', this book delves deeper into Swami's radical transformation from a successful entrepreneur to an ascetic devoted to discovering the Creator. Written with an almost poetic honesty, it presents a gripping narrative of discipline, endurance, and transcendence.

**A Journey of the Soul:** The Himalayas serve as more than just the backdrop for Swami's odyssey—they become a central character, mirroring the challenges and revelations of his inner world. The author's detailed descriptions of his austere lifestyle, rigorous sadhanas and encounters with celestial energies immerse readers in his spiritual journey. The book's raw and vivid prose captures the stark beauty of the mountains and the unforgiving nature of the terrain, where every moment is a test of will and faith.

**Spiritual Discipline Redefined:** What makes this book especially compelling is its depiction of extreme spiritual discipline. Swami's daily routine of meditation, mantras, and fasting is as exhausting to read about as it is inspiring. His ability to persevere through physical deprivation, isolation, and moments of self-doubt speaks to an exceptional strength of spirit. His writing makes you feel the depth of his longing to encounter God, transforming what could have been a remote subject into something deeply relatable. At its core, *Thirteen Months in the Himalayas* is a meditation on faith and purpose. It challenges readers to reflect on their own lives and the sacrifices they are willing to make in pursuit of their truths. The book inspires by showing what is possible when one's commitment to a goal is absolute, even when the goal is as abstract and immense as experiencing the divine.

**Accessible Yet Profound:** Om Swami's journey is deeply personal, yet its lessons transcend individual experience. This book is a rare gem that inspires introspection, courage and hope. Highly recommended for anyone seeking inspiration to explore the limits of human potential and the boundless nature of the divine.



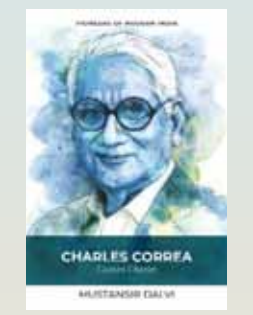
### ABOUT THE BOOK

**Book:** Thirteen Months in the Himalayas by Om Swami  
**Publisher:** HarperCollins  
**Price:** ₹499

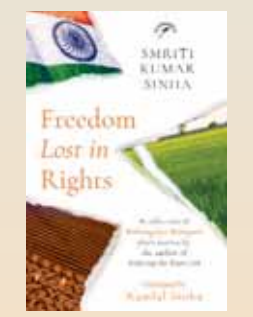
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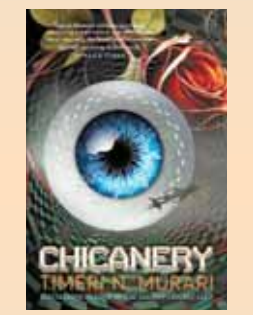
**Book:** Our Man in Warsaw  
**Author:** Carlos Tamilavan  
**Publisher:** Niyogi Books  
**Price:** ₹595



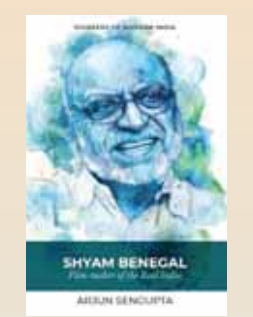
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**Author:** Mustansir Dalvi  
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**Price:** ₹299



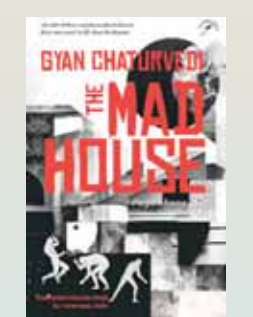
**Book:** Freedom Lost in Rights  
**Author:** Smriti Kumar Sinha  
**Publisher:** Niyogi Books  
**Price:** ₹395



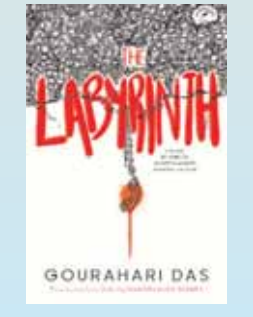
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**Author:** Timeri N. Murari  
**Publisher:** Niyogi Books  
**Price:** ₹695



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**Book:** The Labyrinth  
**Author:** Gourahari Das  
**Publisher:** Niyogi Books  
**Price:** ₹295

# Rohit must return to opening if he has to throw the first punch: Shastri

PTI ■ BRISBANE

Former India head coach Ravi Shastri, who knows a thing or two about winning Test rubbers in Australia, on Thursday asked India skipper Rohit Sharma to return to the opening slot "if he has to throw the first punch" on an opponent brimming with confidence. Shastri was serving as team director when India won their maiden Test series in Australia in 2017-18 and was the head coach when the side rallied brilliantly to stun the hosts in the last tour in 2020-21. The move to slot Rohit at number six did not yield the desired results for India and they were hammered by 10 wickets in the second Test at Adelaide, leaving the five-match clash locked at 1-1 and with everything to play for in what Shastri believes could decide the fate of the series. "That's where he's (Rohit) been at his best over the last eight or nine years," Shastri was quoted as saying by "The

Age"

"It's not that he's going to set the world on fire - he could - but that's the place that's best for him...If he has to do damage, if he has to throw the first punch, that's the best place from where he can do it."

Rohit had only one fifty in his last 10 innings heading into the Pink-ball Test last week when Shastri, interestingly, advised against changing the opening combination of Yashasvi Jaiswal and KL Rahul after their success in the position while backing the captain to bat in the middle-order. Shastri said he has no doubt the winner of the third Test, starting here on Saturday, could go on to claim the series. "I feel whichever team wins this Test match will win the series. I have absolutely no doubt in my mind. So it is very, very important that India get the balance right, because Australia have got the confidence back," the former captain said.



The triumph of 2021 is considered one of the greatest in the history of Indian cricket and Shastri, while speaking at the first annual Usman Khawaja Foundation lunch at the Gabba, said the unity showed by the team, despite restrictions due to COVID-19, played a big part in the historic win.

"In COVID, the first Test match you start with five bowlers and the same five bowlers don't play the last Test. That says it all, it's like Australia playing without these five bowlers in the last Test of the series, it's a different ball game. Plus you didn't have quite a few batsmen as well. So it's a tribute to the players. "You can only do so much as a coach from behind the scenes. At the end of it, it's the players who have to go out there and do their job and they were magnificent." Four years ago, after getting bundled out for their lowest Test total of 36 in Adelaide, India made a magnificent comeback to win two of the remaining three games and emerge winners. Shastri fondly recalled a conversation between Rishabh Pant and Shubman Gill, who was helping out the latter with some useful tips right after his dismissal, as India went for the jugular to score 140 odd runs in the final session of play to shock

the hosts at the Gabba, which was until then the home team's fortress. "I'll never forget it," Shastri said. "Last session, 140 runs to get. We had two different change rooms because of COVID. I went down from the coaches' room to have a chat with either Rishabh or (Chateshwar) Pujara. When I was about to reach the toilet, I heard a conversation between Gill and Pant. "Seventy-one overs bowled, Gill had got out for 91, and they were the two youngest players in the side, 21 and 22. 'Nine overs left, they need the new ball, they'll bring (Marnus) Labuschagne on with his leg spin, you've got to score 45-50 runs there.' "They are planning how they can reach closer to the end score, and no way was I going to stop them, I don't want to change that mindset. So I just walked past and said 'do what you have to do'. In the end, we chased down nearly 150 in that last session."



## Virat Kohli addresses team ahead of 3rd Test in Brisbane

PTI ■ BRISBANE

He used to be the cynosure of all eyes at training sessions during his captaincy days and Virat Kohli was once again the centre of attention as he addressed his teammates here on Thursday. After the demoralising 10-wicket defeat in the Adelaide day/night game, the visitors needed a bit of inspiration going into the crucial third Test of the series, and the youngsters in the side couldn't have got a better mentor than 'King' Kohli himself to guide them with his words of wisdom. The team huddles before the start of the training session has been a constant feature for years now and Kohli used to do a lot of talking during his days in charge. He did take a back seat once he left captaincy but with skipper Rohit also under immense pressure after four straight defeats, the senior-most player (in terms of Test debut) had to take the initiative ahead of the match starting here on Saturday. With vice-captain Jasprit Bumrah by his side, Kohli was

seen speaking animatedly to the group and everyone, including Rohit, listened to him with rapt attention. Rohit faces both new and semi-new ball in nets. Unlike before the pink ball Test, Rohit looked in far better shape during his net session at the Gabba but question marks remain over whether he would be back to opening the innings or stay put at No. 6, which isn't his preferred slot. On the day, while KL Rahul and Yashasvi Jaiswal once again faced the new ball at the nets, Rohit took on a slightly older Kookaburra at the beginning. Having faced that for some time, he did change nets with Rahul and also played a brand new red cherry for a while. The Gabba pitch has a decent grass cover and has always been one of the most traditional Australian wickets with both seam and bounce being on offer. Rohit's susceptibility has been against the moving deliveries more than bounce, and hence, it would be interesting to see if he takes on the challenge head on. After his session, Rohit and

head coach Gautam Gambhir were immersed in a lengthy chat and from a distance, it looked like they were discussing technique. Gambhir was seen shaping up for some shadow drives, with Rohit watching him intently. Akash Deep looks better but will Gambhir drop Harshit? Akash Deep is believed to be the most consistent bowler in the Indian net session but that is no indicator that he will replace the young Harshit Rana, who was taken to task by Travis Head during the second Test in Adelaide. After four wickets on Test debut in Perth, Harshit was smashed for 86 in 16 overs but skipper Rohit came firmly to the youngster's defence. The burly Harshit can bowl the heavy ball and Gabba, just like the Optus Stadium track, could suit his style of bowling although he has been losing steam in subsequent spells after the opening one. Akash Deep at the other hand troubled Jaiswal twice, getting the outside edge of his bat, and those were clear catches in the slip cordon. He also got a pat on the back from the skipper.

## Gujarat Giants appoint Pravin Tambe as bowling coach; Marsh takes over as batting coach

PTI ■ AHMEDABAD

Gujarat Giants on Thursday appointed former leg-spinner Pravin Tambe as their bowling coach, while Australian Daniel Marsh joined the side as batting coach ahead of Women's Premier League 2025. Michael Klinger, who joined the team last season, will continue as the Giants' head coach. Tambe, who made his IPL debut at the age of 41 back in 2013 for Rajasthan Royals, brings substantial coaching experience, having worked with Kolkata Knight Riders and Lucknow Super Giants. "I'm eager to work with this talented group of players to sharpen their skills and help



them excel," said Tambe. Marsh carries loads of experience, having served as head coach of the Tasmania men's team from 2013 to 2017 and was appointed as the assistant coach of the Australian women's cricket team in 2022. "I look forward to developing a fearless approach to our batting with the aim of

making our team one of the strongest batting units of the WPL," said Marsh. Ahead of the WPL 2025 auction to be held in Bengaluru on Sunday, the Giants had retained players such as Ashleigh Gardner and Beth Mooney. Gujarat Giants retained players: Ashleigh Gardner, Beth Mooney, Dayalan Hemalatha, Harleen Deol, Laura Wolvaardt, Shabnam Shakil, Tanuja Kanwer, Phoebe Litchfield, Meghna Singh, Kashvee Gautam, Priya Mishra, Mannat Kashyap, Bharti Fulmali, Sayali Satghare. Released players: Sneha Rana, Kathryn Bryce, Trisha Poojitha, Veda Krishnamurthy, Tarannum Pathan, Lea Tahuhu.

## Prasar Bharati to broadcast Hockey India League

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

The upcoming Hockey India League, which is being revived after seven years, will be telecast live on the country's national broadcaster, Prasar Bharati. The Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) in this regard was signed in a ceremony between Abhishek Agarwal, Deputy Director General Sports, Prasar Bharati, and Hockey India Secretary General Bhola Nath Singh. Set to commence on December 28 in Rourkela, HIL will be broadcast live across the nation through Doordarshan and Prasar Bharati's new OTT platform -- Waves. This edition of the HIL is path-breaking because it will feature the inaugural season of the women's league alongside the men's competition. While the men's competition will be played in Rourkela, a four-team maiden tournament for the women will be hosted at Ranchi. Navneet Sehgal, chairman Prasar Bharati, emphasised the importance of this partnership. "This is a proud moment for hockey, a sport that has captured the hearts of millions of Indians, and for Prasar Bharati, as we come together to bring the Hockey India League to every corner of the country. Our goal is to showcase this prestigious league to households across India, including remote towns and villages where future hockey stars are emerging. "With Doordarshan's extensive reach and our OTT platform, Waves, we will ensure that the Hockey India League becomes a national celebration, inspiring a deeper connection between the sport and its fans. Together, we aim to elevate hockey's prominence and turn it into a true festival for the entire nation," he said.

## Momentum is with Australia after win at Adelaide, says Sunil Gavaskar

PTI ■ BRISBANE

The legendary Sunil Gavaskar feels Australia will have the momentum in the third Test against India starting on Saturday thanks to their victory in the Pink Ball Test at Adelaide last week. Australia levelled the five-match Border-Gavaskar Trophy 1-1 with a 10-wicket win in the day-night Test after losing the first Test at Perth by 295 runs. "The momentum that the Indian team got in Perth was lost during the 10-day gap. Now, the momentum is with Australia because they have won this Test match," Gavaskar told Star Sports. "After the Adelaide Test, a few days later, you are playing at The Gabba. So, the momentum is now with the



Australian team," he added. Speaking to the same channel, former spinner Harbhajan Singh said India should try to play their best cricket to register a win at the 'Gabba' before travelling to more favourable venues in Sydney and Melbourne. "Their best chances will be, I think, in Sydney and Melbourne. Anyway, if you play your best cricket at The Gabba and win there, then you will definitely win one match out of Melbourne or Sydney," Harbhajan said. He said India has the ability to make a comeback into the series despite the heavy loss

in Adelaide. "The equality of the first two Tests shows that both teams have the ability to come back. Australia has come back; now maybe it's India's turn to turn the tables," he said. The owner of 711 international wickets too agreed that the long interval between the first and second Test resulted in India losing the momentum. "This series is tough because both teams have had losses. What happened with Australia in Perth, maybe they didn't expect it. And what happened with India in Adelaide, maybe India also didn't expect it. "Although there was a very long gap in the middle between the two Tests, sometimes such a gap spoils the momentum, and it happened here," he said.

# Manchester City crisis deepens with loss to Juventus in Champions League

AP ■ PARIS

Manchester City plunged deeper into trouble in the Champions League by losing 2-0 at Juventus, the latest setback in a scarcely believable run of poor results for the ailing English champions. City dropped to 22nd place in the 36-team standings, with only the top 24 advancing. Progressing to the next round of the new-look format looked a certainty before the season for a team that was European champion in 2023 and has won the last four Premier League titles. But not anymore as City manager Pep Guardiola battles injuries and an apparent loss of belief among his players. City has won just one of its last 10 matches in all competitions, with goals by Dušan Vlahovic

and Weston McKennie inflicting the latest defeat and igniting Juventus' qualification hopes. City midfielder Ilkay Gundogan described the team's problem as a "mental issue." Opponents "are able to break our rhythm with the smallest of things," Gundogan said on Wednesday. "They don't even need to do much and it has such a big effect on us right now." Barcelona jumped into second place in the league standings, behind Liverpool, and is guaranteed to advance after a 3-2 win at Borussia Dortmund. Raphinha and Ferran Torres, with two goals, scored for Barca. Arsenal beat Monaco 3-0 mainly thanks to two goals by Bukayo Saka to move into

third place and be the highest of six teams on 13 points. The top eight qualify directly for the last 16 and the teams placed No. 9-24 go into a two-legged playoff. Danger for City City has two games to save its faltering Champions League campaign and the first is against Paris Saint-Germain, another giant in trouble in 25th place - one spot out of the qualifying positions. Vlahovic put Juventus ahead in the 53rd when he powered a header goalward straight at City goalkeeper Ederson, who could only parry the ball over his own line. Two American substitutes sealed the win for Juve, with McKennie volleying home from Timothy Weah's cross. Juventus moved into 14th place.



Super-sub Torres Ferran Torres came off the bench to inspire Barcelona to a fifth win in six games and push Dortmund, last season's runner-up, out of the top eight. Torres came on in the 71st to replace Robert Lewandowski, who had a quiet game against his former club. Just four minutes later, Torres scored a goal on the rebound from Dani Olmo's shot. Serhou Guirassy's second goal of the game leveled the score at 2-2 but Torres scored again in the 85th off Lamine Yamal's

pass on the counter. Raphinha gave Barcelona the lead before Guirassy equalised from the penalty spot. Raphinha and Guirassy are tied for second place in the scoring chart on six goals, behind Lewandowski's competition-high seven. Home comforts for Arsenal Arsenal secured a third straight home win without conceding in the league stage, with Saka scoring in the 34th and 78th minutes and sending in a shot that was turned into the net by substitute Kai Havertz in the 88th. Arsenal is ahead of Bayer Leverkusen, Aston Villa, Inter Milan, Brest and Lille on goal difference. Lille won 3-2 at home to Sturm Graz on Wednesday. In-form Alvarez Man City could sure do with

Julian Alvarez at the moment. With a brilliant curling finish to open the scoring, the Argentinian striker helped Atletico Madrid beat Slovan Bratislava 3-1 and provide a timely reminder of what City is missing after selling him for more than USD 100 million in August. Alvarez has 12 goals for the season, with four coming in the Champions League. Antoine Griezmann scored Atletico's other two goals at Metropolitan stadium as the Spanish team climbed to 11th place after a 10th straight win in all competitions. Tribute to grieving teammate When Lukasz Lakomy gave Young Boys the lead against Stuttgart, he ran toward the sideline and held up teammate Meschack Elia's jersey as others gathered around him.

The gesture was a tribute after Elia's son died unexpectedly this week after a short illness. Elia wasn't playing as he was on his way to his native Congo, where his son died, to be with his family. Both teams wore black armbands and there was a moment of silence before the game, which was won 5-1 by Stuttgart. Late winner Tammy Abraham scored an 87th-minute winner as AC Milan beat Red Star Belgrade 2-1 to move one point off the top eight. Milan lost Alvaro Morata and Ruben Loftus-Cheek to muscle injuries in the first half. Benfica's five-match winning streak ended with a 0-0 home draw against Bologna, and Feyenoord had a 4-2 win over Sparta Prague.

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