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VOW TO SPEAK UP

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## US imposes over 300 per cent penalty on companies who bribed HAL, Railways, IOC

J GOPIKRISHNAN ■ NEW DELHI

With controversies raging on the United States Department of Justice indicting Adani Group for bribing 265 Million Dollars to multiple solar energy companies in India, recent orders from the American authorities, shows that many US firms which gave the bribes in India and other countries, have settled the case by paying more than 300 per cent penalty to avoid prosecution. The US-based research and design firm Moog Inc was caught for bribery of more than half-a-Million Dollars to Hindustan Aeronautics Limited (HAL), Indian Railways settled their case with US Securities and Exchange Commission by paying more than 1.68 Million Dollars. The IT giant Oracle Corporation, caught for charges of corrupt practices and bribery of more than

6.8 Million Dollars in Indian Railways, and organisations in United Arab Emirates (UAE) and Turkey, settled the case by paying a fine of 23 Million Dollars to the US Treasury as per the orders of US Securities and Exchange Commission. US-based chemical manufacturing company Albemarle Corporation was caught by the US Department of Justice for bribing Indian Oil Corporation and companies in Indonesia and Vietnam for more than 63.5 Million Dollars settled the case by paying a hefty fine of more than 198 million dollars to avoid prosecution. As per the orders on October 11, 2024, the Securities and Exchange Commission (SEC), Moog Inc through its Indian subsidiary Moog Motion Controls Private Limited (MMCPL) bribed officials in Hindustan Aeronautics Limited (HAL), South Central

Railway and Research Designs and Standards Organisation (RDSO) under the Ministry of Railways to bag contracts. "In August 2020, shortly after engaging Agent A, Moog brand was added to the supplier list for an upcoming South Central Railway (SCR) tender notice... then tender notice listed Moog, along with one additional supplier for potential supplier for a specific part in the SCR tender..." "In September 2020, Moog Inc's India subsidiary MMCPL won the SCR contract for \$34,323. In April 2022, Agent A invoiced MMCPL for "commission charges," which several MMCPL employees knew included the improper payments to Government officials to eliminate competition and win contract awards. The payments were falsely recorded as legitimate contractor services," says the SEC Order, adding that 10% was the

bribe commission in the Railways contract. The SEC order detailing bribery in HAL says in November 2021, Moog bagged \$ 1,399,328 valued contract for parts and services related to the April 2021 contract tender. Investigation found that 2.5% commission was received as a bribe by "a HAL official." As per the eight page order, Moog Inc paid more than 5,00,000 Dollars as bribe for getting contracts in HAL and Railways. The US Department of Justice's order dated September 28, 2023 says Albemarle Corporation bagged big contracts in Indian Oil Corporation and companies in Indonesia and Vietnam by corrupt practices and bribing of more than 63.5 million dollars. Albemarle is supplying refining solutions to more than 700 refineries across the world and dealing with Indian Oil Corporation (IOC) from 2009

### THE PUNISHED

- Moog Inc caught for bribery of over a half a Million Dollars in HAL, Railways settled the case with United States Securities and Exchange Commission by paying a penalty of more than 1.68 Million Dollars.
- Oracle Corporation, caught for bribery of more than 6.8 Million Dollars in Indian Railways, UAE and Turkey, settled the case by paying a penalty of 23 Million Dollars.
- Albemarle Corporation caught for bribery in Indian Oil Corporation & companies in Indonesia & Vietnam for more than 63.5 Million Dollars settled the case by paying a penalty of more than 198 Million Dollars to avoid prosecution.

to 2017. The 46 page order says Albemarle started paying bribes to IOC officials to get it removed from the "Holiday List" in 2009.

"Albemarle paid approximately \$1.14 Million in commission to India intermediary company relating to Indian Oil Corporation business and obtained approximately \$11.14 million in profits on that business between approximately 2009 and 2011," said the Order. Albemarle was caught for bribery by US authorities in 2017 for 63.5 Million Dollars and then settled the case in September 2023 by paying a hefty fine of more than 198 Million Dollars to avoid prosecution. The 46-page Order imposing fine on Albemarle says the US company also engaged in corrupt practices with an Indian private refinery. However the name of the private refinery is not mentioned in the Order. The September 27, 2022 dated Order of Securities and Exchange Commission says that the IT giant Oracle Corporation was engaged

in corrupt practices and bribery in India, UAE and Turkey. "In 2019, Oracle India sales employees also used an excessive discount scheme in connection with a transportation company, a majority of which was owned by the Indian Ministry of Railways... One of the sales employees involved in the transaction maintained a spreadsheet that indicated \$67,000 was the "buffer" available to potentially make payments to a specific Indian SOE (State Owned Entity) official. "A total of approximately \$330,000 was funneled to an entity with a reputation for paying SOE officials and another \$62,000 was paid to an entity controlled by the sales employees," states the 10-page order of Securities and Exchange Commission imposing hefty fine of Rs.23 Million Dollars on Oracle, caught for bribery amount of 6.8 Million Dollars.



MARCH 9, 1951-DEC 15, 2024

## The tabla falls silent, Ustad Zakir Hussain passes away at 73

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

Tabla maestro Ustad Zakir Hussain passed away in the United States on Sunday. He was 73. Hussain was admitted to the ICU of a San Francisco hospital with heart related problems, his friend and flautist Rakesh Chaurasia had told PTI earlier on Sunday. Hussain is hailed as the maestro who took the tabla to the global stage. He had been having blood pressure issues, added Hussain's manager Nirmala Bachani. The eldest son of legendary tabla player Allah Rakha, Hussain followed in the footsteps of his father, becoming a marquee name in India and across the world. Hussain has received five Grammy Awards in his career, including three at the 66th Grammy Awards earlier this year. In his career spanning six decades, the musician has worked with several renowned international and Indian artists, but it was his 1973 musical project with English guitarist John McLaughlin, violinist L. Shankar, and percussionist TH 'Vikku' Vinayakram that brought together Indian classical and elements of jazz in a fusion hitherto unknown. The percussionist, one of India's most celebrated classical musicians, received the Padma Shri in 1988, the Padma Bhushan in 2002, and the Padma Vibhushan in 2023.

## Now Omar chips away at India Bloc

DEEPAK KUMAR JHA ■ NEW DELHI

There seem to be further cracks developing in the Congress-led Opposition INDIA Bloc, as Jammu and Kashmir Chief Minister and head of National Conference Omar Abdullah on Sunday categorically rejected the grand old party's crying over Electronic Voting Machines (EVMs) after losing elections. Omar is one of the important ally of the INDIA Bloc and his resentment against Congress comes within one week which saw other constituents like Sharad Pawar-led Nationalist Congress Party (NCP), Mamata Banerjee-led Trinamool Congress (TMC), Lalu Yadav-led Rashtriya Janata Dal (RJD) echoed similar views and called for Congress must rethink and give up its Big brother attitude after the party had dismal performance in the just concluded



Assembly polls in Haryana, Maharashtra, Jharkhand and J & K where the party was outshined by their principle ally Jharkhand Mukti Morcha (JMM) and Jammu and Kashmir National Conference (JKNC), respectively. "When you get a hundred plus members of Parliament using the same EVMs, and you celebrate that as sort of a victory for

your party, you can't then a few months later turn around and say... We don't like these EVMs because now the election results aren't going the way we would like them to," Abdullah, currently in Delhi, said. The J & K CM said political parties should not contest elections if they do not trust the voting mechanism. "If you have problems with the EVMs, then you should be consistent in those problems," he said. Going against the INDIA Bloc thought process, Omar also reiterated his stand for the New Parliament Building and the upcoming massive Central Vista. "Central Vista project is a good idea to develop in the Lutyens' and I also have read out my mind for a new Parliament building as the old one has outlived," he said.

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## BJP has no CM face, says poll ready Kejriwal

RAJESH KUMAR ■ NEW DELHI

With a couple of months left for the Delhi Assembly polls, the Aam Aadmi Party (AAP) released its fourth, and final, list of 38 candidates on Sunday. AAP convener Arvind Kejriwal will contest from New Delhi constituency for the fourth consecutive time, while Delhi Chief Minister Atishi has been fielded from Kalkaji for the second time. In the fourth list, a total of 38 candidates have been announced, of which 36 are sitting MLAs. The AAP has now released names of its candidates for all 70 seats in the Delhi Assembly. The party has, so far, dropped 19 sitting MLAs. The party has given a chance to two new names- Ramesh Pehalwan from Kasturba Nagar and Naresh Balyan's wife Pooja Balyan. The upcoming polls are expected to be a litmus test for the party's governance model and its appeal to the electorate. Besides Kejriwal's bid for New Delhi, where he has won since 2013 the AAP faces significant



Photo: Ranjan Dimri/The Pioneer

competition. The Congress has fielded former Member of Parliament Sandeep Dikshit, son of Sheila Dikshit, the city's longest-serving chief minister while the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) is expected to field former MP Parvesh Sahib Singh Verma, son of former Delhi Chief Minister Sahib Singh Verma who was denied a ticket for the Lok Sabha polls.

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Photo: Ranjan Dimri/The Pioneer

## Delhi AQI will rise as temp dips

RAJESH KUMAR ■ NEW DELHI

Delhi's air quality worsened on Sunday as the Air Quality Index (AQI) remained in the 'poor category' alongside a significant drop in temperature, intensifying cold conditions across the city. According to the India Meteorological Department (IMD), mercury dipped once again across the capital on Sunday, falling to 4.9 degree Celsius for the third time this winter season a sharp decline from Saturday's 9.4 degree Celsius while the Central Pollution Control Board (CPCB) reported Delhi's AQI was recorded at 294, deteriorating from 212 the previous day. With 15.005 per cent, the transport sector was the key contributor to air pollution, followed by Industries with 8.8 percent. Visuals from areas like Jama Masjid and

AIIMS showed individuals braving the cold under thick blankets, trying to rest amidst harsh conditions. No cold wave conditions prevailed, as per the data, the IMD said. Safdarjung, the representative station for Delhi's weather, recorded a minimum temperature of 4.9°C on Sunday, which is four degrees below normal for this time of year. Forecasts indicate that Delhi's minimum temperature is likely to hover around 5°C until Tuesday, maintaining the chill. Aya Nagar recorded 5.2 degree Celsius and Ridge 5.3 degree Celsius. The minimum temperature recorded at Palam Observatory at 8.30 am today was 6.2 degrees Celsius which is three degrees Celsius below the normal temperature of the season. The drop in temperature in 24 hours is 0.2 degrees Celsius.

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## Devendra Fadnavis expands Maha Cabinet

T N RAGHUNATHA ■ MUMBAI

In the first-ever expansion of this ministry undertaken by him ten days after he and two Deputy Chief Ministers were sworn in, Maharashtra Chief Minister Devendra Fadnavis on Sunday inducted 39 ministers, including 33 ranked ones, into his Cabinet, while he dropped 10 senior MahaYuti leaders, including BJP's Sudhir Mungantiwar and Nationalist Congress Party NCP (Ajit Pawar) leader Chhagan Bhujbal, from it. In a swearing-in ceremony held at Raj Bhavan in Nagpur for the second time since 1981, Maharashtra Governor CP Radhakrishnan administered oath of office to the 39 ministers, including six Ministers of State, ahead of the start of the Winter Session of the Maharashtra Legislature on Monday. Interestingly enough, as many as 25 new faces found place in the Devendra Fadnavis Cabinet. Late BJP leader Gopinath Munde's daughter Pankaja Munde, who has made a comeback as a State minister for the second time in her career, is among the four women ministers in the State Cabinet. With the induction of 39 ministers, the total number of ministers in the State Cabinet has gone up to 42, which is one less than the stipulated 43-member ministry which accounts for 15 percent of total



Maharashtra Governor CP Radhakrishnan, Chief Minister Devendra Fadnavis, Deputy Chief Ministers Ajit Pawar and Eknath Shinde and others during the swearing-in ceremony of cabinet ministers amid State Cabinet expansion, at Raj Bhavan, in Nagpur

288 members in the State Assembly. Of the 39 ministers inducted into the State Cabinet, 19 are from the BJP, 11 from the Shiv Sena and 9 from the NCP (AP). Apart from Mungantiwar and Bhujbal, eight other senior leaders from the MahaYuti, comprising Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP), Shiv Sena (Eknath Shinde) and NCP (AP), who have been dropped from the Fadnavis Cabinet are Vijay Kumar Gavit, Suresh Khade, Tanaji Sawant, Abdul Sattar, Deepal Kesarkar, Dilip Walse-Patil, Anil Patil and Sanjay Bansode. What has come as a big surprise is the induction of 25 ministerial faces who were not in the earlier government include Chandrashekhar Bawankule, Ganesh Naik, Pankaja Munde, Ashish Shelar, Jaikumar Rawal., Nitesh Rane (all from the BJP), Pratap Sarnaik, Sanjay

Rathod, Dada Bhuse, Sanjay Shirsat (all from the Shiv Sena) Makrand Patil, Hasan Mushraf, Narahari Hirwal and Dattaraya Bharne (all from the Ajit Pawar NCP). Apart from Pankaja Munde, the three other women who have made it into the State Cabinet are BJP's Madhuri Misal, Meghana Bordikar and NCP's Aditi Tatkare. The dropping of Sudhir Mungantiwar, a seven-time MLA from Ballapur in Vidarbha, has come as a big shock to the rank and file of the BJP. In fact, he was number two in the Devendra Fadnavis Cabinet that existed from 2014 to 2019. A seven-time MLA, two-term MLC and a former deputy chief minister, Bhujbal has surprised one and all. A senior OBC leader, Bhujbal is also the President of Akhil Bharatiya Mahatma Phule Samata Parishad.

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## Justice Shekhar Kumar Yadav to appear before SC Collegium soon

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

Justice Shekhar Kumar Yadav, who made controversial statements at a Vishva Hindu Parishad (VHP) function, is likely to appear before the Supreme Court Collegium soon to explain his stand on the controversy. The SC on December 10 took note of news reports over the statements and sought a report from the Allahabad High Court on the entire issue. "The Supreme Court has taken note of newspaper reports of a speech given by Mr Justice Shekhar Kumar Yadav, a sitting judge of the High Court of Judicature at Allahabad. The details and particulars have been called from the high court and the matter is under consideration," an official statement had said. As per the established practices, a judge, against whom a report is sought by the Supreme Court Collegium on any controversial issue from the High Court concerned, is given an opportunity to put forth his or her version before the top court Collegium headed by the Chief Justice of India (CJI). The Allahabad High Court judge is likely to be asked to appear and put forth his version as per established practices, said many legal experts.



At a VHP function on December 8, Justice Yadav said the main aim of the uniform civil code was to promote social harmony, gender equality and secularism. He was addressing a provincial convention of the legal cell and high court unit of the VHP in Allahabad High Court. Supreme Court Bar Association President and Rajya Sabha MP Kapil Sibal initiated signatures from parliamentarians to initiate impeachment procedures against Justice Yadav. A day later, videos of the judge speaking on provocative issues, including the law working according to the majority, were circulated widely on social media, prompting strong reactions from several quarters, including opposition leaders who questioned his reported statements, labelling it as "hate speech".

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## Lucky escape for eight lions chilling on railway tracks

PTI N BHAVNAGAR

Alert loco pilots of a goods train and a passenger train applied the brakes in time to save the lives of eight lions that had wandered onto railway tracks in Gujarat's Bhavnagar district in the last two days, an official said Sunday. With the vigilance of the loco pilots of the Western Railway's Bhavnagar division and the help of trackers of the forest department, 104 lions have been saved so far in this financial year, said Mashooque Ahmad, senior divisional commercial manager, Bhavnagar. As per a release, loco pilot Dhavalbhai P, driving a goods train heading to Pipavav port from Hapa on Thursday, noticed five lions crossing the track near



Raijula city. The alert loco pilot applied emergency brakes to stop the train and provide safe passage to the big cats, it said. The release said the train was allowed to move after the forest guard reached the spot and found all the conditions normal.

Similarly, on Friday, loco pilot Sunil Pandit, driving a passenger train, noticed a lioness with two cubs crossing the track in the Chalala-Dhari section and stopped the train by applying emergency brakes. "On receiving the information, a forest guard reached the spot. He

saw that the lions had moved away from the railway track. When all conditions were found normal, the forest guard asked the loco pilot to depart," the release said. Asiatic lions have either died or been seriously hurt on the railway line connecting Pipavav Port with north Gujarat, with the Gujarat High Court raising concern and directing authorities to come up with a standard operating procedure (SOP) to avoid such incidents. The Bhavnagar Division has instructed loco pilots operating the trains to work with special vigilance while following the prescribed speed, the release said. The state forest department has also erected fences along the track at regular intervals to save lions from getting hit by train

## WINTER WONDERLAND



Tourists visit a frozen waterfall at Drung area on a cold winter morning, in Baramulla district, Jammu and Kashmir

PTI



# Assembly speaker, CM seek cooperation from all parties

Winter session begins today

PNS ■ LUCKNOW

Uttar Pradesh legislative Assembly Speaker Satish Mahana and Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath on Sunday sought cooperation from all political parties for smooth proceedings as the winter session of the state assembly commences here on Monday. Leaders from various political parties participated in the all-party meeting presided over by the state assembly speaker. CM Yogi emphasised that constructive discussions in the House contribute to both the state's development and the resolution of public issues. "As public representatives, we must address the concerns and problems of the people constructively," he said. The chief minister, along with the assembly speaker, called for the cooperation of all parties to ensure the efficient functioning of the House.



Uttar Pradesh Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath with Assembly Speaker Satish Mahana and other leaders during an all-party meeting ahead of the winter session, in Lucknow on Sunday

PTI

During the meeting, Yogi said that the House serves as a platform for meaningful discussions that accelerate the state's development and resolve key issues. He urged that no disruptions should hinder the

House's work and that everyone must work together to ensure its smooth operation. "The cooperation of all parties is essential to keep the House functioning effectively," he added. The chief minister also

urged leaders from all parties to contribute actively to the development of Uttar Pradesh. Finance and Parliamentary Affairs Minister Suresh Khanna, Leader of Opposition

Mata Prasad Pandey, Cabinet minister Sanjay Nishad, Congress MLA Anuradha Mishra Mona, Raghuraj Pratap Singh Raja Bhaiya of Jansatta Dal, Anil Tripathi, etc were present on the occasion.

# Yogi: Why no justice for victims of Sambhal massacre after 46 years?

PNS ■ LUCKNOW

Uttar Pradesh Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath on Sunday launched a scathing attack on Congress and other opposition parties, questioning why justice has still not been served for the victims of the Sambhal massacre, despite 46 years having passed since the incident. "Why have those responsible for the horrific massacre in Sambhal not been punished to this day?" he asked.

Addressing gatherings in Mumbai on Saturday and Lucknow on Sunday, the CM accused the opposition of threatening those who uphold India's heritage and of undermining constitutional values. Highlighting issues related to Sambhal, Yogi said, "Those who speak in favour of India's rich heritage face threats, and the truth is suppressed by those who wish to strangle the Constitution."

He called on the public to expose the mindset of such political groups and their double standards. CM Yogi said that while Parliament was discussing the Constitution yesterday, the issue of Sambhal was also raised. Criticising the opposition, he pointed out that 46 years ago, during their rule, a historic temple in Sambhal was shut down, but now the temple has been restored, exposing their

true nature. He remarked, "Such an ancient temple with a Bajrang Bali idol and a Jyotirlinga could not have appeared overnight."

The CM questioned why those responsible for the massacre in Sambhal 46 years ago have not been punished to date. "What was the fault of the innocent people who were brutally killed in Sambhal? Anyone who speaks the truth is threatened and silenced," he added.

The CM criticised Congress for its "double standards", stating that those who claim to represent India and consider "The Discovery of India" as the nation's oldest text are now indulging in hypocrisy in the name of the Constitution. He referred to the Supreme Court's historic verdict on the Shri Ram Janmabhoomi case on November 9, 2019, and highlighted how such individuals still resort to threatening judges. He also accused the opposition of attempting to silence the voice of the Rajya Sabha chairman (vice-president) by bringing a no-confidence motion against him. The CM pointed out that the Rajya Sabha chairman emphasised fulfilling duties and ensuring the House operates to discuss public issues. However, the opposition accused him of bias and issued a no-confidence notice in retaliation. CM Yogi emphasised that the

vice-president is upholding constitutional dignity with his competence and dedication while managing the Upper House. He criticised the opposition, saying they are troubled by the idea of a farmer's son reaching such a high position, which was once considered the legacy of a 'particular family'.

He added that when a judge, as a citizen, speaks the truth, they are threatened. "The opposition attempts to silence truth-tellers by using the threat of impeachment, all while claiming to uphold the Constitution. This double standard won't work," he said, calling for such tactics to be exposed and the truth to prevail. CM Yogi further highlighted that a judge of the Allahabad High Court recently spoke in favour of implementing a Uniform Civil Code (UCC). He emphasised that, globally, the sentiments of the majority community are respected, and discussing the interests of the majority is not a crime. However, in India, those speaking the truth face backlash, he added. Referring to the opposition's impeachment notice against the judge, he criticised their actions, saying, "They claim to be democratic, carry the Constitution in their hands, but have no shame in violating its principles. These are the very people strangling the Constitution."

# Blast at illegal gas refilling centre: Toll reaches 4

Lucknow (PNS): Even as the investigation into the explosion at an illegal gas warehouse and refilling centre in Dubagga remains ongoing, another worker injured in the incident has died, taking the toll to 4. On December 6, six people, including two children, were injured in an explosion that occurred while gas was being refilled illegally inside a house in Shahpur Bhamrauli village. Inspector Abhinav Verma confirmed that Somnath Vishwakarma (24), a resident of Adarsh Nagar, Mallapur, Thakurganj, died during treatment at KGMU Trauma Centre on Saturday. Rohit Gupta, a resident of Mallapur, was allegedly running the illegal gas warehouse at his house. On the evening of December 6, an explosion occurred during gas refilling in the house, injuring Rohit Gupta's brothers, Mohit Gupta and Shobhit Gupta, along with Somnath Vishwakarma, Ranjeet Chaurasia, and two children, Zeeshan and Ayesha, who were playing outside the house. Ranjeet Chaurasia was the first to die during treatment. Mohit Gupta and Shobhit Gupta also succumbed later. Somnath's father Yogendra filed a case against the operator. The accused, Rohit Gupta, is currently absconding.

# Woman dies in vehicle parking dispute

PNS ■ LUCKNOW

A woman died following a dispute over vehicle parking in the Hazratganj area on Saturday night. The altercation began when a scooter parked in front of the victim's house became the source of contention, police said on Sunday. The incident occurred at Bajpai Lane in Narhi, where Mahesh Gupta and Saurabh Chauhan, neighbours living opposite each other, were involved in the dispute. As per reports, around 9:30 pm, Saurabh requested Mahesh to remove his scooter parked in front of his house. This led to a heated argument, with Mahesh and his family members—identified as Gunja and Simple—allegedly hurling abuses. As the scuffle escalated,

Saurabh's mother Ramguni Chauhan tried to intervene but was allegedly pushed by Mahesh's family. She fell on the road and lost consciousness. Ramguni was rushed to the Civil hospital, where doctors declared her dead. The police have sent the body for postmortem, and an investigation is underway. Speaking about the incident, Saurabh alleged that Mahesh's brother Manoj Gupta, a sub-inspector in the Uttar Pradesh Police currently posted in Kanpur, often uses his position to intimidate locals. "They abuse their power and harass people in the area," Saurabh alleged. Residents of the neighbourhood also criticised the local police for their inaction. "The issue had been reported

to Hazratganj police earlier, but no preventive measures were taken. This tragedy could have been avoided if they had acted. Instead, the police sided with the accused due to their family connection," a resident remarked. ACP Vikas Jaiswal said further action would be taken based on the postmortem report. Meanwhile, a teenager was found hanging from a ceiling fan in his room at his residence in Sector 5C/105, Telibagh. The PGI police, who were informed by the family, reached the scene and sent the body for postmortem. Inspector Ravi Shankar

Tripathi stated that no suicide note was found, and the reason for the act remains unknown. The family is currently being questioned as part of the investigation.

**WANTED CRIMINAL HELD AFTER ENCOUNTER**  
**Gorakhpur:** Police on Sunday arrested a wanted history-sheeter involved in a recent firing incident at a petrol pump following an encounter in the Gorakhnath area here, officials said. The accused, identified as Sarfaraz, was caught by the Special Operations Group (SOG) following a gunfight in which his accomplice managed to escape. On December 6, panic gripped the Ramgarh Tal area after Sarfaraz and others fired shots at a petrol pump near

Taramandal Tiraha. CCTV footage of the incident helped police identify the culprits. Acting on intelligence inputs, police tracked Sarfaraz's location to Gorakhnath on Sunday. As a police team led by SOG in-charge Suraj Singh surrounded him, Sarfaraz opened fire in a bid to flee. In the retaliatory firing, he sustained bullet injury in his right leg before being apprehended. A .32 bore pistol, one fired cartridge shell, and four live cartridges were recovered from Sarfaraz, who was rushed to the district Hospital and later referred to the BRD Medical College for treatment. Additional Superintendent of Police (City), Abhinav Tyagi, said police are trying to arrest the other persons involved in the petrol pump firing case.

# Missing teenager's body found in canal

Bulandshahr (PTI): The body of a 15-year-old boy, who had been missing for two days, was recovered from a canal in the Shikarpur area here on Sunday, police said. Three people have been detained for questioning, police said. Mayank was missing since December 13 and his body was found in the canal on Sunday, said Additional Superintendent of Police (Rural) Rohit Mishra. According to preliminary investigation, he was killed over his friendship with a girl, the sister of one of the accused, the officer said. Forensic teams inspected the crime scene and the body was sent for post-mortem, police said. Three suspects have been detained for questioning and further investigation in the matter is underway, they said.

# Gomti Riverfront to undergo facelift

Lucknow (PNS): The Gomti Riverfront is set to undergo a facelift, inspired by the renowned Ahmedabad Riverfront on the Sabarmati River, Lucknow Development Authority Vice-Chairman Prathmesh Kumar said on Sunday. The proposed project is expected to begin on March 1, 2025. Kumar stated that the LDA would collaborate with the Irrigation department to measure the river's width, depth, and length at the proposed site for a pedestrian bridge, from which visitors, including international tourists, will be able to enjoy a panoramic view of the Gomti River. The LDA plans to invite architects from across the country to

submit their designs, with a selection panel set to choose the best submission. The final date for design submissions is January 15, 2025. Although the LDA had been planning a 10-metre-wide bridge for the past three years, the project had been delayed due to unspecified reasons. The Tourism department had recommended the riverfront beautification as a way to attract both foreign tourists and domestic visitors. A unique feature of the proposed bridge will be its accessibility to pedestrians and cyclists, allowing for walking and cycling along the bridge. The bridge will be dedicated solely to pedestrians and cyclists.

# Private company's senior official accused of misappropriating more than 18-kg gold

Lucknow (PNS): A high-ranking official from a private company dealing in gold, responsible for managing the company's business in central Uttar Pradesh, has been accused of misappropriating over 18 kg of 22-carat gold, police said on Sunday. The accused, Kamal Singh, allegedly used the stolen gold to purchase personal property, invest in share trading, and run his own gold jewellery business in the Chowk police station area. Kamal Singh had been employed by the company for four years, the police added.

According to a complaint filed by general manager Umesh Kumar, the company has been in operation since August 18, 2011, and is engaged in the manufacturing, wholesale, and retail trading of gold jewellery across several states, including Karnataka, Kerala, Andhra Pradesh, Maharashtra, Uttar Pradesh, West Bengal, Odisha, Delhi, Telangana, and Tamil Nadu. Kamal Singh was responsible for overseeing the Lucknow office and had joined the company as a regular employee on April 5, 2021, taking on the role of busi-

ness head for central Uttar Pradesh. In his complaint, Umesh Kumar stated that payments from vendors began to be delayed from November 15, 2024, which was unusual for the company, as it typically provided a credit period of 15 to 20 days for payments. Upon investigating the delay in payments for gold supplies in October and November 2024, it was discovered that Kamal Singh had misappropriated 18,531.86 grams of 22-carat gold jewellery from the company's inventory, which had been billed to jewellers with valid delivery

challans. The misappropriated jewellery was likely supplied under false pretenses, causing significant financial damage to the company's operations. Further investigation revealed that Kamal Singh used the proceeds from the misappropriated gold to purchase properties, invest in share trading, and advance his own jewellery business. The company described this as a breach of trust and professional ethics, undermining the integrity and reputation of the organisation. The police have registered a case and initiated a probe into the matter.

# RLD's 'Digital Connect' initiative to mark Chaudhary Charan Singh's birth anniversary

Lucknow (PNS): The Rashtriya Lok Dal (RLD) will launch a programme called 'Digital Connect' on December 23, marking the birth anniversary of former prime minister and Bharat Ratna Chaudhary Charan Singh, to connect with the youth in rural Uttar Pradesh. Anupam Mishra, national secretary of RLD, emphasised that Chaudhary Charan Singh's ideology remains relevant and widely admired by the youth in UP's villages. "This programme aims to connect with the youth on a large scale and spread the ideology of

Chaudhary Charan Singh across Uttar Pradesh and beyond. With the rise of digital connectivity in rural areas, reaching out to the youth and sharing Chaudhary Charan Singh's principles has become easier," Mishra said. Meanwhile, RLD national spokesperson Anil Dubey urged party officials and workers to spread the values of Chaudhary Charan Singh and the programmes of RLD president Jayant Chaudhary. He mentioned that a campaign has been launched to bring more of Chaudhary Charan Singh's supporters into the RLD

fold ahead of his birth anniversary on December 23. Dubey was speaking at a membership drive held in Faizullahganj, Lucknow North Assembly, where hundreds of advocates, colleagues, and women joined the RLD under the leadership of social worker Satya Prakash Tiwari. In his address, Dubey reiterated the need for the government to engage in dialogue with farmers to resolve their concerns. He also highlighted that despite sugar mills operating in Uttar Pradesh since November 3, the government has yet to announce

the support price for sugarcane, leaving farmers to sell their produce at low prices. Dubey criticised Congress for claiming to be farmer-friendly, accusing the party of being anti-farmer historically. He also acknowledged the efforts made by the UP government, under CM Yogi Adityanath, to improve the conditions of farmers. According to Dubey, the government is working to increase the support price of crops, expand crop insurance, and provide farmers with financial aid through schemes like Kisan Nidhi.

# Timely parenthood key to healthy babies: IVF expert

Lucknow (PNS): Director of Ajanta Hospital & IVF Centre Dr Gita Khanna said the critical importance of timely consultations with fertility special-



ists during the "Test Tube Baby Meet 2024" held on Sunday. Dr Khanna urged couples to adopt a healthy lifestyle, including a balanced diet, regular exercise, and stress management. She also advised against smoking, alcohol consumption, and exposure to environmental toxins, stressing the importance of timely marriages and conceptions to minimise the risks of chromosomal anomalies and metabolic disorders in children. The celebration brought together IVF babies, ranging from newborns to 26-year-olds, some of whom are now parents themselves. Prarthana, the first test-tube baby born at Ajanta Hospital in 1998, was the chief guest.

# Drone operators take wedding season by storm in rural pockets

Ballia (PTI): In the heart of rural Ballia in Uttar Pradesh, young men are turning heads with their innovative use of drones to capture weddings from new heights. Among them is Sumit Kumar, a 20-year-old, who has become a sought-after drone pilot during the wedding season. Sumit, who started as an assistant photographer, quickly adapted to the growing demand for aerial photography, offering services that blend technology with tradition, making every wedding unique. Flying drones over wedding guests, capturing mesmerising aerial shots and even delivering garlands to the couple have made his work a favourite among locals. "No matter how grand the wedding is, I make every guest look up when I fly my drone," he said with a smile. Earlier this week, he stole the show at a village wedding when he used his drone to deliver garlands to the couple standing on a lotus-shaped stage. Guests watched in awe as the drone hovered above, its blinking LED's lighting up the scene. With a deft flick of the remote,

he lowered the drone, allowing the groom to take the garland and place around the bride's neck, earning cheers and applause from the crowd. The spectacle did not end there — he sent the drone soaring again to retrieve another garland before placing it on the couple, creating a moment that left guests reaching for their phones. Sumit has an assistant who helps transport the drone to various functions on a motorcycle to functions across Ballia and nearby districts. Drones have become a must-have at weddings in the region, with pilots like him charging anywhere between Rs 8,000 and Rs 40,000 per event, depending on the complexity and duration of the service. Awdhesh Singh, a mobile phone shop owner, who supplies drones and their parts to photographers said that the trend is rapidly gaining attention in rural areas. "Drones offer amazing wedding photos and create a buzz among guests. They are also more cost-effective than hiring a troupe of dancers," Singh explained.



A drone is seen bringing garland to the couple atop a lotus shaped stage, in Ballia

PTI

During the off-season, Sumit and other drone pilots like Pushkar Kumar take bookings for religious and political

events, though wedding season remains the most lucrative, with demands from nearby districts and cities like Varanasi.

Pushkar, who also prefers working in rural areas, said that there are fewer permissions and regulations to deal with in vil-

lages, and the locals are thrilled to see technology in action. He aspires to turn his passion for drones into a full-time career, hoping that government schemes like the 'Namo Drone Didi' initiative, which empowers rural women with agricultural drones, will expand to include support for photographers and drone operators like him. Experts suggest that the scheme was launched to capitalise on the rising popularity of drones among the youth. According to market reports, India's drone industry is expected to grow from USD 2.71 billion in 2022 to USD 13 billion by 2030, with drones being used in a variety of sectors. Drone operators like Pushkar and Sumit want to be a part of this growth. Sumit said that he paid Rs 15,000 to a Delhi institute to learn drone operations. He believes that there are a lot of possibilities to explore ways in which drones can be used beyond photography. He said it has huge potential in the future and added that he plans to start a drone training academy in Varanasi.

the pioneer CLASSIFIEDS

NOTICE

I have changed my name from Mohd Tahir to Mohammad Tahir for all future purpose, Mohammad Tahir S/o Peer Baksh R/o 102/32, Colonelganj Kanpur

NOTICE

I Khalilur Rehman S/o Zainul Abidin R/o 96/15 F, Yateem Khana Pared Kanpur Nagar have changed my name to Khalil Ur Rehman for all future purpose, Both name are one & same person



# 'Patel inspires us to work towards Ek Bharat, Shreshtha Bharat'

PNS ■ LUCKNOW

Uttar Pradesh Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath on Sunday paid tributes to Sardar Vallabhbhai Patel on his death anniversary. In a post in Hindi on X, Adityanath said Patel's efforts to unite the country are the inspiration behind working towards building "Ek Bharat, Shreshtha Bharat".

"Humble tributes to the architect of modern India, farmer well-wisher, Iron Man, 'Bharat Ratna' Sardar Vallabhbhai Patel ji on his death anniversary! His contributions in giving a form to the unity, integrity and sovereignty of the nation will always inspire us to work towards building 'Ek Bharat, Shreshtha Bharat,'" the chief minister said.

At a tribute meeting on Patel's death anniversary, Adityanath highlighted the country's first home minister's unwavering dedication to Mother India.

"As a key member of the Constituent Assembly and the first home minister of independent India, Sardar Patel spearheaded the integration of more than 563 princely states into the Republic, laying the foundation for a unified and strong nation. The India we see today is a testament to Sardar Patel's vision, efforts and tireless commitment to the ideals of 'One India, Great India, Safe India,'" he said.

According to a press statement, the chief minister highlighted Patel's active participation in major movements for India's independence, including the Champaran Movement, Salt Satyagraha and Quit India Movement, during which he was also imprisoned.

Adityanath also launched numerous public awareness campaigns aimed at ensuring the prosperity of farmers. He noted that Patel's vision laid the foundation for Gujarat's strong cooperative movement, which played a key role in empowering farmers and elevating them to new heights of prosperity.

Adityanath further said Patel, a great son of Mother India, not only led the campaign for the country's unification but also ensured the restoration of its dignity, which was tarnished during the colonial period. He



Uttar Pradesh Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath pays floral tribute to Sardar Vallabhbhai Patel on his death anniversary, in Lucknow, on Sunday

highlighted that the revival of the Somnath temple, a symbol of cultural resurgence, was part of this mission. The chief minister said if Patel was alive today, Article 370 of the Constitution would never have been imposed on Jammu and Kashmir. He lauded Prime Minister Narendra Modi for abrogating the provisions of the article on August 5, 2019, dismantling the foundation of terrorism and paving the way for a unified and strong India.

Adityanath also highlighted that the Ram temple in Ayodhya is a significant part of a new, cultural India, drawing a parallel with the revival of the Somnath temple initiated by Patel in 1948.

Patel, who was India's first deputy prime minister and home minister, breathed his last on December 15, 1950. Born in Gujarat's Nadiad in 1875, Patel was a pivotal figure in India's struggle for independence. Renowned for his excep-

tional leadership and unyielding commitment to national integration, he is fondly remembered as the "Iron Man of India". The "Ek Bharat, Shreshtha Bharat" initiative was announced by the BJP-led Centre on October 31, 2015, on the 140th birth anniversary of Patel. It aims at enhancing interaction between people living in states and Union territories and promoting mutual understanding.

# Maya urges parties to back ONOE bills; slams SP, Congress on reservation issue

PNS ■ LUCKNOW

Bahujan Samaj Party chief Mayawati on Sunday attacked the Congress and the Samajwadi Party, saying they should not speak on reservations as they colluded in opposing legislation giving quota in promotions to Scheduled Castes (SC) and Scheduled Tribes (ST) when the Congress-led UPA was in power.

Addressing a press conference, she also backed the Centre's bills on 'one nation-one election', stressing it will reduce expenses and ensure public welfare works continue uninterrupted. She urged other parties to also support the measure. Mayawati demanded that reservations for SC, ST and OBC be included in the Ninth Schedule of the Constitution to prevent any tampering. Central and state laws listed in the Ninth Schedule are exempt from judicial review.

During the discussion on the Constitution in Lok Sabha, the ruling side and the opposition, especially the Congress and the Samajwadi Party, to woo Dalit and OBC voters, have said a lot of "baseless" things about reservation issue in which there is "not even an iota of truth", she told reporters.

"And it would have been better if these two parties (Congress, SP) had remained silent on this



Bahujan Samaj Party president Mayawati addresses a press conference at her residence in Lucknow on Sunday

issue in Parliament, because during the time of the Congress party's government at the Centre and with the connivance of this party, SP had strongly opposed the Constitutional Amendment Bill related to reservations in promotion of SC and ST communities.

"This bill was torn and thrown away by SP in the Parliament itself and ... is still pending in the Parliament," she lamented.

The BSP chief also targeted the ruling BJP and said, "The anti-reservation mentality of the BJP is also clearly visible, due to which they are in no mood to get the bill passed." Mayawati said that there was a heated discussion in the Parliament on the 'glorious journey of 75 Years of the Constitution of India'.

"But its usefulness is possible only when it is accepted with an

open mind whether the ruling class has been able to provide employment and justice, a life of self-respect and self-esteem to crores of people of the country as per the sacred intention of the humanitarian and welfare Constitution," she said.

The former Uttar Pradesh chief minister said that the Constitution has not failed but the people and parties ruling the country have failed the Constitution of the country with their "narrow thinking and casteist politics".

Mayawati also said that the "resolutions" being taken by the current BJP government are not going to benefit the people of the country.

She said if the government makes amendments to the Constitution to benefit a party or any particular person or institution, "then our party will strongly oppose it".

Mayawati said being the party of the poor and the oppressed, the BSP welcomes the related bills brought by the BJP government regarding 'one nation, one election'. It would be better for all the parties to rise above party politics and work in the interest of the country and the general public on this issue, she said.

The BSP has faced a steady electoral decline in recent years and has only one Rajya Sabha MP in Parliament.

# Railways to elevate tracks for smooth traffic during Maha Kumbh 2025

PNS ■ MAHAKUMBH NAGAR

Indian Railways, in collaboration with the Uttar Pradesh State Bridge Corporation, has undertaken a project to elevate railway tracks to remove level crossings before next year's Maha Kumbh, officials said on Sunday.

The initiative is set to ease traffic congestion, save travel time, and provide significant relief to city residents, they added.

Celebrated in a cycle of 12 years, the Maha Kumbh will be held in Prayagraj from January 13 to February 26. Rail under bridges (RUBs)

and rail over bridges (ROBs) are ready on almost all the level crossings in Prayagraj where movement will start fully before the mega event, officials said.

Alongside the spiritual festivities, the Maha Kumbh has accelerated industrial growth and commercial development across the region. A major highlight of this transformation is the removal of level crossings, made possible through the collaborative efforts of Indian Railways and the State Bridge Corporation. Amit Malviya, senior public relations officer, Prayagraj division, said the RUBs and ROBs are being constructed at

almost all level crossings, not only within Prayagraj, but also in the surrounding areas. Several of these crossings were completed during the last Kumbh in 2019 as part of earlier infrastructure upgrades, he said, adding that the remaining projects are now being fast-tracked for completion ahead of Maha Kumbh 2025, with joint efforts from the Centre and state government.

These developments are expected to be fully ready before the commencement of the grand event, Malviya said. Seven ROBs have been constructed here at a cost of about Rs 375 crore, while the

construction work for three RUBs is in the final stages, the officials said.

Cementing operations will begin soon on all the newly-constructed ROBs and RUBs, which will not only ease the movement of crores of devotees attending the Maha Kumbh, but also benefit the city residents with reduced traffic congestion even after the event, Malviya said.

The end of level crossings will ensure uninterrupted and safe operation of trains. Approximately 10,000 trains are expected to operate seamlessly through the upper division during the Maha Kumbh, officials said.

# BJP pursues communal agenda to undermine social justice: Akhilesh

PNS ■ LUCKNOW

Samajwadi Party president Akhilesh Yadav on Sunday accused the Bharatiya Janata Party of pursuing an aggressive communal agenda to thwart the aspirations of the poor, Dalit, and underprivileged classes. He claimed that the unity of the PDA (Pichda-Dalit-Alpsankhyak) has unnerved the ruling BJP.

He said that the BJP will continue to pursue the communal agenda to counter the growing people's discontent over rising inflation, unemployment, and corruption.

Slamming the court-ordered surveys of various mosques in UP and other states, the SP chief said, "The campaign for

searching temples beneath every mosque will derail the process of development in the country."

He claimed that only the Samajwadi Party is sincerely following the principles of social justice to ensure justice for Dalits, OBCs, farmers, and Muslims.

Akhilesh Yadav criticised the BJP-led Central government, attributing ongoing issues in Bangladesh to failures in Indian foreign policy.

Yadav raised concerns about the mistreatment of minorities in Bangladesh, asserting that the prime minister and the BJP government must answer for their inability to maintain strong ties with neighbouring countries.

"If questions about this issue are directed at the opposition, it shows the prime minister's weakness. Political parties cannot openly discuss foreign policy matters, but what is happening in Bangladesh signifies a failure of India's foreign policy. A saint has been jailed, and people are being mistreated there. This reflects poorly on the BJP government, which is failing to protect Indians living abroad," Yadav said.

"The SP is dedicated to development and justice, while the BJP thrives on spreading hatred and disrupting social harmony. Digging into past issues won't progress the country. For a developed India, we must work collectively and respect everyone," he

remarked. Yadav expressed confidence in SP's ground-level efforts against the BJP in Uttar Pradesh.

"We defeated the BJP in the 2024 elections by uniting the PDA. Our booth-level workers have worked tirelessly. The public will deliver an even stronger mandate in the 2027 Assembly elections," he said. He reiterated the SP's opposition to the BJP's communal politics, highlighting unfulfilled promises such as cleaning the Ganga.

"The prime minister pledged to clean the Ganga ten years ago, but drains still flow into the river, even in places like Kanpur and Kannauj," he alleged.

Yadav accused the BJP of undermining democratic rights during elections.

"The BJP misused police and administrative power in by-elections, preventing voters from exercising their rights. In some cases, police officers intimidated women with revolvers to stop them from voting. Over 300 complaints were filed with the Election Commission by the SP," he claimed.

He also reiterated his stance against electronic voting machines (EVMs). "Developed nations, including Germany, have banned EVMs as they undermine the secrecy of voting. SP remains committed to replacing EVMs with ballot voting to ensure free and fair

elections," Yadav said.

Rejecting accusations of caste-based division, Yadav stated, "We did not divide society into castes; Rishi Manu did. SP is fighting for the rights of deprived and exploited communities. BJP's actions, such as washing the CM residence with Ganga water after I left office, reflect their divisive mindset."

Calling for accountability in the Sambhal incident, Yadav blamed officials for the loss of lives. "The BJP government's refusal to let us visit the victims shows their unwillingness to listen to grievances. Farmers and youth across the country are distressed, with farmers in Noida sitting on strike over unmet demands," he added.

# Sambhal admn cracks down on encroachments near mosque

Sambhal (PTI): Weeks after violent clashes over a court-ordered survey of the Shahi Jama Masjid claimed four lives, the district administration has launched a campaign against encroachments and illegal power theft in the area around the historic mosque.

As part of its efforts, the administration began removing encroachments from the area on Sunday morning.

According to Additional Superintendent of Police (ASP) Shrish Chandra, the focus is on clearing drains outside houses and shops in the area under the Nakhasa police station.

The area is close to the residence of Samajwadi Party (SP) MP Zia ur Rehman Barq. Chandra said the operation, aimed at restoring public spaces and ensuring a smooth flow of the drainage system, started at 7 am.

The drive uncovered an illegal stockpile of domestic gas cylinders in a house. Supply Inspector Yogesh Shukla said they found 25 such cylinders at the house of Haji Rabban.

"While the family claimed that the cylinders were for a wedding, they were unable to provide the necessary documentation. The cylinders, two of which were filled and the rest empty, were confiscated and an FIR will be registered," Shukla said.

Meanwhile, the electricity department also carried out a major operation target-

ing power theft. Naveen Gautam, executive engineer of the department, said during a raid at Deepa Sarai, officials unearthed illegal electricity connections in four mosques and a madrasa.

"A total of 130 kilowatts of electricity, amounting to approximately Rs 1.25 crore, were being stolen. The operation led to the identification of 49 individuals involved in the theft and FIRs are being filed against them," Gautam said. In another development, the Bhasma Shankar temple, which was reopened by the district administration on Saturday, has resumed regular worship.

Mahant Acharya Vinod Shukla said worshippers have begun visiting the temple, offering prayers and reciting the Hanuman Chalisa. The temple has been secured with the presence of Provincial Armed Constabulary (PAC) personnel. Local resident Mohit Rastogi expressed gratitude for the temple's reopening. "I had heard about this temple from my grandfather," he said, after offering water to the Shivaling and reciting prayers. "I thank the district administration for allowing us to reconnect with our heritage," he added.

District Magistrate Rajender Pensiya said on Saturday that these actions are part of a broader initiative to restore order and address illegal activities in the Shahi Jama Masjid area.

# Admn writes to ASI for carbon dating of temple, steps up security at site

Sambhal (PTI): The Sambhal district administration has written to the Archaeological Survey of India (ASI) for carbon dating of the Bhasma Shankar temple, including a well there, officials said on Sunday, days after the reopening of the temple locked since 1978 following communal riots in the town.

Worshippers have started visiting the temple and it is being guarded round the clock, they said. "This is the temple of Kartik Mahadev. A well has been found here. This is Amrit Koop. Security guards have been permanently posted here and CCTV cameras have also been installed. Puja has also started in the temple. There is encroachment here, which is being removed," District Magistrate Rajender Pensiya said. "We have written a letter to ASI for carbon dating of the temple and the well," he added. Carbon dating is a method used to determine the age of archaeological artefacts from ancient

sites. Superintendent of Police Krishan Kumar said that all roads leading to the temple have been covered with CCTV cameras and a control room is also being set up there. "There will be round-the-clock security in the temple and permanent police deployment is being ensured," the SP said.

Provincial Armed Constabulary (PAC) personnel have been posted at the site. The Bhasma Shankar temple was reopened on Friday after authorities said that they stumbled upon the covered structure during an anti-encroachment drive.

Referring to the reopening of the temple, Uttar Pradesh Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath on Sunday said it did not appear overnight and represents "our enduring heritage and the truth of our history".

Mahant Acharya Vinod Shukla, the temple priest, said worshippers have begun visiting and offering prayers. Local resident Mohit Rastogi

expressed gratitude over the temple's reopening.

"I had heard about this temple from my grandfather," he said, after offering water to the Shivaling and reciting prayers. "I thank the district administration for allowing us to reconnect with our heritage," he added.

The temple is situated in the Khagga Sarai area which is just over a kilometre away from the Jama Masjid where violence had taken place on November 24 during a protest against a court-ordered survey of a mosque. The temple houses an idol of Lord Hanuman and a Shivaling. It had remained locked since 1978 after the communal riots led to the displacement of the local Hindu community, locals claimed.

The temple also has a well nearby which the authorities plan to reopen. Some residents on Saturday shared their memories of the temple, with many highlighting its importance for the community.

# Govt gears up to host 100 crore people at Maha Kumbh

PNS ■ LUCKNOW

Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath announced that while 40 crore devotees are expected to attend the 45-day Maha Kumbh in Prayagraj (from January 13 to February 26), arrangements are being made to accommodate 100 crore people.

On January 29, during the main 'Muhurta' of Mauni Amavasya, an estimated six crore devotees will take a holy dip, but preparations will cater to 10 crore.

He said, "The Maha Kumbh will feature extensive facilities, including 12 km of ghats and an expanded area spanning 10,000 acres. Devotees will have the opportunity to experience the darshan of Char Dham, Dwadash Jyotirlingas, and other significant Jyotirlingas. The event will integrate cutting-edge technology, such as an AI-based Bhashini app in 11 Indian languages, allowing visitors to access information about the Kumbh and services like Khoyapaya in their preferred language."

He added, "The government plans to implement a precise headcount of every attendee and ensure a sustainable, eco-friendly event."

The Maha Kumbh will feature zero liquid discharge systems, 1.50 lakh toilets, and a ban on single-use plastics. This grand event aims to set a benchmark and drive Uttar Pradesh's roadmap for economic prosperity."

Yogi highlighted the remarkable transformation of the 2019 Prayagraj Kumbh, stating that it redefined expectations.

"Anyone who witnessed the Kumbh of 2019 would have seen the out-of-the-box efforts that made it clean, safe, and well-organised. What was once associated with dirt, chaos, stampedes, and insecurity became a divine and grand event," he said.

He credited the success of the 2019 Kumbh to its high standards of cleanliness, management, and security, noting that it was so exemplary that Prime Minister Narendra Modi washed the feet of sanitation workers in appreciation.

"It is part of India's heritage to express gratitude to those who contribute to its success," he said. The Maha Kumbh 2025, he added, will showcase a unique confluence of faith and modernity.

Yogi emphasised that the construction of the Ram temple in Ayodhya has been pivotal in driving development in the region. "Without the Ram temple, there would have been no airport, no double rail line, and no enhanced connectivity. While the common man and devotees are expressing their gratitude, those who secretly inserted the word 'secular' into the Constitution are lamenting in their homes," he said.

The chief minister pointed out that these individuals, who ruled for decades without delivering meaningful progress, are now criticising the present government for their inefficiencies. "They have a problem with the spirituality and development of Kashi and Ayodhya. Their frustration stems from their failure and our success. We must understand their mentality," he added.

Yogi outlined his government's efforts to transform Prayagraj into a hub of spiritual and infrastructural excellence. The Sangam will feature a permanent ghat for the first time, and a modern riverfront is being developed along the Ganga. He said, "The water of the Sangam will be kept clean and uninterrupted, while devotees will have year-round access to the Akshayavat Corridor. The Saraswati Koop Corridor, Bade Hanuman Ji Mandir, and Maharishi Bhardwaj Ashram Corridor are complete.



# Look for land to set up new AYUSH hospitals: Minister

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ VARANASI

Uttar Pradesh Minister of State (Independent Charge) for AYUSH, Food Safety and Drug Administration Dr Dayashankar Mishra 'Dayalu' has directed the concerned officers to look for land to set up new AYUSH hospitals. The minister said to ensure better medical facilities, the AYUSH hospitals running in rented buildings are being set up in their own buildings as well as adequate availability of medicines is being ensured. "For the construction of new AYUSH hospitals, the availability of land will be ensured by contacting the public representatives and gram pradhans", he



said. Dayalu directed the officials that there should be no shortage of medicines in all Ayurveda, Unani, Homeopathy (AYUSH) hospitals of the state so that the patients do not face

any difficulty in treatment. He said the pending works should be completed on a war footing with quality and timeliness. He emphasised on cleanliness in hospitals and keeping the premises clean. The minister also instructed the officers to complete the proceedings related to Departmental Promotion Committee (DPC) and Assured Career Progression (ACP) on priority. The minister's Public Relations Officer (PRO) Gaurav Rathi said for the implementation of the instructions of the minister, Special Secretary (AYUSH), Director General (AYUSH), AYUSH Mission Director, Director (Homeopathy) and Director (Unani) have been informed.

# SMM lays emphasis on revival of Varuna river

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ VARANASI

Varanasi (PNS): The Sanjha Sanskriti Manch (SSM) expressed concern over the condition of Varuna river and said that its revival is possible only with public participation and administrative will. At a meeting of SSM, a joint wing of social organisations, at Nepali Kothi (Nadesar) here on Sunday, the participants said to ensure the purification and uninterrupted flow of Ganga river, its tributary rivers will also have to be made clean and pure. "Without reviving the two local Ganga tributary rivers Varuna and Assi that give identity to the name Varanasi, purification of Ganga will not be possible. Revival of these rivers will be possible only with public participation and administrative will", the speakers said. The meeting

organised on the topic of Varuna river revival possibilities and challenges was attended mainly by scientists from Indian Institute of Technology (IIT) Mumbai and IIT (Banaras Hindu University) and People's Science Institute (Dehradun), environmentally conscious citizens and activists, workers of Bhu Seva Jal Seva Abhiyan and members of Varuna River Samvad Yatra and SSM. Before the meeting, river scientists and experts observed the condition of Varuna river at Shastrī Ghat. In the meeting Prof Om Damani, Prof Pradeep Kumar Mishra, Prof Anil Gautam, Ramjanam, Dr Mohammad Arif, Ravi Shekhar, Ekta, Satish Singh, Rajkumar, Father Dayakar, Anshul Agarwal, Rohit, Nandlal Master and others expressed their views.

# Sardar Patel's sacrifice discussed

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ VARANASI

A programme was organised by Apna Dal (Sonelal) at its district office located at Mohansarai Kaneri of Rohania assembly constituency under the chairmanship of district president Dr Narendra Patel on the death anniversary of 'Bharat Ratna' and 'Iron Man' Sardar Vallabhbhai Patel, on Sunday. The chief guest was Rohania MLA Dr Sunil Patel offered floral tribute at his picture along with party workers and office-bearers. In his address, Dr Sunil Patel discussed Sardar Patel's sacrifice, struggle, fearlessness and patriotism. On the occasion, district AD (S) president Dr Narendra Patel, state secretary Dr Mahendra Singh Patel, Block Pramukh representative Manas Kumar Singh, district president of party's Youth Forum, Vikas Patel, Rajkumar



Rohania MLA Dr Sunil Patel paying tribute to Sardar Patel on his death anniversary in Varanasi on Sunday.

Verma, Jagat Narayan Kashyap, Adarsh Patel along with party workers and office-bearers of national, state, district, assembly, sector, zone and booth level were present. Meanwhile, to provide relief from the severe cold by the Uttar Pradesh government, in

the blanket distribution ceremony programme organised at the residence of zone president Dinesh Patel in Misirpur village of Rohania assembly constituency, the MLA Dr Sunil Patel distributed blankets to the needy poor and helpless people of the area.

# CMO: 82 TB champions spreading awareness

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ VARANASI

Chief Medical Officer (CMO) Dr Sandeep Chaudhary said that under the Pradhan Mantri TB Mukht Bharat Abhiyan (Prime Minister's TB Free India Campaign), world health partner organisations are working with the Health department under the Impact India Project to create awareness about TB disease among the people of the community through TB champions. In Varanasi district the CMO said that 82 TB champions are now spreading awareness about the campaign. "TB champions are being trained so that along with treatment and support of TB patients, champions can change behaviour", he said, adding that TB is curable, if it

is treated at the right time and medicines are taken on time, then TB patients can easily recover. District Tuberculosis Officer (DTO) Dr Piyush Rai said to become a TB champion, one has to join the standard training course. "A TB champion is a person suffering from TB who, after this training, wishes to work in the community for TB elimination. TB champions are role models and help people suffering from TB and their families," he said and added that champions are being trained under TB free campaign. In this direction the DTO had informed that 34 TB champions have been trained in Primary Health Centre (PHC) Pindra, 24 in Primary Health Centre Baragaon, 24 in

Chirgaon block, thus a total of 82 TB champions have been trained who, with the help of Community Health Officers (CHOs) in Ayushman Arogya Mandirs of their respective villages, are conducting meetings in the community and schools, apart from holding patient-provider meetings besides meeting patients who have left their medication midway, telling them their story and convincing them to restart their treatment. Along with this, he said in all the Ayushman Arogya Mandirs of the district, the patients who have been cured after taking the medicine are being selected as TB champions by talking and meeting them and by giving them one day training they are being motivated to work as TB champions.

# Art exhibition attracts visitors

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ VARANASI

A 10-day art exhibition being organised at the Ahivasi art gallery, Faculty of Visual Arts, Banaras Hindu University (BHU) from December 13 which will end on December 22 is attracting a good number of visitors. This exhibition is being hosted by Faculty of Visual Arts and curated by Prof Chawky Frenn, George Mason University, USA. Prof Frenn is a Fulbright US scholar who has been having interaction with the students of the painting department for the last three months. The Fulbright US Scholar Award has provided him with the invaluable opportunity to use his research, artistic practice and teaching to build bridges between diverse cultures, religions, races and communities, promoting mutual understanding and solidarity.

# Dr Tiwari takes over as new Prayagraj CMO

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ PRAYAGRAJ

Dr AK Tiwari has taken over as the new Chief Medical Officer (CMO) of Prayagraj on Sunday. The outgoing CMO Dr Ashu Pandey



officially handed over all responsibilities to him. Dr Pandey has been made the Joint Director of Prayagraj Division. The officials of the

department and all the doctors welcomed him by presenting bouquet. A CMO Dr RC Pandey, Dr Naveen Giri, Dr Hemant Pathak, Dr RK Srivastava, Dr Rawendra Singh, Dr Amrit Lal Yadav, Dr Anupam Dwivedi and others were present. Dr AK Tiwari has also served as superintendent of some community health centres of Prayagraj and has been working here for a long time. Dr Tiwari, a resident of Jaunpur, has done intermediate from GIC Prayagraj, MBBS from Motilal Nehru and PG from Kanpur. As the new CMO, Dr AK Tiwari told mediapersons here on Sunday that Maha Kumbh will be his priority. A big event is going to be organised here, in which crores of devotees from all over the world will reach, full care will be taken to ensure that they do not face any kind of health related inconvenience. One of his main aim is

also to convey the schemes of the Health department to every person, he added. **CME ORGANISED:** A CME was organised at AMA Convention Centre under the presidentship of AMA Vice-President Dr Jyoti Bhushan on Sunday. Dr Anubha Srivastava Professor Department of Medicine MLN Medical College, Prayagraj, said diabetes and hypertension are two closely linked conditions that can have severe consequences if left unmanaged. Senior nephrologist Dr Saumya Gupta said both diabetes and high blood pressure can damage the kidneys: Diabetes can damage the blood vessels of the kidney. This can cause kidney damage and high blood pressure. High blood pressure narrows the blood vessels of the kidney, reducing blood flow. Due to this the kidneys are unable to function properly.

Dr Kamal Singh, Dr.Ashok Kumar Mishra, Dr Subodh Jain, Dr Sujit Singh, Dr Rajesh Maurya, Dr Sapan Srivastava, Dr Anoop Chauhan, Dr Atul Dubey, DrPrabhat Pankaj Khatri, Dr Parul Saksena, Dr Varsha Kumar and others were present. **ARRESTED:** The police on Sunday claimed to have worked out the murder of a security guard. The body of the deceased, identified as Arun Kumar Tiwari of Tiwaripur, Jaunpur, was found along the railway line near Bharoha Kot village in Yamunanagar Industrial Area on October 29. His wife and her brother-in-law were nabbed near Om Shanti Puram Colony in front of BPCL in the industrial area in this connection. The arrested woman made a shocking claim that her husband was impotent, due to which she committed this murder along with her brother-in-law.

# First deep brain stimulation surgery successfully performed at IMS-BHU

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ VARANASI

The Institute of Medical Sciences Banaras Hindu University (IMS-BHU) announced the successful completion of its first deep brain stimulation (DBS) surgery. This significant milestone marks a new era in advanced neurological care at the institution. For the first time in the Purvanchal (eastern UP) region, DBS surgery was performed by the joint efforts of Department of Neurology and Neurosurgery, IMS-BHU under the guidance of Director Prof SN Shankhwar and Medical Superintendent Prof KK Gupta. Prof Deepika Joshi and Dr Anand Kumar from the Department of Neurology, Dr Nitya Nand Pandey from Department of Neurosurgery, Dr Naren Naik (consultant neurosurgeon from Global hospitals Mumbai) and Prof RK Dubey from Anaesthesia department, along with Medtronics India team were involved in the procedure which lasted for almost seven-eight hours. The other faculty from Neurology who were a part of the team include Prof VN Mishra, Prof RN Chaurasia, Prof Abhishek Pathak (HoD), Dr Varun Kumar Singh, senior



residents Dr Janki Makani and Dr Arpan Mitra. DBS is an established US FDA approved safe neurosurgical procedure for patients with advanced disease in whom medical treatment fails to provide adequate symptom control and good quality of life or in whom medical therapy induces severe side effects such as dyskinesia. DBS is a surgical procedure in which the neurosurgeon implants a medical device called a neurostimulator to send electrical signals to specific areas of the brain. This technology has proven highly effective in treating a range of neurological disorders, including Parkinson's disease, essential tremor, and dystonia. "We are also delighted to announce that the procedure has been done under Ayushman Bharat Yojana under which expenditures were taken care of. BHU remains committed to providing cutting-edge neurological care and improving the quality of life for patients with neurological disorders. This successful DBS surgery is a testament to the institution's dedication to innovation and patient care", said the IMS-BHU director.

# BLW GM: Sports events strengthen mutual cooperation

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ VARANASI

Varanasi (PNS): General Manager (GM) of Banaras Locomotive Works (BLW) Naresh Pal Singh said sports events not only promote physical and mental health, but also strengthen mutual cooperation, coordination and team spirit. Singh was speaking at a friendly cricket match between BLW GM XI and NER DRM XI played at BLW Stadium here on Sunday. He appreciated the players of both the teams and praised their excellent performance. While encouraging the players on the occasion Divisional Railway Manager (DRM) of North Eastern Railway (NER) Vineet Kumar Srivastava said a sense of discipline and unity is developed through sports competition. In the match, after winning the toss, GM XI scored 125 runs in 20 overs. While chasing the

same, DRM XI won the match by scoring 127 runs in 18.5 overs. 'Man of the Match' RK Singh (ADRM, NER) was the star of the match batting brilliantly and scored unbeaten 52 runs, which included 6 fours and 2 sixes. Another ADRM (Infra) RL Yadav made an important contribution of 24 runs and provided stability to the innings of DRM XI. Later, at a prize distribution ceremony organised after the match, the BLW GM and NER DRM felicitated the winners and outstanding performing players including RK Singh (Man of the Match), RL Yadav (Best Batsman), Divisional Mechanical Engineer, (NER) Abhishek Singh (Best Bowler) taking two wickets for 27 runs in 4 overs and Senior Engineer (BLW) Amit Kumar (Best All-Rounder) for scoring 27 runs with two fours and taking one wicket for 17 runs in 3 overs.

# Pathak stresses importance of innovation

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ KANPUR

The prestigious Digi100 2024 summit was held at the India Habitat Centre in New Delhi to accelerate the digital transformation of India's higher education system. Organised in collaboration with AWS (Amazon) and EPSI, the event focused on the theme "Unlocking Digital Excellence at Higher Education Institutions (HEIs)" and brought together leading voices from the education and technology sectors. Professor Vinay Pathak, Vice-Chancellor of Chhatrapati Shahu Ji Maharaj University (CSJMU), Kanpur, and President of the Association of Indian Universities (AIU), graced the occasion as the special guest. Prof Pathak in his

address emphasised the transformative potential of digital technologies in reshaping education and highlighted initiatives aimed at bridging gaps and enhancing accessibility in higher education. Professor Pathak discussed various national-level digital initiatives, including SWAYAM, the National Digital Library, Virtual Labs and the National Academic Depository, which are revolutionising access to quality education. He also emphasised the potential of technologies like artificial intelligence (AI), blockchain, and virtual/augmented reality (VR/AR) in creating immersive and personalised learning environments. Recognising the challenges faced by Indian HEIs, such as limited connectivity and outdated infrastructure, Professor Pathak stressed the importance of innovation and adaptability in overcoming these hurdles. He appreciated the National Education Policy (NEP) 2020 for laying the foundation for a multidisciplinary and technology-driven education system that aligns with global standards. During the summit, Prof Pathak announced the ongoing development of a Supercomputing Hub at CSJMU. Once operational, this hub will serve as a platform for advanced interdisciplinary research, facilitating simulations in fields like physics, biology, material science and AI. He stated that this initiative reflects the university's commitment to fostering cutting-edge research and innovation in higher education. The event saw the launch of the Student Experience Framework by Digi100 in collaboration with KPMG India. Additionally, interactive workshops on design thinking, AI for social impact and technology-enhanced learning were held. Digi100 2024 proved to be an insightful platform for thought leaders and policymakers to collaborate and shape the digital future of Indian higher education. Professor Pathak's vision and strategies resonated with the event's goal of fostering innovation and excellence in the education sector.

# Critical need for reskilling & upskilling emphasised

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ KANPUR

The Dr Gaur Hari Singhania Institute of Management and Research (GHS-IMR) hosted its eighth National HR Conclave HumanOource-2024. The conclave brought together alumni and industry leaders for an insightful discussion on this year's theme: "HR Evolution: Leadership in Transition." The event was designed to emphasise the growing importance of evolving leadership practices in HR to adapt to the shifting landscape of business and workforce dynamics. As organisations grapple with transitions and unprecedented challenges, the conclave aimed to shed light on the pivotal role of HR leaders in driving change, fostering innovation and navigating complex transformations in the modern workplace. The inaugural session began with the lighting of the ceremonial lamp by the dignitaries. In his welcome speech, Director (GHS-IMR) Dr Rahul Goyal said with a proactive approach we could look in to the future and drive benefits from there. Time is a witness that organisations which could anticipate the prospect could only turn the table. In the current sce-



HumanOource-2024 being inaugurated at GHS-IMR.

nario to boosting the eagerly awaited industrial growth summit theme is very relevant and will give the needed directionality shaping the HR strategy for the organisations. Keynote speaker Director of Vertical Dimension, Shubhank Gupta, discussed how HR leaders must embrace digital transformation to stay competitive. "In today's business world, the ability to adapt and lead through change is no longer optional but a necessity," he said, underscoring the value of agility and innovation in HR practices. The event featured a dynamic panel of eminent HR professionals who shared their expertise and experi-

ences: Anchal Anand, an experienced HR manager and HR consultant, emphasised the transformative role of strategic HR planning in achieving organisational success. HR Manager, Aditya Birla L&D, Ankur Gupta, shared valuable insights into effective workforce transition strategies in the context of rapid global and technological disruptions. Chandni Srivastava, a talent acquisition expert at Deloitte, highlighted the evolving expectations of modern employees, emphasising the shift towards workplaces that prioritise well-being, flexibility and inclusivity. Manoj Srivastava, HR Manager at

Superhouse Ltd, addressed the complexities of managing diverse teams in the evolving hybrid work environment. Kuldeep Pathak, an experienced HR professional from Lohia Group, emphasised the critical need for reskilling and upskilling in today's era of rapid technological advancements. Senior HR Manager at Pepsico, Anil Singh, delved into the evolving dynamics of performance management systems in today's digitally empowered workplaces. HR Manager at RSPAL Farhan Ahmed offered valuable insights into cultivating a culture of innovation and inclusion within organisations. The event also included interactive sessions with students and faculty, providing an opportunity for aspiring HR professionals to engage directly with the experts. Participants posed questions about emerging trends, career growth and overcoming challenges in the HR field. The experts offered practical advice, motivating students to stay proactive and adaptable in their professional journeys. HumanOource-2024 served as a vibrant platform to honour and celebrate the remarkable achievements of GHS-IMR alumni, who

have made significant strides in the HR domain. Their notable contributions spanning diverse industries, underscored the institute's legacy of producing impactful leaders. The alumni's presence at the conclave offered students invaluable insights into real-world challenges and opportunities in HR. By sharing their journeys, they not only showcased the immense potential for growth in the field but also motivated the current batch to strive for excellence. Their experiences highlighted how dedication, adaptability and continuous learning can lead to meaningful and transformative careers. In their closing remarks, Prof Anmol Chopra, Summit Chair, and Prof Smriti Saxena, Co-Summit Chair, extended heartfelt thanks to the esteemed guests, alumni and participants for their active and enthusiastic participation. They reaffirmed the institute's commitment to nurturing a learning ecosystem that seamlessly integrates academic concepts with real-world industry practices. The success of HumanOource-2024 highlighted GHS-IMR's role as a pioneer in the HR field, promoting a culture of innovation, collaboration and continuous learning.

# Woman hit by dumper, dies

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ KANPUR

A woman died after being hit by a speeding dumper in Ajjain Kotwali police station area of Unnao on Sunday morning. The incident took place when she was going to buy medicines. Her irate kin staged a massive protest and blocked the road with the body. Police assured them of initiating action against the guilty and sent the body for an autopsy. Reports said Suman (35), wife of Kamlesh of Itkuti village was going with brother to get medicine from her from her parents' house in Dilbagh village under Makhi police area on a bike when the speeding dumper knocked them down near Rishikul Vidyapeeth School as a result of which she died on the spot. The dumper driver escaped with the vehicle from the spot after the incident. Her brother informed the kin who rushed to the spot and staged a massive agitation. They blocked the road with the body. Ajjain Kotwali in charge Avaneesh Singh rushed to the spot and assured them of initiating action against the dumper driver on the basis of their complaint.

# ALS ambulance inaugurated at NTPC Auraiya



PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ KANPUR

The Advanced Life Support (ALS) ambulance was inaugurated at NTPC Auraiya by the Head of the Project Abhay Kumar Srivastava. This advanced ambulance is a significant step towards ensuring better healthcare access. It is equipped with cutting-edge medical equipment, including a cardiac monitor, ventilator, injection pump and other essential tools for managing critical patients. The ALS ambulance will serve as a lifeline for transporting critical patients to tertiary care hospitals, ensuring timely and efficient medical support. The inauguration was graced

by Dr Bijay Nayak, CMO, Tanmoy Dutta, AGM-HR, VP Pandey, AGM-C&M and other HODs, highlighting NTPC's commitment to prioritising health and safety. **SHOOTING CHAMPIONSHIP:** Four budding shooters of The Sportz Hub (TSH) made the city proud by qualifying for the 67th national shooting championship. Kashi Dwivedi and Anuj Mishra will vie for the title in pistol category in Dr Karni Singh Shooting Range, Delhi, while in the rifle category, Arna Gupta and Girdhari Agarwal will do so in MP Shooting Range, Bhopal. Director (Operations) PK Srivastava said the selection of shooters in national championship was possible due to world-level training facilities available at TSH under the guidance of experienced coaches. It was not only the hard work and dedication of players but the quality training at TSH which drove them to shine on national and international competitions, he added.



# Lawyers, activists call for extending POSH Act to political parties

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

Legal experts and activists have voiced the urgent need to bring political parties under the ambit of the Sexual Harassment of Women at Workplace (Prevention, Prohibition and Redressal) Act, known as the POSH Act, citing the need for gender equality and accountability. The reaction comes after the Supreme Court on Monday disposed of a plea seeking direction to political parties to follow the procedure for the protection of women in the workplace under the 2013 POSH Act.

A bench of Justices Surya Kant and Manmohan asked the petitioner to approach the Election Commission of India (ECI) with a representation for the application of the POSH Act. Sonal Mattoo, a lawyer and director of NGO Helping Hands, called for a shift in perspective, urging political parties to focus on the spirit of the law rather than its technical definition.

"The problem is they're looking at the letter of the law as opposed to the spirit of the law. If you look at the letter of the law, yes, you will struggle with who with them I think the whole idea is to look at the spirit, rather than the letter of the law," Mattoo said. However, prominent lawyer Shilpi Jain expressed concerns over the internal committees' independence, given the immense power wielded



decorum is followed and no member does anything that brings disrepute to the party. "Similarly, they can set up a committee that also looks at the behaviour related to inappropriate conduct of party workers and people within the party. So, if you look at the letter of the law and you look at who is the employer, you will struggle.

"But if you look at other bodies within political parties that look at discipline and other conduct or misconduct, it's very easy to create a similar pattern in terms of ensuring appropriate conduct with women colleagues that work with them I think the whole idea is to look at the spirit, rather than the letter of the law," Mattoo said. However, prominent lawyer Shilpi Jain expressed concerns over the internal committees' independence, given the immense power wielded

by politicians. "An internal committee funded by a political group will lack teeth. For such bodies to function effectively, independence and courage are essential. Unfortunately, given the misuse of power by many politicians, achieving this remains a challenge," she told PTI. Jain added that courts are better positioned to handle cases of sexual harassment involving politicians, given the inherent biases internal mechanisms might face. Activists argue that addressing harassment within political parties will set a precedent for improving gender equality across society.

Shabnam Hashmi, founder of NGO Anhad, called it a "progressive" move. "Politicians are expected to lead by example. If they continue to ignore gender equality, it sends the wrong message to society. Establishing such mechanisms in political parties will bring gradual but important changes, just as we saw with women asserting themselves after the implementation of 33 per cent reservation in panchayats," she told PTI.

Yogita Bhayana, anti-rape activist and founder of People Against Rape in India (PARI) criticised the "irony" of Parliament exempting itself from a law it enacted. "If an institution with more than 10 members is required to implement POSH, why are political parties excluded? Parliament itself brought in this law. Their inability to enforce it internally reflects their reluctance to confront harassment within their ranks," she told PTI. Bhayana also pointed out the larger issue of poor implementation of the POSH Act across various sectors, stating, "We need a framework that is not only expansive but also effective in its enforcement."

The legal definition of "workplace" under the POSH Act complicates its application to political parties. A 2022 Kerala High Court ruling stated that political parties do not have a conventional employer-employee relationship and cannot be mandated to set up Internal Complaints Committees (ICCs). This ambiguity, combined with the decentralised and informal nature of political party structures, has often

been cited as a reason for non-compliance. Still, many experts believe this should not prevent political parties from taking proactive steps. "The lack of a traditional workplace structure cannot be an excuse. Political parties must adapt and lead by example," Hashmi emphasised. She added that even minimal initial progress would pave the way for systemic change in the long run.

Lawyers and activists have also highlighted how extending the POSH Act to political parties could improve the participation of women in politics. Additionally, extending the Act's provisions would address the vulnerability of women working in political settings, who often find themselves in informal roles without clear channels for grievance redressal. "These women face unique challenges because they are not officially employed. This makes them more vulnerable to harassment, and it's why political parties must implement systems to protect them," Bhayana noted. While legal experts warn of challenges in implementation, activists stress that this is an opportunity to hold political parties accountable.

"This is not just about legal compliance but about sending a strong message that politics is not above the law," Hashmi said.

# PM Modi invokes Nehru to distract nation's attention from his own failures, claims Congress

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

The Congress hit out at Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Sunday, alleging that defamation of Jawaharlal Nehru and minimum democratic governance was his model. Congress general secretary Jairam Ramesh said PM Modi has an "obsession" with Nehru as he invokes the country's first prime minister to distract the nation's attention from his "own failures" and current challenges on which he maintains a "complete silence". The Congress attack on the prime minister came a day after Modi attacked the party during the debate on the 'Glorious 75-year journey of India's Constitution'. "It was the famous French philosopher Voltaire who had first said that if God did not exist, it would be necessary to invent Him. For our self-anointed divinity -- if Nehru had not existed -- it would have been necessary to invent him," Ramesh said. The Congress leader asked what would the prime minister do without Nehru, for whom he has a pathological obsession. "Nehru is necessary to distract the nation's attention from his own failures. Nehru is necessary to divert the nation's attention from current challenges on which he maintains a complete silence," Ramesh said. He also said that Nehru was necessary to deny the nation's many achievements before May 2014.



In another post on X, Ramesh said, "In his rant in the Lok Sabha yesterday, the PM attacked Nehru on the First Amendment to the Constitution of India -- which was carried out with effect from June 18th, 1951." Explaining why this amendment was brought, the Congress leader said, it was carried out for three reasons. "One, to deal with communal propaganda at a most sensitive time. Two, to protect Zamindari abolition laws that were being struck down by the courts. Three, to protect reservations in education and employment for scheduled castes, scheduled tribes, and OBCs that had been rejected by the courts" he said. A select committee, in which Nehru, Rajagopalchari, and Ambedkar were among the members, examined the Bill in detail, Ramesh said, noting that even after the panel tabled its report, Nehru listened to his critics and modified his stance.

"Earlier on July 3, 1950, Sardar Patel had written to Nehru on the need for restrictions on freedom of speech, expressing his frustration with people like Syama Prasad Mookerjee. This letter reveals that Sardar Patel himself would have supported the First Amendment had he been alive. "Granville Austin's masterly Working a Democratic Constitution tells the full story of the amendments carried out till 1980. It is too much to expect of MAs in Entire Political Science or his cheerleaders to have read it?" Ramesh posed while sharing the letter in his X post. Prime Minister Modi Saturday accused the Congress of repeatedly mutilating the Constitution, having "tasted blood" in its "greed" for power, as he asserted that his government's policies and decisions since 2014 have been aimed at boosting India's strength and unity in line with the vision of the Constitution.

# Hakim asks Muslims to outnumber Hindus, TMC backs him

SAUGAR SENGUPTA ■ KOLKATA

The Trinamool Congress has stood up for its senior Minister Firhad Hakim for calling upon the 'minorities' to grow and outnumber the "majority" community so that "one day we can not only become majority but even more than majority." Though the opposition parties have vehemently opposed Hakim who has still not explained his statement senior TMC leader Kunal Ghosh said that "he is being misinterpreted by some people why a majority of them have understood the real meaning of what he has said." Holding the bat for Hakim -

-- who apart from being a senior Cabinet Minister is also the Mayor of Kolkata -- Ghosh said that "what he meant is that the minorities (read Muslims) through their effort will one day contribute immensely in the uplift of the society and nation building... which is a fairly good statement and needs no censor." Hakim while delivering a speech in a social gathering said "while in Bengal, we are 33 per cent in the entire country we are 17 per cent which is why we are called a minority... But we don't want to be called minorities," adding to a big round of applause that "we can become not only majority but even bigger than that if we have the

mercy of Allah." Though he said that the minorities should work hand-in-hand with the other communities for the cause of nation building he clearly inspired them to achieve the majority status so that "we can wield so much power we don't have to hold candlelight marches for justice ... and that so that our voices are automatically heard, and calls for justice answered." Curiously there was no comment on the issue from Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee whose office remained as silent as it was when Hakim during an earlier occasion asked the members of his community to work for a situation when "all those who



'unblessed' have not received the mercy (rehmat) of Allah will one day be enfolded in our path." Referring to Hakim's remarks

as "dangerous" Bengal Opposition Leader Suvendu Adhikari said, "some minority people have been asking the minority people to labour

hard to get better government jobs including those of judges etc but this mentality is quite dangerous ... if they become 50 percent or more then the Constitution will stop working ... like in Afghanistan, Bangladesh or Pakistan ... they will unleash the Sharia laws."

Bengal BJP president and Union Minister Sukanto Majumdar said that Hakim's speech "smacked of Abrahamian religious trends." "They wanted to occupy a region and make it as their religion liked it to be" Majumdar said wondering why the Chief Minister who was talking big on Bangladesh a few days ago was silent on Hakim's statements.

Another senior BJP leader Sajal Ghosh said that the Muslims can walk Hakim's talk by "replicating the Great Calcutta killings of 1946 or by allowing mass infiltration from Bangladesh which his Chief Minister is doing for vote bank politics and third by subscribing to another TMC minister Siddiquallah Chowdhury who recently asked the Muslims to follow the 'hum do humare chaar' (four children for every couple) plan ... a time has come for the people to reply to this." While BN Chakrabarty a famed political analyst wondered "why I did not die before having to encounter such a statement," the Left tended to look into it through

a "larger conspiracy angle." Condemning Hakim's statement CPI(M) central committee member Sujana Chakrabarty said that it was a part of bigger ploy to polarise the people of Bengal. "they do not want the secular fabric of Bengal to stay ... so he has made this remark ... I don't think this statement has been made without the nod of RSS because such kind of statements will benefit them and the BJP the most in the present scenario ... Firhad Hakim is not a minnow of a politician not to understand the political implication of this statement in the elections ... it is clear that he has been making such statements as per some instructions."

# Want RS to debate Constitution if BJP does not disrupt: TMC's Derek

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

Trinamool Congress Rajya Sabha Parliamentary Party Leader Derek O'Brien said on Sunday his party wants the House to run and the debate on the Constitution to be taken up "if the BJP does not disrupt Parliament". Blaming the ruling BJP for disruptions after the Upper House last week witnessed multiple adjournments and heated exchanges involving the opposition, treasury benches and the Chair, the TMC leader said they wanted people's issues to be discussed. After the Lok Sabha, the Rajya Sabha is set to take up on Monday a debate on 75 years of the Constitution in the backdrop of a proposed no-trust motion against Vice President



and Rajya Sabha Chairman Jagdeep Dhanraj by Opposition parties which have submitted a notice for it. The debate on the Constitution has been the key demand of the opposition for the Winter Session of Parliament. Multiple adjournments over the Adani row, Soros issue and the no-trust notice had marred the proceedings of the House last week.

Asked about the debate scheduled to be taken in the House for Monday, O'Brien said, "We

want Parliament to run, we want to raise issues affecting people." "If the BJP does not disrupt Parliament again, we will take up the debate on the Constitution and expose them," O'Brien told reporters on Sunday. According to sources, 10-11 MPs will participate in the debate, and speak for 3-4 minutes each. They said it would also showcase the "diversity" of their party. The MPs will highlight the essence of ten keywords from the Preamble of the Constitution, speaking on themes like equality, justice, sovereignty, independence, democracy and socialism. The TMC has 12 MPs in the Rajya Sabha. However, MP Sukhendu Shekhar Roy has been sidelined for his criticism of the party during the RG Kar protests.

# Minister Sonowal launches Jalvahak scheme

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI/KOLKATA

The Union government on Sunday launched the 'Jalvahak' scheme to incentivise cargo movement via inland waterways, marking a major step towards promoting sustainable and cost-effective transportation across National Waterways 1 (Ganga), 2 (Brahmaputra), and 16 (Barak river). Union Minister of Ports, Shipping & Waterways Sarbananda Sonowal flagged off three cargo ships and inaugurated the fixed scheduled service of vessels. He said the scheme aims to unlock the trade potential of inland waterways while reducing logistics costs and decongesting road and rail networks. Under the scheme, cargo owners



transporting goods over distances exceeding 300 km via waterways will receive up to 35 per cent reimbursement on operating costs. The scheme will remain valid for three years and is designed to optimise supply chains for major shipping companies, freight

forwarders, and trade bodies. The scheme is jointly implemented by the Inland Waterways Authority of India (IWAI) and Inland & Coastal Shipping Ltd (ICSL), a subsidiary of the Shipping Corporation of India. The cargo promotion scheme is

projected to facilitate a modal shift of 800 million tonne-kilometres with an estimated investment of Rs 95.4 crore by 2027, a statement said. The fixed-schedule sailing service will ply vessels between Kolkata-Patna-Varanasi and Kolkata-Pandu (Guwahati) routes, demonstrating the readiness of waterways for efficient and eco-friendly cargo transportation.

"The Jalvahak scheme incentivises long-haul cargo transport and ensures timely delivery through regular freight services. This initiative provides a positive economic value proposition to trade while advancing Prime Minister Narendra Modi's vision of transformation via transportation," Sonowal said. Sonowal flagged off three vessels - MV Trishul carrying

1,500 tonnes of cement to Guwahati via the Indo-Bangladesh Protocol Route, MV Aai with 1,000 tonnes of gypsum to Patna for a cement company and MV Homi Bhaba transporting 200 tonnes of coal to Varanasi.

Highlighting the sector's growth, Sonowal said cargo volumes on national waterways have increased from 18.07 million tonnes in 2013-14 to 132.89 million tonnes in 2023-24, registering over 700 per cent growth. He added that the government aims to achieve 200 million tonnes by 2030 and 500 million tonnes by 2047. Union Minister of State for shipping Shantanu Thakur told the media that there is no concern in bilateral trade despite ongoing Bangladesh unrest and government has been keeping a close watch.

# Economic boon: Maha Kumbh 2025 promises spiritual and financial revival

BISWAJEET BANERJEE ■ PRAYAGRAJ

Mahakumbh Mela 2025 is set to be more than just a spiritual event; it promises to be a major economic driver for Uttar Pradesh. Historical records from the 1882 Kumbh Mela show that the event cost ₹20,228 to organize while generating ₹49,840 in revenue, resulting in a net profit of ₹29,612. This legacy of economic gain continues, with the upcoming Mahakumbh expected to generate ₹25,000 crore in revenue for the state.

Covering approximately 4,000 hectares, the Mahakumbh is projected to attract 40-45 crore pilgrims, making it the largest religious gathering in the world. The event's estimated budget stands at ₹6,382 crore, with ₹5,600 crore already allocated for event management and infrastruc-

ture development. In comparison, the government had spent ₹3,700 crore in the 2019 Kumbh Mela.

"Mahakumbh 2025 is not just a spiritual gathering; it's a massive economic engine," said Manoj Kumar Singh, Chief Secretary of Uttar Pradesh. "Our focus is on enhancing infrastructure, tourism, and job creation while ensuring a seamless experience for pilgrims." KV Raju, economic advisor to the UP government, claims that with an expected crowd of 45 crore pilgrims, Mahakumbh could generate no less than ₹2 lakh crore. Advisor to Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath and former IAS officer Awanish Awasthi provided an economic projection: "The worth of this financial activity could be an underestimation of the actual figure. If one pilgrim spends ₹8,000 during



Mahakumbh, the total could surpass ₹3.2 lakh crore based on the expected footfall." Experts, however, caution that the state's net economic benefit may be difficult to gauge,

as much of the financial activity will occur in the informal sector, involving small transactions like renting boats, transportation, and street food. Still, individuals

engaged in these services are likely to see significant gains. The event's economic impact extends beyond Prayagraj, benefiting nearby religious hubs like Varanasi, Ayodhya,

Mathura, and Vindhyavasini Dham, creating thousands of new jobs. The Uttar Pradesh Tourism Department reports that preparations for the event have already provided employment to 45,000 families.

Local vendors and service providers are equally optimistic. Rajesh Tiwari, a street food vendor in Prayagraj, said, "The Mahakumbh is a blessing for small businesses like mine. We earn what we typically make in six months during this event."

Similarly, Ramesh Kumar, a boat operator on the Ganga, shared his excitement: "With millions of tourists expected, our income will multiply. We are also receiving special training to enhance our services."

The government is actively training service providers, including tour guides, street vendors, and drivers, through

specialized programs conducted by the Manyavar Kanshiram Tourism Management Agency in Lucknow and Prayagraj. "This training will improve our skills and help us provide better services to tourists," said Neha Mishra, a trainee tour guide.

In a first, the temporary tent city at the Mahakumbh will be visible on Google Maps, thanks to a memorandum of understanding signed between Google representatives and the Mahakumbh Mela Authority. "We are committed to using technology to improve the pilgrimage experience," said an official from the authority.

Infrastructure development is at the heart of the preparations. Major projects completed include a six-lane bridge over the Ganga and a ₹275-crore four-lane railway overbridge, aimed at improv-

ing connectivity and easing traffic flow.

Even after Mahakumbh 2025 concludes, Prayagraj is expected to remain a tourism hotspot.

"We believe that the infrastructure and global visibility created during the event will drive tourism for years," said a senior tourism official.

Common people also see this as a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity. "I have attended several Kumbh Melas. This time, it feels like the entire world will be watching," said Meera Devi, a pilgrim from Bihar. "We come for spiritual fulfillment, but we can see how it benefits the locals as well."

Mahakumbh 2025 promises not just spiritual enrichment but also lasting economic prosperity, creating a sustainable legacy for Uttar Pradesh and its people.





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PAPER WITH PASSION

## Modi's mantra

PM Modi's resolutions give roadmap for progress but its realisation requires collaborative efforts from the government and civil society

During the Constitution debate in the Lok Sabha on December 13, Prime Minister Narendra Modi articulated 11 resolutions to guide India's future development. These resolutions, inspired by the spirit of the Constitution, aim to address critical aspects of governance, societal values and national development. PM Modi emphasised the need for citizens and government officials to uphold their duties. This aligns with the Constitution's emphasis on Fundamental Duties, but its implementation requires widespread public awareness and institutional accountability. The Prime Minister reaffirmed the government's commitment to inclusive development through his vision of "Sabka Saath, Sabka Vikas." While significant progress has been made in sectors like infrastructure and digital access, challenges like regional disparities and social inequality persist. Addressing these requires targeted policy interventions and efficient resource allocation. Corruption, which undermines public trust and economic



efficiency, was also highlighted by PM Modi, who called for societal rejection of corruption. His stance complements ongoing measures like digital transparency and anti-corruption legislation. However, robust enforcement mechanisms and judicial efficiency are essential for achieving this goal. Fostering respect for laws and traditions was another critical resolution aimed at strengthening social cohesion. This requires not only stricter enforcement of laws but also cultural campaigns to educate citizens about the value of India's legal and cultural heritage.

In a similar vein, PM Modi's call to instill pride in India's heritage seeks to dismantle colonial-era mindsets. This involves promoting indigenous knowledge systems, decolonising education curricula and celebrating India's achievements globally. Modi also stressed the importance of respecting the Constitution and avoiding its exploitation for political gains. This underscores the need for political integrity and constructive discourse in legislative processes. Another pivotal resolution was the preservation of reservations without introducing religion-based quotas. PM Modi's emphasis on the importance of maintaining the status quo while opposing religion-based reservations. Balancing social justice with meritocracy remains a contentious issue, necessitating careful policy considerations to address evolving societal needs. The mantra of "development of the country through the development of states" underscores the importance of cooperative federalism. Strengthening state capacities and ensuring equitable resource distribution are critical for this resolution's success. The feasibility of these resolutions hinges on several factors such as upholding duties and require active citizen engagement. Effective implementation of these resolutions largely depends on robust institutions and governance mechanisms and efficient use of resources by the government itself along with a civil society which is alert and aware.

### PICTALK



A woman protects her child from cold during a foggy winter morning, in Nadia

# A forgotten crisis amid global turmoil



SUDHIR HINDWAN

In a world dominated by geopolitical rivalries, economic uncertainties and environmental degradation, food security concerns are relegated to background

World politics today faces a myriad of challenges, including cyber fraud, widespread corruption, transnational terrorism, and the relentless use of weapons of mass destruction in regional conflicts such as the West Asian crises and the ongoing Ukraine-Russia war. These issues are compounded by a refugee crisis of enormous proportions, environmental degradation, and the growing frequency of natural disasters. Among these pressing concerns, food security remains a critical yet often overlooked challenge that affects nations worldwide.

Food security, as defined by the Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) of the United Nations at the 1996 Rome World Food Summit, exists when "all people, at all times, have physical and economic access to sufficient, safe, and nutritious food that meets their dietary needs and food preferences for an active and healthy life." This definition underscores the importance of not only physical availability but also economic access to food, emphasising both quantity and nutritional quality.

According to the FAO's Food Insecurity Scale, over half of the population in low-income countries lives under food-insecure conditions, with about one-third facing severe crises. Globally, approximately 789 million people lack adequate food, and this number rises to an alarming 2.4 billion when micronutrient deficiencies are considered. Food security issues can be categorised into two broad areas: quantity and quality. These challenges encompass five key dimensions: food availability, price volatility, inclusive access, proper utilisation, and stability. Price volatility, particularly in low-income countries, exacerbates food insecurity as most people lack the resources to access nutrient-rich food. Recognising the severity of global food insecurity, the United Nations included food security among its 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) in the 2015 '2030 Agenda'. The second SDG aims to "end hunger, achieve food security and



improved nutrition, and promote sustainable agriculture." Complementary goals, such as SDG 6 ("Ensure availability and sustainable management of water and sanitation for all") and SDG 12 ("Ensure sustainable consumption and production patterns"), further emphasize the need for sustainable practices in achieving food security. Governments worldwide have been urged to align their food and agriculture policies with these goals to ensure their populations receive adequate, nutritious food in a sustainable manner. Food insecurity leads to numerous problems at both household and societal levels. Household food insecurity, for instance, has been linked to suboptimal sleep patterns and reduced immunity against diseases.

To address these issues, the United Nations reaffirmed its commitment to safe and nutritious food access during the 2012 UN Conference on Sustainable Development. This commitment was encapsulated in the 'Future We Want' document. The conference also saw the launch of the 'Zero Hunger Challenge' (ZHC) by then-UN Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon, aiming to eliminate hunger and malnutrition globally by 2030. A cornerstone of the ZHC is the goal to make "all food systems sustainable," encompassing clean



ACCORDING TO THE FAO'S FOOD INSECURITY SCALE, OVER HALF OF THE POPULATION IN LOW-INCOME COUNTRIES LIVES UNDER FOOD-INSECURE CONDITIONS, WITH ABOUT ONE-THIRD FACING SEVERE CRISES

water, sustainable energy, responsible food consumption and production, and climate action—achievable through national policies and international cooperation. The 1987 Brundtland Report, titled 'Our Common Future', defined sustainable development as "development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs." India, since its independence in 1947, has made significant strides in building food security by establishing agricultural institutions such as the Indian Agricultural Research Institute under the guidance of the Indian Council of Agricultural Research (ICAR). Advancements in genetic engineering and biotechnology hold promise for addressing agricultural challenges, improving food quality, and increasing global food availability. However, concerns persist about biosafety risks posed by genetically modified organisms (GMOs). Proper handling, transfer, and disposal of these organisms, as recommended by global institutions like the World Bank, are critical to ensuring safety. The world is currently mired in geopolitical rivalries, with nations prioritising dominance over addressing pressing issues such as hunger, poverty, environmental degradation and

unemployment. Biotechnology, if harnessed effectively, can address these challenges by creating opportunities for producing higher-quality food, reducing pollution, generating jobs, and fostering economic growth. This, in turn, could promote international cooperation and reduce global tensions, paving the way for peace. Investments in research and development can yield innovative solutions to hunger, malnutrition and food adulteration, transforming biotechnology into a force for global good.

However, two major apprehensions regarding biotechnology persist. First, it may deepen the divide between developed and developing nations. Second, globalisation could threaten the survival of indigenous food industries. Despite these concerns, the potential benefits of biotechnology in transforming global food and energy systems into a philanthropic movement cannot be overlooked. Food security initiatives must rise above geopolitical rivalries, embracing inclusivity and shared responsibilities. India, with its emphasis on inclusive diplomacy, has the potential to play a pivotal role in this endeavor.

(The author, a recipient of the Bharat Gaurav Award, is a professor, HOD, and an expert on strategic affairs. Views expressed are personal)

## LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

### ONE NATION ONE ELECTION

Madam — It will be the most precious gift to the nation amidst political anarchy and election extravaganza. The people will be stupendously relieved by single elections for multiple reasons. The Model Code of Conduct stalls development projects and decision-making of the governments. The alleged sale of party tickets, defections by politicians, experimenting with the disruptive agendas, noisy debates on TV channels, spoiling harmony in the country, poll violence, foreign interference, the game of opinion and exit polls losing credibility, betting on elections, saving billions of rupees for the government on election machinery including deployment staff and police forces, huge resource mobilisation by the political parties, and people's contribution for multiple elections, etc., are a few to quote in favour of one nation, one election. The former President, Ram Nath Kovind's recommendation of holding municipal elections along with the Lok Sabha and State Assembly elections should also be considered by the Union Government in the next phase.

It may also be contemplated by the government that those candidates who lose elections in parliamentary or Assembly elections and are rejected by the people should not get entry in the Rajya Sabha and legislative councils where only elected representatives are allowed to vote. In fact, the state assemblies don't need legislative councils. The number of Lok Sabha and state assembly seats should be optimally increased so that there is wider and appropriate representation of people. There should be a dedicated cadre of the Civil Services for elections. It will facilitate the continuity of updating electoral rolls, EVM maintenance, election reforms as and when required, create a data bank and an archive on elections, training, delimitation, dedicated teamwork to contest election-related litigation, and work on a constitutional framework for elections-related issues.

Vinod Johri | Delhi

### SC says no survey of worship places



By halting the surveys of places of worship, the Supreme Court's recent order bars all courts nationwide from registering fresh suits or issuing any interim or final orders, including those permitting surveys in ongoing cases concerning existing structures, until the validity of the Places of Worship Act 1991 is decided. SC's order means that in pending suits such as those pertaining to the Kashi Vishwanath-Gyanvapi mosque and Krishna Janmabhoomi-Idgah dis-

putes, courts cannot pass any effective or final orders. The order is timely and a welcome move. The 1991 Act was enacted to prevent conflicts that may arise from disputes with historical ties and to protect the equality of faiths, a constitutional value.

The Act also prohibits converting a place of worship to a different denomination or section and mandates that history and its wrongs should not be used to oppress the present and future. But recently many petitioners have approached lower courts as well as the Supreme Court against the 1991 Act, alleging that the law has created an arbitrary and irrational retrospective cut-off date of August 15, 1947, for maintaining the character of the places of worship.

P Victor Selvaraj | Tirunelveli

### REFORMING INDIAN JUDICIAL SYSTEM

Madam — The Indian judicial system has long struggled with the issue of delayed justice, raising concerns about its credibility and effectiveness. The principle that "delayed justice is equivalent to injustice" emphasises the importance of timely and accessible justice. The backlog of cases, complex procedures, and delays in decision-making have caused significant mental, social, and moral harm to victims and society at large. Currently, around 44 million cases are pending in district courts, 6.1 million in high courts, and over 82,000 in the Supreme Court. This backlog has led to questions about the system's efficiency, impacting not just the legal system but also the democratic fabric of the country. The Nirbhaya case highlights the detrimental effects of delayed justice, eroding public trust in the system. To address these issues, the central government has introduced judicial reforms, including three new criminal laws aimed at improving timeliness, transparency, and efficiency. These reforms introduce fixed time limits for

resolving cases and create a framework for expediting the disposal of long-pending cases, offering relief to victims and ensuring justice.

R K Jain | Barwani

### GUKESH DEFEATS DING LIREN

Madam — Carrying on chess dominance, hitting Gukesh displayed a high level and proved that he is not second in the FIDE World Championship 2024 in style. India's D Gukesh achieved the landmark in a crucial game and in a cliffhanger manner, beating titleholder China's Ding Liren in the 14th and last game of the FIDE World Chess Championship 2024 in a clinical way. India's D Gukesh masters moves and makes them in a calculative way. He played to plan to eat humble pie. The 18-year-old had Gukesh play a great game of chess. Three cheers for golden boy Gukesh.

C K Subramaniam | Mumbai

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## Beyond the screen: The hidden truths of our social media lives

Social media is a tool to make life more connected and interesting, it is not a measure to judge worth and success of family and friends

Ever since social media sneaked into our lives, we have made it a shelf to display our lives' wares. We paint our digital walls with milestones, memories, smiles, and sorrows. It's a vibrant collage of life's varied hues, yet what we post is often a curated version of reality. The smiles are brighter, the love is deeper, the vacations are grander, and the heartbreaks are more dramatic. But behind this veneer of filtered perfection, the raw and unfiltered truth often lurks quietly, hidden from the world's gaze.

For a month, I posted pictures from my holiday—pristine landscapes, cheerful meals, and stylish getups—giving the impression that I was the happiest and luckiest person on earth. From the outside, it looked like life was a seamless tapestry of joy and contentment. But behind each post was a personal battle being waged in silence. While my timeline radiated unbridled joy, I was working on myself to remedy a tough health challenge. Why did I choose to post happy pictures when my reality was tumultuous? Was I pretending? Was I



seeking validation? No. I was trying to reassure myself. I was reminding myself that happiness exists, that moments of beauty and joy still punctuate my life. Those posts were not deceit; they were lifelines. Glimpses of joy that I clung to as I navigated the storm within. And in sharing those moments, I was also hoping to pass on slivers of hope to others who might be fighting unseen battles. This is the duality of social media.

The laughter we see might be tears in disguise. The grand celebrations could be cloaked in anxiety. The tears shed publicly may be crafted for effect. What appears authentic can be artifice; what looks carefree can be layered with burdens. This is why we should not judge others based on what we see on their profiles. Why do people disguise their struggles and pre-

sent happy pictures? It's not necessarily deceit or a desire to mislead others. Sometimes, it's a way of keeping hope alive. When life's challenges weigh heavily, projecting happiness can feel like a self-fulfilling prophecy. By sharing joy, even when it feels out of reach, we try to manifest it. We tell ourselves that happiness is not an illusion—it's around the corner and within our grasp. We also do it for others. Social media can be a dark and overwhelming place filled with negativity, comparison, and distressing news. By sharing moments of beauty, love and humour, we offer small doses of positivity to those who might need them. But here-in lies the trap. When we view others' lives through the glossy lens of social media, we risk falling into the pit of comparison. We measure our own lives against the seemingly perfect lives of others and wonder where we went wrong.

We feel envious, resentful, or inadequate. But this comparison is unfair—because it's based on incomplete information. What you see on social media is a highlight

reel, not a documentary. To compare your behind-the-scenes reality to someone else's carefully chosen highlights is to set yourself up for needless suffering. So, how should we approach social media with clarity and kindness? First, partake in others' happiness without envy. Celebrate their joys as you would want them to celebrate yours.

Let their happiness be a reminder that good things are possible, even if they haven't yet arrived in your life. Second, lend support in difficult times without judgment. If someone shares their struggles, resist the urge to undermine or dismiss them. Behind their words could be a pain far deeper than what they've expressed. Offer empathy, not assumptions. Be the steady presence that reminds them they're not alone. Finally, take social media for what it is—a tool to make life more connected, more interesting and occasionally more fun. It's not a measure of worth, success, or happiness.

(The author is a columnist and writing coach based in Dubai. Views are personal)



ASHA IYER KUMAR





## FIRST COLUMN

## BRIDGING DIVIDES IN THE WORKPLACE

This growing divide can hinder teamwork, erode trust and undermine organisational effectiveness



SAKSHI SETHI

With the advent of the 21st generation, the division of people into sharply opposing groups has increasingly infiltrated workplaces, reflecting the broader societal divides in politics, culture and values. In professional settings, it is often referred to as polarisation and can hinder collaboration, damage relationships, and undermine organisational effectiveness. Addressing workplace polarisation requires proactive leadership, open communication, and an emphasis on shared goals. Polarisation often stems from various sources such as divergent personal values where the employees bring their political, cultural and social identities into the workplace.

Differences in beliefs particularly on sensitive issues such as gender, race and political ideologies lead to conflicts. On the other hand, media coverage, political campaigns, or social movements heighten tensions among employees with differing viewpoints. A lack of open dialogue within teams fosters echo chambers, where employees interact only with like-minded individuals, reinforcing biases and misunderstandings. Also, differences in work styles, priorities and values between generations can create friction. Younger employees may prioritise social activism, while older colleagues might value traditional workplace norms.

The impact of this kind of polarisation on organisational health and employee wellbeing can be significant. It can hamper teamwork, as employees will become less willing to cooperate with those holding opposing views which will stifle innovation and productivity. Disagreements on personal or political issues can also lead to distrust among colleagues, creating a toxic work environment. Employees who feel alienated or marginalised due to their beliefs may seek opportunities elsewhere, result-



ing in talent loss. Workplace conflicts rooted in polarisation can lead to stress, burnout and decreased job satisfaction.

By encouraging respectful conversations that allow employees to express their perspectives without fear of judgment; by implementing structured initiatives, such as facilitated discussions or conflict resolution workshops; by emphasising organisational objectives that unite employees and by highlighting common ground, such as shared values or team missions, can be a few measures that can reduce the focus on divisive issues and can help bridge divides. Last but not least that play a crucial role in setting the tone for workplace interactions is that of the leader. There is no denying that inclusive leaders model respectful behaviour, encourage diverse viewpoints, and mediate conflicts effectively. Developing guidelines that outline acceptable workplace behaviour, particularly concerning discussions on sensitive topics; making policies that promote mutual respect while preserving freedom of expression or taking initiatives such as team-building exercises, mentorship programs, or cross-department projects can help reduce silos and foster connections between employees with differing viewpoints. Undoubtedly an organisation's culture significantly influences how polarisation manifests and is addressed. A culture that values respect, inclusivity, and open-mindedness can mitigate the effects of polarization.

Conversely, a culture that tolerates favouritism or discrimination can exacerbate divisions. Leaders must prioritise cultivating a culture where employees feel valued and heard, regardless of their beliefs or backgrounds. Workplace polarisation reflects the broader societal divides but has unique challenges and opportunities within professional settings. While it risks collaboration, trust, and productivity, it can also catalyse growth if managed effectively. By fostering a culture of respect, promoting open dialogue, and emphasising shared goals, organisations can navigate polarisation and create environments where diverse perspectives thrive.

(The writer is an educator; views expressed are personal)

# Syria's collapse: Foreign meddling and economic ruin



NILANTHA ILANGAMUWA

As allies like Iran pressured Assad for reforms, and Western nations explored conditional sanctions relief, Syria became a battleground of competing geopolitical manoeuvring



By the end of November, the situation in Syria was dire. Government forces were on the brink of exhaustion, stretched thin by an economic crisis that spiralled out of control. Soldiers earned a paltry \$7 a month, with even high-ranking officers receiving only \$40. This was in blunt contrast to militia fighters funded by external powers, who earned up to \$2,000 monthly. This glaring disparity revealed not just economic fault lines but the extent of foreign intervention sustaining these militias. Meanwhile, protests erupted across Suwayda province, historically a stronghold of Assad support, highlighting widespread famine, collapsing services, and the devaluation of the Syrian pound. Discontent was palpable, threatening to upend the regime's fragile grasp on power.

Iran, Syria's long-time ally, reportedly pressured Assad to address these challenges. Tehran's warnings accentuated the erosion of public trust and a crumbling economy, urging decisive action. Yet Assad seemed increasingly aloof, allegedly seeking new alliances with Gulf nations, hoping these relationships would secure his future. By December, reports emerged that the United States and the United Arab Emirates were considering lifting sanctions on Assad—but only if he severed ties with Iran and halted arms transfers to Hezbollah. This diplomatic manoeuvre was a calculated strategy to weaken Assad's regime further. Relief from Caesar sanctions was an unlikely prospect given Washington's decade-long effort to dismantle the Assad family rule. The outcome was preordained: Assad was isolated, and the geopolitical chessboard advanced. The trajectory of Assad's downfall mirrors a broader pattern in Western foreign policy. Leaders once celebrated as reformers—from Saddam Hussein to Muammar Gaddafi—are vilified when their geopolitical utility wanes. Assad, who was once lauded for fostering coexistence among Syria's religious and ethnic groups, became the West's pariah.

In 2010, Syria was a stable nation, ranked seventh on *The New York Times*'s "31 best places to visit." Assad met with Queen Elizabeth, hosted Nancy Pelosi, and welcomed Pope John Paul II. Yet the West's affection was



BY DECEMBER, REPORTS EMERGED THAT THE UNITED STATES AND THE UNITED ARAB EMIRATES WERE CONSIDERING LIFTING SANCTIONS ON ASSAD—BUT ONLY IF HE SEVERED TIES WITH IRAN AND HALTED ARMS TRANSFERS TO HEZBOLLAH. THIS DIPLOMATIC MANOEUVRE WAS A CALCULATED STRATEGY TO WEAKEN ASSAD'S REGIME FURTHER

short-lived. As geopolitical calculations shifted, Assad's regime was recast as the antithesis of democracy, paving the way for intervention. The Syrian conflict was never just a civil war. It was a proxy war fueled by external actors. Over 100,000 jihadists were funnelled into Syria, backed by a coalition of nations. The United States, Israel, Saudi Arabia, and Qatar allegedly provided financial and logistical support.

Turkey and Jordan facilitated arms shipments and fighter transport. Western media amplified anti-Assad narratives, while the UK-backed White Helmets shaped public perceptions. Each player pursued its agenda, yet all converged on a singular goal: regime change. The motivations driving this coalition were diverse. The United States and Israel sought regional hegemony, neutralising perceived threats while advancing the Greater Israel project. Qatar's pipeline ambitions clashed with Assad's preference for an Iranian alternative, further entrenching divisions.

These dynamics turned Syria into a battleground for competing interests, with devastating consequences for its people. By late 2013, the influx of foreign fighters intensified. Western nations grappled with their citizens joining extremist groups in Syria. The UK reported approximately 600 fighters, while France contributed around 1,200. Belgium, the Netherlands, and Sweden also faced significant outflows. However, the greatest contributions came from West Asia and North Africa, with Tunisia leading at 3,000 fighters, followed by Saudi Arabia at 2,500.

Russia's involvement, particularly from regions like Chechnya, underscored the conflict's global reach. The arms supply chain further exacerbated the war. Gulf states like Qatar and Saudi Arabia allegedly supplied weapons, supported by over 160 military cargo flights.

These arms, transported through Turkey and Jordan, sustained rebel factions. European nations, such as Croatia, indirectly contributed by routing surplus weapons through Jordan. This complex web of arms smuggling empowered extremist groups, further destabilising Syria. Western hypocrisy was stark.

While denouncing Assad's regime, the United States supported "moderate rebels" aligned with Al Qaeda and ISIS. Declassified documents revealed this duplicity. In 2012, General Michael Flynn's memo to the Pentagon warned that the opposition included jihadist factions. Similarly, Hillary Clinton's advisor, Jake Sullivan, acknowledged in an email that "Al Qaeda is on our side in Syria." The West's support for these groups undercut its claims of promoting democracy, revealing a strategy rooted in destabilisation. Atrocity propaganda became a central tool in the anti-Assad narrative. Staged chemical attacks, amplified by the White Helmets, justified military intervention.

Western media perpetuated these fabrications, obscuring the reality on the ground. Idlib province, under "rebel" control, became a dystopian preview of Syria's potential future: public executions, forced veiling of women, and sectarian slogans. This grim reality highlighted the consequences of regime change. Operation Timber Sycamore, the CIA's covert programme, exemplified Western duplicity. Billions of dollars in weapons were funnelled to extremist factions, prolonging the war.

The irony was stark: the West, claiming to combat terrorism, empowered the very groups destabilising the region. Syria's devastation became a witness to the destructive nature of interventionist policies. Syria's collapse parallels other Western interventions. Iraq's 2003 invasion, justified by the false pretext of weapons of mass destruc-

tion, left the nation in tatters. Libya, once Africa's wealthiest country, descended into anarchy following Gaddafi's overthrow—these interventions, framed as humanitarian missions, unleashed chaos, empowering extremist factions and creating power vacuums. The broader motivations behind these actions lie in geopolitics.

Syria's strategic location, its role as a buffer between Iran and Israel, and its proximity to oil-rich regions made it a prime target. The West's desire to reshape the region's political structure has driven decades of intervention, often with catastrophic consequences. Meanwhile, allies like Saudi Arabia and Turkey, despite their human rights abuses, remain central to Western strategy, exposing the moral bankruptcy of interventionist policies. Syria's tragedy is a miniature of a global pattern. The collapse of nations like Iraq, Libya, and Syria reflects a broader system where sovereignty is sacrificed for strategic interests. Foreign interventions, far from promoting democracy or stability, have left legacies of destruction, displacement, and despair.

The narrative of "humanitarian intervention" serves as a veneer, masking the true motives of power and greed. As the 50th anniversary of Iran's 1979 revolution approaches in 2029, the stakes are higher than ever. Iran's defiance of Western hegemony remains a critical factor in the region's future. The forces shaping West Asia—Israel, Turkey, and Western powers—are poised to challenge Iran's resilience. Syria's collapse serves as both a warning and a call to scrutinise the ethics of intervention. The legacy of these actions is clear: a world shaped by greed, ambition, and the devastating cost of unchecked power.

(The writer is a senior journalist and a policy analyst; views expressed are personal)

## Can INDIA bloc resolve its leadership disputes and put to rest its internal strife

With Mamata vying for the leadership of the INDIA bloc supported by a number constituents, chances of the bloc succumbing to internal disputes are high

The INDIA bloc, a coalition of 26 ideologically diverse parties, was created to counter the BJP's electoral dominance. In the 2024 general elections, the bloc achieved a significant milestone, reducing the BJP's tally to below 240 seats. However, this success has been tempered by internal discord, which now threatens the alliance's fragile unity.

A key figure in this unfolding drama is Mamata Banerjee, the dynamic leader of the Trinamool Congress (TMC). Her aspirations for leadership within the coalition have both galvanised and fractured its members. Mamata Banerjee's National Ambitions Mamata Banerjee's bid for prominence within the INDIA bloc stems from her desire to extend her



K S TOMAR

influence beyond Bengal and play a decisive role in shaping national politics. Her assertive style has invigorated some allies but has alienated others, exposing the persistent challenge of reconciling regional ambitions with a unified national strategy. Earlier, Banerjee proposed Congress President Mallikarjun Kharge as the bloc's chairperson, a strategic move to diminish

the influence of Bihar Chief Minister Nitish Kumar, one of the coalition's key architects. This proposal, supported by leaders like Akhilesh Yadav and Arvind Kejriwal, showcased Banerjee's ability to consolidate support. However, her growing clout has sparked unease among other leaders. For instance, Lalu Prasad Yadav, a staunch Congress ally, appears to be rethinking his loyalties. Such dynamics highlight the alliance's precarious balance and the potential for further fractures.

Lessons from the Past: UPA2 The INDIA bloc's current challenges echo the struggles faced by the United Progressive Alliance (UPA2) during its tenure. In 2012, Mamata Banerjee's dramatic exit from the UPA over policy disagree-

ments underscored the inherent instability of coalition politics. Scandals and policy paralysis plagued UPA2, eroding its credibility and paving the way for Narendra Modi's rise.

As Banerjee's ambitions take center stage, the INDIA bloc risks repeating history. If it fails to address its internal contradictions, it could suffer the same fate as UPA2, jeopardising its ability to present a united front against the BJP. BJP's Advantage Amid Opposition Discord The BJP stands to benefit from the INDIA bloc's internal strife. While Banerjee wields considerable influence in West Bengal, Congress retains a broader national presence. A fragmented opposition could split anti-BJP votes, a scenario that would play into the



saffron party's hands. Recent BJP gains in Maharashtra and Haryana underscore the bloc's challenges, particularly for Congress, which has struggled to maintain dominance in key states. Seat-sharing disputes within the bloc further illustrate its lack of strategic coherence. For instance, the Aam Aadmi Party's unilateral candidate announcements in Delhi and Haryana have fueled tensions,

revealing the alliance's inability to present a united strategy.

**Mamata vs Congress:** Mamata Banerjee's leadership ambitions pose a paradox for Congress. Her energy and charisma could revitalise the bloc, but her assertiveness risks overshadowing Congress's central role. This tension is particularly pronounced in states like West Bengal and Kerala, where Congress directly competes with the TMC and the Left. Seat-sharing negotiations in overlapping constituencies could exacerbate divisions, straining the alliance further. For Congress, retaining relevance within the INDIA bloc will require a delicate balancing act: accommodating Banerjee's influence without

compromising its identity. Key Challenges for the INDIA Bloc The alliance faces several hurdles that could determine its survival:

**Leadership Struggles:** The lack of consensus on a prime ministerial candidate risks deepening divisions.

**Unified Campaign Narrative:** A focus on governance, economic policies, and social justice can resonate with voters more effectively than personal rivalries.

**Effective Coordination:** Mechanisms for conflict resolution and decision-making must be strengthened. **Balancing Regional and National Goals:** Respecting regional aspirations while pursuing a cohesive national agenda is critical. **A Test of Political Maturity:**

Mamata Banerjee's ambitions underscore her political acumen and the complexities of coalition politics. While her leadership could energise the INDIA bloc, it also risks deepening divisions. Navigating this intricate web of regional and national aspirations will test the bloc's political maturity.

The upcoming state elections and the 2029 general elections will be pivotal in determining whether the INDIA bloc can overcome its internal strife and emerge as a credible alternative to the BJP. Resolving leadership disputes, crafting a compelling narrative, and presenting a unified front are critical to its success.

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



# Indian nationals returning from Syria recall their panic situation

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

A batch of Indian nationals, who returned to their homeland on Saturday after being evacuated from crisis-hit Syria, recalled the panic situation they faced in that country but praised the Indian Embassy there for being in "constant touch" with them.

Some of the returnees, soon after landing at the Delhi airport late evening, shared with media their experiences of the last week. Sunil Dutt, a native of Chandigarh, and a mechanical engineer, alleged that there were some "anti-social elements" too in the streets who were also "looting stuff". It was a very bad situation and sights of fire and sounds of bombarding made it worse, he said.

However, the Indian Embassy was in "constant touch with us" and its personnel "asked us to be calm, not open doors" to ensure safety, Dutt told reporters at Delhi airport. India has evacuated from Syria all its nationals who wished to return home after rebel forces overthrew President Bashar Assad's authoritarian government in the Arab nation.

The Syrian government collapsed on Sunday as the rebels seized control of capital Damascus after capturing several other prominent cities and towns.

"We have evacuated all Indian nationals in Syria who wished to return home following recent developments in that country. So far, 77 Indian nationals from Syria have been evacuated," Ministry of



External Affairs (MEA) spokesperson Randhir Jaiswal said on Friday during his weekly briefing. The Indian Embassy personnel in Damascus accompanied them to the border, after which our mission in Lebanon received them and facilitated their immigration, he said.

Sachit Kapoor, a resident of Greater Noida, was also among the Indians who arrived in Delhi on Saturday.

"We were in Syria for nearly seven months. The situation worsened on December 7. We were shifted to Damascus city and then we saw fire and bombarding all around. It was a panic situation. We were a team of 11 at a luxury hotel. Situation got worsened. People were running amok in

the streets, some looting also," he said.

Because of the Indian Embassy in Syria, "we were shifted to Lebanon very smoothly and we faced no issues", Kapoor recalled. The electrical engineer said in Lebanon too, "our lodging and food facility was very good".

He thanked the Ministry of External Affairs for the assistance rendered to the affected Indians, who wish to return to home country.

Ratan Lal, another Indian national who arrived at the Delhi airport on Saturday, said: "I have been in Syria for the last five years." When the situation got worsened, "we were called to Damascus and there lodged at a hotel. And, then visa was given, and then we went to

the airport for the onward journey," he recalled.

Lal said the situation was very bad and added that his family members told him to return somehow.

Chetan Lal, another returnee who hails from Gurgaon district of Haryana, said that he was working in Syria for the last 10 years in a glass bottle-making company.

"For three days, we were lodged at Damascus. The Lebanese and Syrian Embassy also cooperated with us a lot in aiding us in the return journey," he said.

The Indian Embassy in Syria continues to function, Jaiswal said on Friday.

Earlier on Monday, India called for a peaceful and inclusive Syrian-led political process to bring stability in that country.

## Karnataka BJP Chief rejects charges that he attempted to bribe Anwar Manipaddy

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ BENGALURU



Karnataka BJP president B Y Vijayendra on Sunday strongly dismissed Chief Minister Siddaramaiah and ruling Congress leaders' charges that he attempted to "bribe" former state Minority Commission chairperson Anwar Manipaddy to hush up his report on the Waqf encroachments.

Siddaramaiah in a statement on Saturday said that Manipaddy had publicly stated that Vijayendra visited his house during Yediyurappa's tenure as CM and offered Rs 150 crore to be silent about the Waqf property encroachment report.

Meanwhile, Manipaddy on Sunday denied that no such offer was made to him by Vijayendra, while Siddaramaiah stated that there was video footage showing Manipaddy making such a charge, and demanded that the central government order a CBI probe into it.

Questioning whether there was any logic in the allegation, Vijayendra today said, the Congress and Siddaramaiah seem to be "perturbed" by the allegations of corruption and scam against them, especially by the MUDA site allotment case against the CM.

"This is a shameful government. Its leaders, ministers and legislators, I have seen their statements. They seem to have lost their minds. When B S Yediyurappa was CM and the BJP government was in power, Manipaddy had submitted a report on Waqf regarding irregularities committed during the previous Congress government and its leaders," Vijayendra said.

Speaking to media, he said, "As the then chief minister's son, why should I go to Manipaddy's house and offer Rs 150 crore? That too to save Congress leaders? Is there any logic in this (allegation)?"

The state BJP chief said if the Congress wants to use this issue to waste the time of the legislature during the ongoing Assembly session, it is nothing but the "height of stupidity".

"The government, which is in the midst of corruption allegations and scams, is trying to waste time, he further alleged.

"I have not seen Manipaddy's statement. Is there any meaning in the allegations (made

by CM and Congress leaders)? What Minister Priyank Kharge has said is meaningless. If the CM is speaking using what he (Kharge) has said, I don't know what to say. It seems to be true that CM is perturbed," he said.

Stating that he will respond to the allegations if raised in the Assembly, Vijayendra said, "By creating imaginary things, if they feel that they can make opposition and the state BJP chief succumb to it, we are ready to take it as a challenge and respond to it."

Demanding a CBI probe, the CM in his statement on Saturday said that Manipaddy has further stated that he sent Vijayendra out of his house when he offered money, and reported the incident to PM Narendra Modi and the BJP president.

Manipaddy, as the chairman of the Karnataka State Minority Commission, had prepared the report and submitted it to the then BJP government in March 2012. It was tabled in the legislature in 2020, when the BJP was again in power.

Meanwhile, speaking to reporters in Mangaluru, Manipaddy said, Vijayendra did not come to his house and no such offer was made to him.

"Vijayendra was not in the scene when the report was submitted. I didn't even know him then and had only heard his name. I only spoke to him and expressed displeasure about the delay in tabling of report when Vijayendra was party vice president, and Yediyurappa was CM once again. There was no Rs 150 crore offer," he said.

Reacting to this, Siddaramaiah said, his statement is based on what Manipaddy had said in the video recording. "....If he now says no, it means he is lying. He had said that he had written letters to the PM and the party president."

Let the central government hand it over to the CBI for probe, the CM said while responding to a question by reporters in Gadag.

## Centre defers 'One Nation One Election' Bills

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

The Centre has deferred the introduction of Bills related to 'One Nation One Election' in the Lok Sabha till after the completion of financial business, sources said. Earlier, the two Bills, The Constitution (129th Amendment) Bill and The Union Territories Laws (Amendment) Bill, were listed for introduction in the Lok Sabha on Monday.

Sources in the Government said the Bills could be brought later this week after the House passes the first batch of supplementary demands for grants listed for Monday. The revised list of business, issued by the Lok Sabha secretariat, does not have the two Bills on the agenda for Monday.

However, the Government can always bring in legislative agenda to Parliament at the last minute through 'Supplementary List of Business' with the permission of the Lok Sabha Speaker. The two Bills related to implementation of the simultaneous elections to Lok Sabha and State Assemblies have been circulated among members last week. The Winter Session of Parliament is scheduled to conclude on December 20. The debate on the Constitution is scheduled to take place in Rajya Sabha on Monday.

The Bill proposes to insert a new Article 82A, simultaneous elections to the House of the People (Lok Sabha) and all Legislative Assemblies, and to amend Article 83 (Duration of Houses of Parliament), Article 172 (Duration of State Legislatures) and Article 327 (power of Parliament to make provision with respect to elections to Legislatures).

## IREL, Kazakh company to form joint venture to harness India's titanium potential

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

Indian Rare Earth Limited (IREL) has signed an agreement with a Kazakhstan-based company to develop the titanium value chain in India by harnessing the potential of rare-earth minerals in the coastal parts of the country. The joint venture between IREL (India) Limited and Ust-Kamenogorsk Titanium and Magnesium Plant JSC (UKTMP JSC) proposes to convert low titanium oxide (TiO2) ilmenite produced in Odisha to titanium slag, which is in great demand in the aerospace and defence sectors.

"The setting up of this JV plant is expected to catalyse the establishment of chloride pigment/Ti Slag/sponge manufacturing industry, which has been hindered by non-availability of high TiO2 feedstock," Minister of State in the Prime Minister's Office (PMO) Jitendra Singh told the Rajya Sabha in a written reply to a question last week.

Titanium is highly corrosion-resistant and remains unaffected by most acids, bases, environmental conditions, and has a low density paired with high strength. These qualities make it essential for industries requiring durability, such as the aerospace and maritime sectors.

"Titanium slag can be used as the feed material to produce titanium sponge, which is required for strategic use by defence, aerospace and atomic energy sectors," the minister said.

At present, the titanium sponge capacity in India is extremely limited, up to 500 tonnes per annum (tpa), with production of the order of about 260 tpa.

Under the joint venture, UKTMP JSC will grant the licence for the technology of

an automated furnace for the production of titanium slag, including the technical design of the plant. It would also provide assistance during the commissioning of the furnace and develop standard operating procedures for the working process of the plant. It would also provide assistance in the plant's operation and hand-holding training to the plant operators, which will result in developing the skillset of the employees of the JV company. IREL will safeguard the intellectual property rights of UKTMP JSC regarding the utilisation of titanium slag production technologies in India.

In addition to titanium slag, pig iron will also be produced in the plant which will have commercial value. "The assured offtake of titanium slag by UKTMP JSC will significantly contribute to increase export value. Further, it will pave the way for Indian industries to produce titanium pigment/sponge which are the ultimate end-use products," Singh said.

He said once implemented, the proposal is expected to develop industry in the titanium value chain and generate direct and indirect employment, including the downstream industry, to the tune of 8,000 to 10,000 people.

The setting up of this JV plant is expected to catalyse the establishment of titanium sponge manufacturing industries which has been hindered by the limited availability of high grade TiO2 feed stock in Odisha. The quality of the titanium slag produced in the Indian facility will be at par with the one required for producing titanium sponge or metal essential for strategic application in aerospace, defence and atomic energy.

## India leading fight against climate change: Bhupender Yadav

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

Union Environment Minister Bhupender Yadav on Sunday said India is leading the fight against climate change by achieving its targets and spearheading international initiatives for global cooperation in this area.

Addressing a conclave on "Future Earth: People's Participation in Climate Resilience" here, Yadav said Prime Minister Narendra Modi has made people's participation the essence of India's climate action through initiatives such as "Mission LiFE" and "Ek Ped Maa Ke Naam".

"Also elaborated on how India is at the forefront of the fight against climate change by both achieving its targets and leading international initiatives for global cooperation in the area," the minister said on social.

Modi launched Mission LiFE at COP26 in Glasgow to promote mindful resource consumption and the "Ek Ped Maa Ke Naam" campaign on June 5 this year, calling on people to plant one tree each in their mother's name to address rising temperatures, desertification, and biodiversity challenges.

## Comments by Bangladeshi political parties 'pack of lies' says ISKCON Kolkata VP

PNS ■ KOLKATA

ISKCON Kolkata vice-president Radharam Das on Sunday termed as "a pack of lies" and "alarming" comments by some leaders of political parties in Bangladesh, which has branded the global religious body of Vaishnavites as "fundamentalist".

Asserting that ISKCON stands for peace, amity, fraternity, and brotherhood among all communities and helps people in distress everywhere in the world, Das said such comments by student leaders, BNP politicians and "religious fanatics" in Bangladesh will not desist the organisation from performing its role there.

## Now Omar chips away at India Bloc

From page 1

After having gained in this year Lok Sabha polls and then incurring electoral loss in the Haryana and Maharashtra Assembly polls three months, Congress has expressed doubts about the EVM and have been questioning the election results demanding a return to the paper ballot.

On this front Samajwadi Party, NCP have backed the Congress while parties like RJD, NCP and TMC have raised the leadership crisis for the bloc and have backed TMC supreme to lead the INDIA Bloc.

Even during the ongoing Winter Session of the Parliament, the opposition parties have come on divided lines on several issues and some of the constituents have blamed even Congress for the regular disruptions of the Session.

Omar too has regretted that Congress is not doing enough a prominent role as the leader of the bloc leading to the current resentment. Not only this even the allies have taken against each like Shiv Sena (UBT) alleging that the Samajwadi Party's Maharashtra unit has been behaving like the BJP's "B team".

## Justice Shekhar Kumar Yadav to appear...

From page 1

Lawyer and convener of Campaign for Judicial Accountability and Reforms, an NGO, Prashant Bhushan on Tuesday wrote to Chief Justice of India (CJI) Sanjiv Khanna seeking an "in-house enquiry" into the conduct of the Allahabad HC judge.

On December 8, CPI(M) leader Brinda Karat also wrote

to the CJI calling the judge's speech a violation of his oath, saying "no place for such persons in a court of justice". Karat sought action from the CJI on the issue. Similarly, the Bar Association of India passed a resolution condemning the statements of the High Court judge.

"The Bar Association of India calls upon the judge to retract his statements and tender a

## Devendra Fadanvis expands Maha Cabinet

From page 1

Similarly, the omission of Dilip Walse-Patil, who is a seven-term MLA from Ambeegaon in Pune, has come as a surprise. A strong lieutenant of Sharad Pawar in the distant past, Patil joined Ajit Pawar when the latter engineered a vertical split in the united NCP led by Sharad Pawar and joined the Eknath Shinde-led MahaYuti government in July 2022.

The Sattar has been dropped many times in the past for courting controversies for his statements as the BJP high-command was very careful on such issues. Kesarkar was the Shiv Sena spokesperson and his omission from Fadanvis Cabinet has come as a bit of a surprise.

## Delhi AQI will rise as temp dips

From page 1

However, temperatures rose afterward, touching 9°C, offering Delhi some respite from the cold. The lowest minimum recorded at Safdarjung in December over the past decade was 2.4°C, on December 28, 2019. The all-time low for December is 0°C, recorded on December 27, 1930.

The IMD has issued warnings of 'cold wave' to severe cold wave' conditions across parts of North India, including Punjab, Haryana, and Uttar Pradesh. According to the IMD, a cold wave is officially declared in the plains when the minimum temperature falls to 4 degrees Celsius or below, or when it registers a drop of 4.5 to 6.4 degrees from normal. With temperatures hovering around these thresholds, the capital has been biting cold mornings, forcing residents to bundle up against the chill.

Meanwhile, Delhi's air quality deteriorated back to the 'poor' category on Sunday. In several areas of the city, AQI readings approached the 'very poor' category. Anand Vihar, Alipur, Bawana, and Burari Crossing recorded AQIs of 292, 256, 298, and 288, respectively. Similarly, Dwarka Sector 8 (258), Nehru Nagar (299), Rohini (288), and Mundka (317) reported high pollution levels.

Delhi recorded the highest number of 'good' to 'moderate' air quality days in 2024 since the past six years, data shared by monitoring agencies said. According to the data, a total of 207 days saw 'good' to 'moderate' air quality, with the Air Quality Index (AQI) remaining below 200. The month of December recorded six 'moderate' air quality days so far - surpassing the previous records since 2018. The data showed that so far, December witnessed a total of eight 'poor' to 'severe' air quality days.

## BJP has no CM face, says poll ready Kejriwal

From page 1

Hussain from Ballimaran. Another key name on AAP's fourth list is senior party leader and former minister Satyendra Jain. Jain, arrested by the Enforcement Directorate in a money laundering case in 2022, and granted bail in October, has been repeated from the Shakur Basti seat he currently holds. This points to the party's rock-solid support for him. In West Delhi's Uttam Nagar constituency, AAP has fielded Pooja Balyan, wife of sitting MLA Naresh Balyan. This comes a month after Balyan's remark, in which he promised to make roads as "smooth as Hema Malini's cheeks" sparked a row and earned him a rap from the National Commission for

## Women. Balyan was arrested earlier this month for allegedly having links with gangster Kapil Sangwan. The party has also given the Mehrauli ticket to Naresh Yadav again. Yadav has recently been sentenced in the Quran Desecration case by a Punjab Court. Shortly after the AAP released its final list of candidates, Kejriwal took a potshot at the BJP alleging that the saffron party has no chief minister face. "Today the Aam Aadmi Party announced its candidates on all 70 seats. The party is contesting the elections with full confidence and full preparation," he said in his post on X. He attacked the Bharatiya Janata Party and said, "BJP is

missing. They have no CM face, no team, no planning and no vision for Delhi. They have only one slogan, only one policy and only one mission, 'Remove Kejriwal'. Ask them what they did in five years, and they reply, 'Kejriwal ko khub gaali di'. Our party has a vision and a plan for the development of Delhiites and a good team of educated people to implement it. There is a long list of works done in the last ten years. People of Delhi will vote for those who work, not those who abuse." Meanwhile, BJP leader Ramesh Pehalwan, along with his wife and two-time councillor Kusum Lata, joined the AAP on Sunday, and was given ticket from the

## Kasturba Nagar seat, replacing three-time MLA Madan Lal. The couple joined the party in the presence of Arvind Kejriwal. In the fourth list, Somnath Bharti has got the ticket from Malviya Nagar, Amanatullah Khan from Okhla, Dhanwati Chandela from Rajouri Garden, Vishesh Ravi from Karol Bagh, Pramila Tokas from RK Puram, Shoaib Iqbal from Matia Mahal and Naresh Yadav from Mehrauli. The AAP had announced 11 candidates in the first list, 20 candidates in the second list and one candidate in the third list. In the 2020 election, the AAP had secured 62 of the 70 seats in Delhi, solidifying its dominance in the Capital's politics.

The capital's residents have been shivering since, with Safdarjung observing 4.9 degrees Celsius on Wednesday as well. The maximum temperature recorded 23.2 degree Celsius, 0.2 notches below normal. The IMD has advised people to wear several layers of loose fitting, light weight; warm woolen clothing. It further advised to cover your head, neck, hands and toes adequately as the most heat loss occurs through these body parts.

The mercury first fell below 5°C for the season on November 11 (4.9°C), marking the earliest drop below this threshold since 1987, when it occurred on December 6. The minimum temperature then dropped to a season low of 4.5°C the following day, which was Delhi's lowest December minimum in three years.



# Rebels try to bring normalcy as Syrians vow to speak up

AP ■ DAMASCUS

The new head of security arrived at Damascus' international airport with his men, a bearded fighter who marched with other rebels across Syria to the capital. The few maintenance staff who showed up for work huddled around Maj Hamza al-Ahmed, eager for answers about what happens next. They unloaded all their complaints, pent up for years during the rule of President Bashar Assad, which now, inconceivably, is over. They told him they were denied promotions and perks funneled to pro-Assad favorites, that bosses threatened them with prison for working too slowly. They warned him of hardcore Assad supporters among the airport staff, ready to return whenever the facility reopens. As al-Ahmed tried to reassure them, Osama Najm, an engineer, confessed: "This is the first time we talk." This was the first week of Syria's transformation after Assad's unexpected fall. Rebels, suddenly in charge, met a population bursting with emotions: excitement at new freedoms; grief over years of repression; and hopes, expectations and worries about the future. Some were overwhelmed to the point of tears.

The transition has been surprisingly smooth. Reports of reprisals, revenge killings and sectarian violence have been minimal. Looting and destruction have been quickly contained, insurgent fighters disciplined. On Saturday, people went about their lives as usual in the capital, Damascus. Only a single van of fighters was seen. There are a million ways it could go wrong. The country is broken and isolated after five decades of Assad family rule. Families have been torn apart by war, former prisoners are traumatized by the brutalities they suffered, tens of thousands of detainees remain missing. The economy is wrecked, poverty is widespread, inflation and unemployment are high. Corruption seeps through daily life. But in this moment of flux, many are ready to feel out the way ahead. At the airport, al-Ahmed told the staffers: "The new path will have challenges, but that is why we have said Syria is for all and we all have to cooperate." The rebels have so far said all the right things, Najm said. "But we will not be silent about anything wrong again." **Idlib comes to Damascus:** At a torched police station, pictures of Assad were torn down and files destroyed after insurgents entered the city Dec. 8.

All Assad-era police and security personnel have vanished. On Saturday, the building was staffed by 10 men serving in the police force of the rebels' de facto "salvation government," which for years governed the rebel enclave of Idlib in Syria's northwest. The rebel policemen watch over the station, dealing with reports of petty thefts and street scuffles. One woman complains that her neighbors sabotaged her power supply. A policeman tells her to wait for courts to start operating again. "It will take a year to solve problems," he mumbled. The rebels sought to bring order in Damascus by replicating the structure of its governance in Idlib. But there is a problem of scale. One of the policemen estimates the number of rebel police at only around 4,000; half are based in Idlib and the rest are tasked with maintaining security in Damascus and elsewhere. Some experts estimate the insurgents' total fighting force at around 20,000. Most of the bearded fighters hail from conservative, provincial areas. Many are hardline Islamists. The main insurgent force, Hayat Tahrir al-Sham, has renounced its al-Qaida past, and its leaders are working to reassure Syria's religious and ethnic communities that the

future will be pluralist and tolerant. Hayat Tahrir al-Sham moved to impose order. It ordered a nighttime curfew for three days. It banned celebratory gunfire and moved fighters to protect properties. After a day, people began to emerge. Tens of thousands went to Assad's prisons to search for loved ones, mingling with rebels, some of whom were also searching. Amid celebrations, gunmen invited children to hop up on their armored vehicles, and posed for photos with women, some with their hair uncovered. Pro-revolution songs blared from cars. The transitional government urged people to return to work. The insurgents deployed men to act as traffic police. Volunteers picked up trash, since municipal workers haven't returned to their jobs. Officials say they want to reopen the airport as soon as possible and this week maintenance crews inspected a handful of planes on the tarmac. Cleaners removed trash, wrecked furniture and merchandise. One cleaner, who identified himself only as Murad, said he earns the equivalent of \$15 a month and has six children to feed, including one with a disability. He dreams of getting a mobile phone.

# Sheikh Hasina involved in enforced disappearance: B'desh commission

PTI ■ DHAKA

An inquiry commission set up by the interim government in Bangladesh has said that it found evidence implicating deposed prime minister Sheikh Hasina and top-ranking military and police officials from her regime in alleged incidents of enforced disappearance. The five-member Commission of Inquiry on Enforced Disappearances submitted an interim report titled "Unfolding The Truth" to Chief Adviser Professor Muhammad Yunus on Saturday. The commission estimated that there would be more than 3,500 enforced disappearances. "The commission has found evidence of former prime minister Sheikh Hasina's involvement as the instructor in the incidents of enforced disappearance," the press wing of the office of Chief Adviser said in a statement on Saturday night. It said the deposed premier's defence adviser Major General (ret'd) Tarique Ahmed Siddique, former director general of the National Telecommunication Monitoring Centre and sacked Major General Ziaul Ahsan and senior police officers Monirul Islam and Mohammad Harun-Or-Rashid and several other senior officials were found to be involved in those incidents. The ex-military and police officers are on the run, mostly believed to be abroad since the ouster of Hasina's Awami

League regime on August 5 following a student-led uprising. According to the statement, retired Supreme Court judge Mainul Islam Chowdhury, the chairman of the commission, told Yunus that during investigations they found a "systematic design" that allowed incidents of enforced disappearances to go undetected. "Individuals carrying out enforced disappearance or extrajudicial killing (even) lacked knowledge about victims," Chowdhury said. The report said the police's elite anti-crime Rapid Action Battalion (RAB), which draws men from the Army, Navy, Air Force, regular police and other law enforcement agencies had collaborated with each other to pick up, torture and keep victims in detention and deliberately segmented the operations. The commission simultaneously proposed the abolition of the RAB alongside scrapping or thoroughly amending the Anti-Terrorism Act, 2009. Rights activist and commission member Sajjad Hossain said they recorded 1,676 complaints of enforced disappearances and, so far, have examined 758 of them. Of these, 200 people or 27 per cent of the victims never returned while those who returned were mostly shown on records as arrested. Besides the chairman, the commission comprises Justice Farid Ahmed Shibli, rights activist Nur Khan, private

BRAC University teacher Nabila Idris and rights activist Sajjad Hossain. At a press conference earlier, the commission announced that they had found eight secret detention centres in Dhaka and its outskirts. The panel chairman on Saturday informed Yunus that they would deliver another interim report in March and would require at least another year to complete the scrutiny of all allegations they had received. "You are doing a really very important job. We are ready to give you all kinds of support that you need," Yunus was quoted as saying. TV channels and social media carried interviews with several victims of the alleged enforced disappearance, including former military officers and opposition activists who were active in opposing Hasina's regime. While receiving the report yesterday, Yunus said he would visit some of the joint interrogation cells and secret detention centres as he wanted first-hand knowledge about the sufferings of the victims. The report called for the creation of a new law criminalising enforced disappearances. Commission members also told the government to repeal laws under the Armed Police Battalions Ordinance that grants law enforcers indemnity for acts done in "good faith".

# Constitution will be amended with consensus of all: Nepal minister

PTI ■ KATHMANDU

Nepal's Minister for Home Affairs Ramesh Lekhak on Sunday said a consensus of all political parties will be ensured to amend the Constitution, a media report said. Lekhak, speaking at a press meet, stressed on the need for the Constitution amendment for strengthening the federal democratic republic. The Himalayan Times newspaper reported. "The preliminary dialogue on this issue has commenced. But the constitution amendment will not be determined by two political parties," he said. Lekhak said that the Nepali Congress (NC) and the Communist Party of Nepal (Unified Marxist-Leninist) (CPN UML), the largest parties in Parliament, had decided to form the incumbent coalition government to promote stabil-

ity, prevent corruption, strengthen good governance and economic activities and accelerate the pace of development. The minister further said that the existing political alliance between the NC and CPN (UML) has no issues and it will continue until the next general election. Responding to a question about the arrest of opposition leader Rabi Lamichhane, he claimed that the government is highly aware of the guarantee of human rights for each citizen. He added that the government has no feeling of "revenge" against Lamichhane, the chair of Rastriya Swatantra Party, as the current investigation against him is a legal issue. Meanwhile, Nepali Congress spokesperson Prakash Sharan Mahat advised the government to seek and accept foreign loans only on the need-basis as

it has been very challenging for the country to repay loans taken after Covid-19. In July, KP Sharma Oli was sworn in as Nepal's Prime Minister for the fourth time to lead a new coalition government. The leader of Nepal's largest communist party was appointed as prime minister by President Ram Chandra Paudel to lead the coalition government with Nepali Congress (NC), the largest party in Parliament, apart from other smaller parties. Oli, 72, succeeded Pushpa Kamal Dahal 'Prachanda', who lost the vote of confidence in the House of Representatives (HoR), leading to the formation of the new government. Nepal has faced frequent political turmoil as the country has seen 14 governments in the past 16 years after the Republican system was introduced.

# Pope Francis' makes 1st papal visit to France's Corsica awash in expressions of popular piety

AP ■ AJACCIO

Pope Francis on the first papal visit ever to the French island of Corsica on Sunday called for a dynamic form of laicism, promoting the kind of popular piety that distinguishes the Mediterranean island from secular France as a bridge between religious and civic society. Speaking at the close of a Mediterranean conference on popular piety, Papa Francesco, as he is called in Corsican, described a concept of secularism "that is not static and fixed, but evolving and dynamic," that can adapt to "unforeseen situations" and promote cooperation "between civil and ecclesiastical authorities." The pontiff said that expressions of popular piety, including processions, communal prayer of the Holy Rosary, "can nurture constructive citizenship" on the part of Christians. At the same time, he warned against such manifestations being seen only in terms of folklore, or even superstition. During off-the-cuff remarks, the pope relayed his experience attending a festival in northern Argentina before his pontificate where he witnessed the importance of popular piety for the faithful "that seeks a healthy complexity." The visit to Corsica's capital Ajaccio, birthplace of Napoleon, is one of the briefest of his papacy beyond Italy's borders, just about nine hours on the ground, including a 40-minute visit with French President Emmanuel Macron. Francis was joined on the dais by the bishop of Ajaccio,



Pope Francis delivers the Angelus prayer inside the Cathedral of Our Lady of the Assumption of Ajaccio on the occasion of his one-day visit in the French island of Corsica on Sunday. AP/PTI

Cardinal Francois-Xavier Bustillo, who organized the conference that brought together some 400 participants from Spain, Sicily, Sardinia and southern France. The two-day meeting examined expressions of faith that often occur outside formal liturgies, such as processions and pilgrimages. Often specific to the places where they are practised, popular piety in Corsica includes the cult of the Virgin Mary, known locally as the "Maddunuccia," which protected the island from the plague in 1656 when it was still under Genoa. Corsica stands out from the rest of secularized France as a particularly devout region, with 92 confraternities, or lay associa-

tions dedicated to works of charity or piety, with over 4,000 members. "It means that there is a beautiful, mature, adult and responsible collaboration between civil authorities, mayors, deputies, senators, officials and religious authorities," Ajaccio Cardinal Francois-Xavier Bustillo told The Associated Press ahead of the visit. "There is no hostility between the two. And that is a very positive aspect because in Corsica there is no ideological hostility." The visit was awash in signs of popular piety. The pope was greeted by children in traditional garb and was continually serenaded by bands, choruses and singing troupes that are central to Corsican culture

from the airport, to the motorcade route, convention center and cathedral. Thousands stood along the roadside to greet the pontiff and more waved from windows. René Colombani traveled with 2,000 others by ship from northern Corsica to Ajaccio, on the western coast, to see the pope. "It is an event that we will not see again in several years. It may be the only time that the pope will come to Corsica. And since we wanted to be a part of it, we have come a long way," Colombani said. The island, which Genoa ceded to France in 1768, is located closer to the Italian mainland than France. From the conference, the pope traveled to the 17th-century

cathedral of Santa Maria Assunta to meet with clergy, stopping along the way at the statue of the Maddunuccia. Francis will later celebrate Mass at the Place d'Austerlitz park, where it is said Napoleon played as a child. Around 7,000 faithful are expected. He will meet privately with Macron at the airport before departing for the 50-minute flight back to Rome. They are expected to talk about the world's crisis, including wars in the Middle East and Ukraine, and environment and climate-related issues, Macron's office said. The pontiff pointedly did not make the trip to Paris earlier this month for the pomp surrounding the reopening of the Notre Dame Cathedral following the devastating 2019 fire. The visit to Corsica seems far more suited to Francis' priorities than a grand cathedral reopening, emphasizing the "church of the peripheries." It is Francis' third trip to France, each time avoiding Paris and the protocols that a state visit entails. He visited the port of Marseille in 2023, on an overnight visit to participate in an annual summit of Mediterranean bishops, and went to Strasbourg in 2014 to address the European Parliament and Council of Europe. Corsica is home to more than 340,000 people and has been part of France since 1768. But the island has also seen pro-independence violence and has an influential nationalist movement, and last year Macron proposed granting it limited autonomy.

# Pakistanis celebrate Raj Kapoor's 100th birth anniversary

PTI ■ PESHAWAR

Pakistani cultural enthusiasts and film lovers gathered at the iconic Kapoor House in Peshawar on Saturday to celebrate the 100th birth anniversary of legendary Bollywood filmmaker and actor Raj Kapoor. A highlight of the event, reinforcing the significance of Peshawar's ties to cinematic history, was the cutting of a cake to mark the birth centenary of Kapoor — one of the most influential figures of Indian cinema. Participants also welcomed the World Bank's announcement to allocate Rs 100 million each for the restoration of the ancestral homes of Raj Kapoor and fellow Bollywood legend Dilip Kumar. Both homes, located near the famous Qissa Khawani Bazaar, are celebrated as symbols of Peshawar's deep ties to Indian cinema. The gathering, jointly organised by the Cultural Heritage Council (CHC) and the Directorate of Archaeology Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, called for larger-scale events to commemorate the legacy of Kapoor. The attendees emphasised Kapoor's connection to Pakistan, where he was born in Peshawar's Dhaki Nalbandi, and praised his enduring influence on cinema. Muhammad Hussain Haider,

Secretary of the Pak-Iran Trade and Investment Council, was the chief guest of the event. Born on December 14, 1924, Kapoor was the son of stalwart actor Prithviraj Kapoor. He made classics like "Awaraz", "Barsaat", "Shree 420", "Sangam" and "Mera Naam Joker" during his illustrious 40-year career. He died in 1988. Ibrahim Zia, a renowned writer and researcher on the Indian film industry who has extensively studied film legends with roots in Peshawar and Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, presented rare photographs of Raj Kapoor from his childhood and early adolescence years in Peshawar. He also shared insights into the actor's illustrious career, starting in the 1940s. Zia highlighted Kapoor's versatility across genres, from romance and comedy to tragedy, which solidified his status as the "Greatest Showman of Indian Cinema". The Kapoor House stands near the ancestral homes of Dilip Kumar and Shah Rukh Khan, connecting two generations of Indian film legends to Peshawar. Dilip Kumar, celebrated for his naturalistic acting, and Shah Rukh Khan, a modern-day Bollywood superstar, further underscore the city's historical contribution to Indian cinema.

# Cyclone Chido leaves 11 dead

AP ■ CAPE TOWN

At least 11 people have died after Cyclone Chido caused devastating damage in the French territory of Mayotte in the Indian Ocean, France's Interior Ministry said Sunday. The ministry said it was proving difficult to get a precise tally of the dead and injured amid fears the death toll will increase. A hospital in Mayotte reported that nine people were in critical condition in the hospital and 246 others were injured. The tropical cyclone blew through the southeastern Indian Ocean, also affecting the nearby islands of Comoros and Madagascar. Mayotte was directly in the path of the cyclone and suffered extensive damage on Saturday, officials said. The prefect of Mayotte said it was the worst cyclone to hit Mayotte in 90 years. French Interior Minister Bruno Retailleau said Saturday night after an emergency meeting in Paris that there were fears that the death toll in Mayotte "will be high." Chido brought winds in excess of 220 kph, according to the French weather service, ripping metal roofs off houses and destroying many small structures in Mayotte, which has a population of just over 300,000 spread over two main islands about 800 kilometres off Africa's east coast. In some parts, entire neighbourhoods were flattened, while local residents reported many trees had been uprooted and boats had been flipped or sunk.

# Trump appoints Richard Grenell to serve as special missions envoy

AP ■ WEST PALM BEACH

President-elect Donald Trump announced Saturday that he's picked longtime foreign policy adviser Richard Grenell to serve as an envoy for special missions, tasking him with helping the incoming administration deal with some of the toughest foreign policy challenges. Grenell served as ambassador to Germany during Trump's first administration, special presidential envoy for Serbia and Kosovo peace negotiations, and did a stint as acting director of national intelligence. He was also a contender to serve as secretary of state, but Trump opted to nominate Florida Sen. Marco Rubio. "Ric will work in some of the hottest spots around the World, including Venezuela and North Korea," Trump said in a posting on his social media platform, Truth Social, announcing

the appointment. Grenell during Trump's first term developed a reputation for employing a sometimes contentious approach to diplomacy that ruffled allies and the foreign policy establishment in Washington. But his style was appreciated by the president-elect who sees value in blunt talk with allies. Grenell remained close to Trump after he left office in 2021, serving at times as a key adviser on foreign policy. He was in the room when Trump met with Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy in September. Grenell has advocated for a peace deal that would preserve Ukraine's territory while still allowing for "autonomous regions" where Russia could remain in control. He's also advised against expanding NATO to include Ukraine, saying — as Trump has — that the alliance shouldn't grow until current members

meet the alliance's defense spending targets. Members of the transatlantic alliance have committed for years to spending 2% of their GDP on defense, but several countries still fall short of the target. He was an early supporter of Trump's 2024 campaign and held multiple events for the Republican nominee focused on economics and national security. Speaking at the Republican National Convention, Grenell echoed Trump's mantra that "it's time to put America first" on the global stage and argued that China and Russia saw President Joe Biden's administration as weak. Trump raised concerns during the 2024 campaign when he said he would not defend NATO members that failed to meet defense spending targets, and warned he would "encourage" Russia "to do whatever the hell they want" to alliance countries that he

considered "delinquent." Grenell has downplayed Trump's criticisms of NATO and said the only talk of leaving the alliance altogether "was really from the media." "What we're saying is, don't come to the wedding without a gift," Grenell said. Grenell was part of the Trump campaign's outreach to Arab American voters in Michigan, where the president-elect made gains with a traditionally Democratic constituency despite his history of banning immigration from several majority-Muslim countries. Grenell orchestrated pro-Trump events with Arab American voters, like a May meeting held in Troy, Michigan. A US spokesman at the United Nations during the George W. Bush administration, Grenell, like many other Republicans, has his own history of criticising Trump before embracing him.

Once an adviser to GOP moderates like 2012 presidential nominee Mitt Romney and a supporter of gay marriage, Grenell, who is openly gay, deleted social media posts blasting Trump as "reckless" and "dangerous" once the former reality TV star became the Republican nominee in 2016. Trump also announced Saturday that he's appointing Devin Nunes, the chief executive officer of the president-elect's Truth Social platform, to head a presidential advisory board that will keep tabs on the U.S. intelligence community. Nunes will continue leading Trump Media & Technology Group. Trump is the company's largest shareholder. The former California lawmaker chaired the House Intelligence Committee and was one of Trump's closest allies in Congress during the president-elect's first term.



# FPIs make a strong comeback to Indian equities

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

Foreign investors have made a strong comeback to Indian equities with a net investment of Rs 22,766 crore in the first two weeks of December driven by expectations of rate cut by the US Federal Reserve. This revival follows significant outflows in the preceding months, with Foreign Portfolio Investors (FPIs) pulling out a net Rs 21,612 crore in November and a massive Rs 94,017 crore in October – the worst monthly outflow on record. Interestingly, September had marked a nine-month high for FPI inflows, with a net investment of Rs 57,724 crore, highlighting the volatility in foreign investment trends. With the latest inflow, FPI investment has reached at Rs 7,747 crore in 2024 so far, data with the depositories showed. Looking ahead, the flow of foreign investments into Indian equity markets will hinge on several key factors. These include the policies implemented under Donald Trump's presidency, the prevailing inflation and interest rate environment, and the evolving geopolitical landscape,



Himanshu Srivastava, Associate Director, Manager Research, Morningstar Investment Research India, said. Additionally, the third-quarter earnings performance of Indian companies and the country's progress on the economic growth front will play a crucial role in shaping investor sentiment and influencing foreign inflows, he added. According to the data with the depositories, FPIs have made a net

investment of Rs 22,766 crore in this month (till December 13). This was driven by expectations of a US Federal Reserve rate cut. A shift toward monetary easing has improved global liquidity, drawing capital into emerging markets like India. These inflows reflect sustained interest in India as a growth market, Karthick Jonagadla, smallcase Manager and Founder of Quantace Research, said. Also, the Reserve Bank of India

(RBI) enhanced liquidity by lowering the Cash Reserve Ratio (CRR) that boosted investors' sentiment, Vipul Bhowar, Senior Director - Listed Investments at Waterfield Advisors, said. Additionally, India's Consumer Price Index (CPI) inflation dropped to 5.48 per cent in November from 6.21 per cent in October, enhancing investor confidence and raising hopes for potential monetary policy easing by the RBI, he added. Even though FPIs have turned buyers in December, they have been large sellers too on certain days. This indicates that at higher levels, they may again turn sellers since Indian valuations continue to be relatively high compared to other markets, V K Vijayakumar, Chief Investment Strategist, Geojit Financial Services, said. The rising dollar is another concern which might prompt FPIs to sell at higher levels, he added. On the other hand, FPIs invested Rs 4,814 crore in the debt general limit and pulled out Rs 666 crore from the debt Voluntary Retention Route (VRR) during the period under review. So far this year, FPIs have invested Rs 1.1 lakh crore in the debt market.

# Coal imports up 4 per cent at 162 MT in Apr-Oct period

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

The country's coal import rose by 4.2 per cent to 162.45 million tonnes (MT) in the April-October period of the current financial year compared to 155.87 MT in the year-ago period. Coal imports in October dropped by 14.4 per cent to 21.84 MT compared to 25.54 MT in the corresponding month of the previous fiscal, according to data compiled by mjunction services, a B2B e-commerce platform. Of the total imports in October, non-coking coal imports stood at 13.49 MT against 18.82 MT imported in October last fiscal. Coking coal imports stood at 4.45 MT, against 4.31 MT imported in October last financial year. In September, non-coking coal imports were 13.24 MT and coking coal at 3.39 MT. "There was a modest increase



(month-on-month) in non-coking coal volumes in October as buyers took fresh positions during the festive month, and ahead of the winter season. Going forward, demand is likely to be moderate due to the anticipated growth in domestic supply during the fourth quarter (Q4)," mjunction MD & CEO Vinaya Varma said. Coal and Mines Minister G Kishan Reddy had recently urged the steel sector to reduce dependence on imported coal and make the required changes in technology. The minister had said that the import of coal should be reduced in a phased manner. The steel industry uses coking coal. The minister had also expressed hopes that the coal production target of 1,080 million tonnes for the current fiscal year would be met.

# Markets to be guided by US Fed interest rate decision, WPI inflation, global trends: Analysts

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

The US Fed interest rate decision, inflation data and FIIs are the key factors that are expected to drive stock markets this week, analysts said. Also, global trends will also be tracked by investors for further cues, they added. "The Indian stock market's future trajectory will be influenced by a blend of global and domestic factors. Global trends, particularly the performance of US markets and the Fed's monetary policy decision, will play a significant role. Additionally, domestic economic indicators like inflation, will shape the



market sentiment," Pravesh Gour, Senior Technical Analyst, Swastika Investmart Ltd, said. The flow of foreign and domestic institutional investments will also be a key driver, he said. Gour further said the rupee's exchange rate and crude oil prices will be critical determinants of market

direction. From the domestic macroeconomic data announcement, WPI inflation will be in focus on Monday. "The key focus will be on the US Federal Reserve meeting, where a 25 basis point rate cut is already factored in. The Fed's commentary on future rate policy will hold significant importance," Ajit Mishra - SVP, Research, Religare Broking Ltd, said. Last week, the BSE benchmark jumped 623.07 points or 0.76 per cent, and the Nifty climbed 90.5 points or 0.36 per cent. Investors will watch out for the domestic WPI inflation to be released on Monday, an expert said.

# Five of top-10 most valued firms together add ₹1.13 lakh Crore in market valuation

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

Five of the 10 most valued firms added Rs 1,13,117.17 crore to their total market valuation last week with Bharti Airtel stealing the show. While Tata Consultancy Services (TCS), HDFC Bank, Bharti Airtel, ICICI Bank and Infosys were the gainers, Reliance Industries, State Bank of India, Life Insurance Corporation of India (LIC), ITC and Hindustan Unilever took a hit in their valuations. Last week, the BSE benchmark gained 623.07 points or 0.76 per cent and the Nifty advanced 90.5 points or 0.36 per cent. The market valuation of Bharti Airtel surged by Rs



47,836.6 crore to Rs 9,57,842.40 crore. Infosys added Rs 31,826.97 crore to its valuation at Rs 8,30,387.10 crore. HDFC Bank's valuation rose by Rs 11,887.78 crore to Rs 14,31,158.06 crore and that of ICICI Bank increased by Rs 11,760.8 crore to Rs 9,49,306.37 crore. The market capitalisation

(mcap) of TCS climbed Rs 9,805.02 crore to Rs 16,18,587.63 crore. However, the mcap of Reliance Industries declined by Rs 52,031.98 crore to Rs 17,23,144.70 crore. The valuation of LIC tumbled Rs 32,067.73 crore to Rs 5,89,869.29 crore and that of Hindustan Unilever slumped Rs 22,250.63 crore to Rs 5,61,423.08 crore. The mcap of State Bank of India dropped Rs 2,052.66 crore to Rs 7,69,034.51 crore and that of ITC by Rs 1,376.19 crore to Rs 5,88,195.82 crore. Reliance Industries remained the most valued firm followed by TCS, HDFC Bank, Bharti Airtel, ICICI Bank, Infosys, State Bank of India, LIC, ITC and Hindustan Unilever.

# India seeks strong WTO subsidy rules for high seas fishing

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

India has pitched at the LWTO for stricter regulations on subsidies granted by countries that are engaged in high seas fishing activities, an official said. Highlighting the stark disparity, an Indian document submitted at the World Trade Organization (WTO) has noted that it provides a modest USD 35 per fisher annually, compared to subsidies as high as USD 76,000 per fisher per year in some European nations. India also suggested that historical subsidisers should seek permission of the Committee on Fisheries Subsidies for grant of subsidies in future. The country has made these remarks in the meetings of the Negotiating Group on Rules (Fisheries subsidies), which are going on in Geneva. "India has pitched for strong disciplines for historical fisheries subsidisers which are engaged in distant water fishing (200 nautical miles from sea shore) and has asked for a moratorium on subsidies at the present level for 25 years," the official said. On these demands, India was supported by countries like Indonesia and other developing countries, the official added. "Blaming India for stalling the decision at the GC (General Council) is merely an excuse and a tactic to push for weak disciplines, allowing business as usual to continue," the official said adding WTO members engaged in distant water fishing should stop providing any kind of subsidies for 25 years as they provide significantly higher support measures and are indiscriminately exploiting the fisheries resources. The General Council is the WTO's highest-level decision-making body in Geneva, meeting regularly to carry out the functions of the WTO. It has representatives (usually ambassadors or equivalent) from all member governments and has the authority to act on behalf of the Ministerial Conference. India has also called for adopting a 'per capita distribution of subsidies' criteria to address concerns over overfishing and capacity under the WTO framework, according to the document.

# Airlines are price takers, they do not have influence on prices they pay: IATA Chief Economist



PTI ■ GENEVA

Airlines are price takers as they do not have an influence on the prices they pay, IATA Chief Economist Marie Owens Thomsen has said and highlighted that carriers' need to diversify their revenues is complicated by slim profit margins as well as weak balance sheets. In a fast-growing aviation market like India where the air traffic demand is on the rise, there are persistent concerns about airfare trajectory and suggestions from various quarters to make air tickets more affordable. Discussing overall airfares and the costs of airlines, Thomsen said airlines do not have any influence on the prices they pay. "There are too few aircraft manufacturers and oil companies. Whatever supplies we are looking at upstream, we are price takers and downstream, we have the

hyper competitive environment where all customers can see all fares from all airlines at all times. So, we always compete in price," she told PTI in an interview in Geneva earlier this week. Thomsen, who is the Chief Economist and Senior Vice President for Sustainability, said as airlines are price takers upstream and downstream, it leaves them with very little in the middle. A study published in November by the International Air Transport Association (IATA) showed that airfares have risen at a slower pace than consumer prices (measured by the Consumer Price Index, CPI) over the past decade. "This indicates that air ticket prices have not fully kept up with inflation, especially in comparison to jet fuel costs, which have significantly outpaced consumer inflation," the study said. Currently, jet fuel accounts for around 30 per cent of

airlines' operating costs. To a question on whether there can be more transparency in pricing of air tickets, Thomsen argued that if airlines were profiteering, the per passenger profit would have been much higher. "When you have high ticket prices and low airline profits, then the money is going somewhere else," she said, pointing out that a third and a 50 per cent of the airline industry's costs are administrative costs. "The rest (of the costs) is actually for services of flying people or cargo," Thomsen noted. As per IATA's latest outlook for 2025, airlines are projected to have a net profit of USD 1.8 per passenger while the overall net profit expected to be USD 3.6 billion. "You can have a lot of activity and a big market and make no profit because your cost base is too high. Lot of them come from various types of regulatory fees and charges levied on airlines," Thomsen pointed out. According to her, there is a need for revenue diversification by airlines but the situation is complicated by slim profit margins and weak balance sheets most airlines suffer from. IATA represents around 340 airlines globally, including Indian carriers. The member airlines account for more than 80 per cent of the global air traffic.

# India's import of Russian oil drops in Nov on shrinking discounts

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

India's import of Russian crude oil dropped in November to its lowest level since June 2022 but the Kremlin continues to be the biggest source of oil for India, according to a monthly tracker report of a European think tank. India became the second biggest buyer of Russian crude oil since Moscow invaded Ukraine in February 2022, with purchases rising from less than one per cent of the total oil imported to almost 40 per cent of the country's total oil purchases. The rise was primarily because the Russian crude oil was available at a discount to other internationally traded oil due to the price cap and the European nations shunning purchases from Moscow. "India's imports of Russian crude oil dropped by a massive 55 per cent in November – the lowest figure since June 2022," the Centre for Research on Energy and Clean Air (CREA) said its latest report. Russia remained India's top oil supplier, followed by Iraq and Saudi Arabia. "China has bought 47 per cent of Russia's crude exports, followed by India (37 per cent), the EU (6 per cent), and Turkey (6 per cent)," CREA said without giving absolute numbers. In November, there was a 17 per cent month-on-month



increase in the discount on Russia's Urals grade crude oil to an average of USD 6.01 per barrel compared to Brent crude oil. The discount on the ESPO grade narrowed by a massive 15 per cent and was traded at an average discount of USD 3.88 per barrel while that on the Sokol blend narrowed by 2 per cent to USD 6.65 per barrel, it said. Russia predominantly sells ESPO and Sokol grades of crude oil to India. Besides crude oil, India bought smaller quantities of coal from Russia. "From December 5, 2022 until the end of November 2024, China purchased 46 per cent of all Russia's coal exports - India (17 per cent), Turkey (11 per cent), South Korea (10 per cent), and Taiwan (5 per cent) round off the top five buyers list," according to CREA. All fossil fuels taken together, "India dropped to third in the list of largest buyers of Russian fossil fuels in November,

contributing 17 per cent (EUR 2.1 billion) to Russia's monthly export earnings from its top five importers. There was a significant 22 per cent drop in Russian revenues from crude oil exports to India in November," it said. While there was an 11 per cent month-on-month decline in the total volume of India's imports of crude oil in November, Russian volumes suffered the most, dropping by a massive 55 per cent. India imports more than 85 per cent of its crude oil, which is refined into fuels like petrol and diesel refineries. In an attempt to restrict funds for Russia's war machine, The Group of Seven (G7) rich nations, the European Union and Australia put an embargo on Russian crude and introduced a USD 60 per barrel price cap in December 2022. Over the next 12 months, the price cap and embargo had a significant impact on revenues, and forced Russia to find new markets and ways to transport its oil. Russia did this by offering deep discounts on its Urals grade crude. "It has been two years since the imposition of the price cap. CREA estimates that in this period, the sanctions have forced Russia to drop the price of Urals by an estimated 15 per cent. Since the sanctions, Russia has lost an estimated EUR 14.6 billion in revenues from Urals grade crude exports," the report said. In the second year of the sanctions, CREA estimates that sanctions impacted Russian Urals crude revenues by 10 per cent resulting in losses of EUR 4 billion. This impact was felt heavily for the first half of 2024 when Russian revenues were hit by EUR 2.5 billion. "The price cap has had an impact but has failed to live up to its potential. A lack of enforcement and desire to lower the price cap has meant Russia has found a way to circumvent the cap and find new markets as time has gone by, especially in the second year of the sanctions," it said. In the first year of the sanctions Russia was losing, on an average, 23 per cent of its Urals crude export revenues every month due to the price cap and embargo. This figure has fallen sharply to a mere monthly average of 9 per cent in the second year of the cap.

# Auto Expo to see highest-ever participation of vehicle manufacturers: SIAM

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

The upcoming edition of Auto Expo will see participation of 34 vehicle manufacturers, the largest number of participants till date, since the first edition of the marquee event in 1986. The Society of Indian Automobile Manufacturers (SIAM) would be organising the 17th edition of Auto Expo, 'The Motor Show', under the aegis of the Bharat Mobility Global Expo 2025 from January 17-22 at Bharat

Mandapam, in partnership with ACMA and CII. "Around 34 vehicle manufacturers would be participating at the exhibition and showcasing technologies with respect to multiple powertrains," SIAM Director General Rajesh Menon told PTI. It is the highest-ever participation in the history of the event so far, he added. Automakers participating in the event include Tata Motors, Maruti Suzuki, Mahindra & Mahindra,



Toyota Kirloskar Motor, Hyundai Motor India, Kia

Motor India, JSW MG Motor and Skoda Auto Volkswagen India, he stated. Luxury carmakers like BMW, Mercedes, Porsche India, and BYD would also be showcasing their products during the event. In the two-wheeler segment, there would be participation from TVS Motor Company, Bajaj Auto, Hero MotoCorp, Honda Motorcycle and Scooter India, Suzuki Motorcycle, and India Yamaha. Similarly, Volvo Eicher

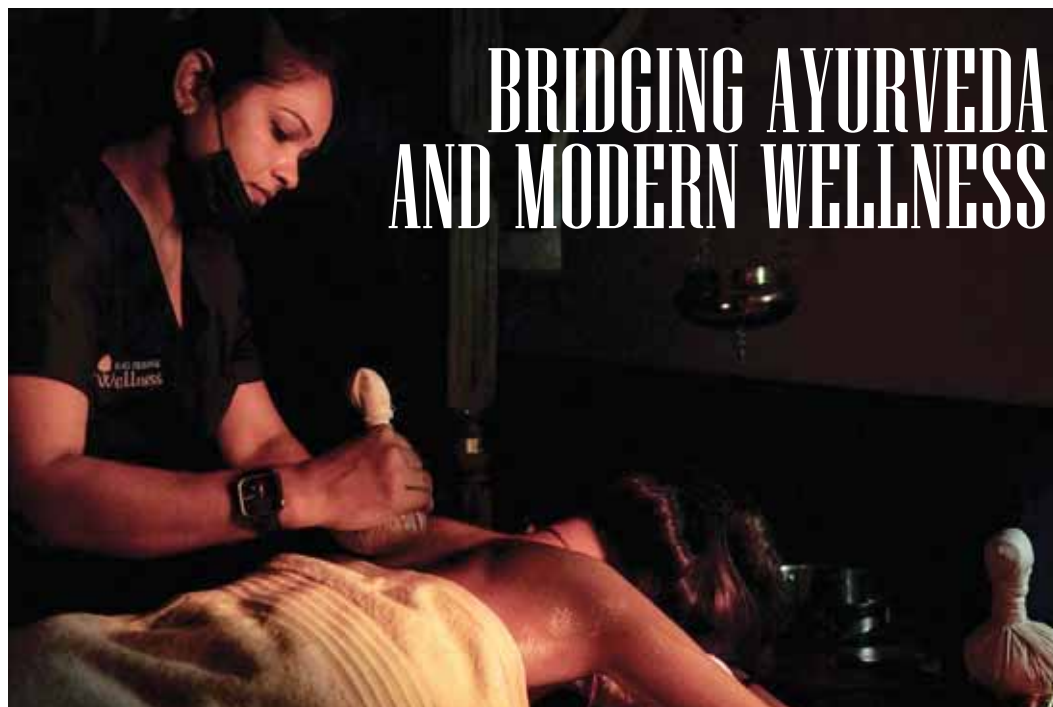
Commercial Vehicles, Ashok Leyland, JBM and Cummins India would be participating in the event. Menon said some of the pure EV players like Ather Energy, TI Clean Mobility, Eka Mobility, Ola Electric and Vinfast would also be participating this time in the Auto Expo. SIAM would also be setting up separate thematic pavilions on decarbonisation, circularity, electrification and road safety at the Expo.

The Bharat Mobility Global Expo 2025 will be held between January 17 and 22 next year at Bharat Mandapam, Yashobhoomi (India International Convention and Expo Centre) Dwarka, and India Expo Centre & Mart, Greater Noida, simultaneously. The last edition of the Auto Expo was held from January 11-18, 2023, at the India Expo Mart, Greater Noida. The inaugural Bharat Mobility Global Expo 2024 was held from February 1-3.



Rajagopal Swaminathan won awards in six categories for his contributions in multi discipline field viz Adtech, Martech, Digttech, Sales and Execution etc pertaining to the organisations like Amazon Pay, Upstox, Aditya Birla, PhonePe, Stock Market and Angel One at the prestigious FINIXX SUMMIT & AWARDS in Mumbai on Friday night.





**BIO RESURGE WELLNESS IS A BLEND OF ANCIENT AYURVEDIC THERAPIES AND CONTEMPORARY WELLNESS PRACTICES DESIGNED TO REJUVENATE MIND, BODY, AND SOUL, WRITES ABHI SINGHAL**

In a world where the pace of life grows faster and stressors more complex, the fusion of ancient Ayurvedic healing with modern wellness practices offers a profound and timely solution. Rooted in the timeless principles of balance, prevention, and natural healing, Ayurveda provides a foundation for holistic well-being. When paired with cutting-edge advancements like Ayurvedic therapies, mindfulness techniques, nutritional science, and fitness innovations, this blend not only bridges centuries of knowledge but also caters to the unique challenges of contemporary living. Together, they empower individuals to reclaim their health, offering a sustainable approach to physical, mental, and emotional harmony. For the same has *Bio Resurge Wellness* is a destination for holistic well-being has entered into the game to provide solution to the people. Designed as a sanctuary for those seeking physical and mental balance, *Bio Resurge Wellness* offers a curated selection of therapies aimed at rejuvenating the body, calming the mind, and promoting long-term vitality. Among their signature treatments are *Shirodhara*, *Abhyangam*, *Nasya*, and other time-honoured Ayurvedic therapies, each tailored to individual



needs for optimal healing. The therapies give a soothing and a calm experience making them feel comfortable. *Abhyangam*, which basically means a massage that can be given in two ways. One is *Sarvanga Abhyangam*, which is basically full body massage, and the next is *Ekanga Abhyangam*, which is basically done on a particular part of the body. The wellness centre also offers *Janu Vasti*, a therapy that stands for staying to him. The purpose of the *vasti* is making sure that the selected area for the therapy gets a constant amount of heat, temperature, which is basically needed to counter the disorders. *Vasti* can be done at any part of the body. It's not just limited to the knees. Offering a range of signature Ayurvedic treatments designed to promote relaxation, healing, and rejuvenation another one is *Shirodhara*, a deeply calming therapy

*Panchakarma* that is five actions or five treatments. It is a set of Ayurvedic detoxification procedures. At *Bio Resurge Wellness* Centre, individuals can undergo these traditional Ayurvedic detoxification and rejuvenation therapies under the guidance of experienced practitioners and therapists.

*Panchakarma* therapies aim to balance the doshas (bioenergies) in the body (Vata, Pitta, Kapha) and remove accumulated toxins (ama) through a series of treatments that include preliminary therapies (*Purvakarma*) like oil massages (*abhyanga*), steam therapy (*swedana*), and herbal treatments to prepare the body for the main detoxification therapies, and main therapies. The main *Panchakarma* treatments involve five primary procedures provided by the wellness centre are *Vamana* (Therapeutic Vomiting), *Nasya* (Nasal administration of medicated oils), *Raktamokshana* (Bloodletting), *Virechana* (Purgation) and *Basti* (Enema). With its comprehensive range of therapies blending ancient Ayurvedic wisdom with modern wellness practices, *Bio Resurge Wellness* serves as a beacon for those seeking a transformative and rejuvenating journey.



## GUILT-FREE CHRISTMAS RECIPES

By TEAM VIVA

The holiday season is synonymous with indulgence, but who says festive treats can't be both delicious and healthy? This Christmas, we've curated four mouth-watering recipes that bring the joy of the season while keeping nutrition in mind. From crispy rolls to decadent chocolate delights, these recipes are perfect for health-conscious foodies looking to celebrate without compromise.

Each recipe promises to surprise your guests with its unique flavours and thoughtful ingredients. Let this season be one of joyous celebrations and mindful indulgence.

### APPLE AND PECAN DONUTS BY CHEF AJAY ON BEHALF OF AMERICAN PECAN



**Ingredients:** □ A handful of American Pecans □ Apples □ 250 gm dark chocolate □ Peanut butter  
**Instructions:**  
□ Dry roast the American Pecans, coarsely chop them, and set aside.  
□ Cut apples into thick, round slices and remove the centre to create donut-shaped slices.  
□ Melt the dark chocolate in a microwave or double boiler.  
□ Dip each apple slice into the melted chocolate, ensuring it's evenly coated.  
□ Drizzle peanut butter over the chocolate-coated apple slices and sprinkle with chopped roasted pecans.  
□ Place the prepared slices in the refrigerator to set.  
□ These treats can be stored in the fridge for 1-2 days. Enjoy!



### NO-SUGAR ENERGY BOOSTER CARROT WALNUT MILKSHAKE BY CHEF MEGHNA ON BEHALF OF CHILEAN WALNUTS

This milkshake is a wholesome and delicious option for Christmas mornings or as a healthy snack during the holidays. Packed with the natural sweetness of dates and the goodness of carrots and walnuts, it's the perfect festive energy drink!

**Ingredients:** □ 6-7 walnuts □ 6 soaked seedless dates (along with the soaking water) □ 1 medium-sized grated carrot □ 2 cardamoms (or a pinch of cinnamon or dry ginger powder for a festive twist) □ 2 cups of milk  
**Method:**  
□ Prepare the Base: In a blender, combine walnuts, soaked dates, grated carrot, and cardamom powder. Blend until a smooth paste forms.  
□ Mix with Milk: Add the paste to 2 cups of milk and blend again until creamy and frothy.  
□ Serve with Style: Pour the milkshake into glasses and garnish with a sprinkle of grated carrot and a few walnut pieces for a festive touch. This nutritious milkshake can be enjoyed at any time of the day, but it's especially satisfying as a quick, energy-packed Christmas breakfast.

### AVOCADO AND LIME CHRISTMAS CAKE BY CHEF BRISTI ON BEHALF OF WORLD AVOCADO ORGANISATION

Serving: 8-10 people

**Ingredients:** □ 300g cream cheese □ 300ml liquid cream □ 2 avocados □ 2 limes □ 200g sugar □ 3 teaspoons gelatine powder □ 250g biscuits □ 100g butter □ Topping options □ Rosemary sprigs □ Redcurrants □ Christmas sprinkles  
**Equipment:** Cake mould

**Instructions:**  
□ Crush the biscuits; add the melted butter and mix.  
□ Cover the base of the mould with the biscuit dough.  
□ Hydrate the gelatine in water and set aside.  
□ Grate the limes and squeeze.  
□ Peel the avocados and scoop out the flesh.  
□ Mix the cream cheese and sugar until creamy.  
□ Add the avocado, lime juice and lime zest and beat until smooth.



□ Heat the gelatine in the microwave until dissolved.  
□ Add the cream and gelatine to the cream cheese and mix until well blended.  
□ Pour over the biscuit base.  
□ Place in the fridge for a few hours until firm.  
□ Remove from the mould and decorate to taste.

### CHOCOLATE CAKE WITH PRUNES BY CHEF VIJAY ON BEHALF OF CHILEAN PRUNES



**Ingredients:** □ 2 cups heavy cream □ 2 cups powdered sugar □ 1/2 cup cocoa powder □ 2 1/4 cups superfine blanched almond flour □ 1/2 cup plus 2 tablespoons sweet rice flour □ 2 1/4 cups whole milk □ 6 large eggs □ 5 soft Prunes, roughly chopped □ 2 1/2 tablespoons sugar □ 2 1/2 tablespoons sugar □ 2 tablespoons salted butter, melted and cooled, plus more for pan □ 1 1/2 teaspoons pure vanilla extract □ 3/4 teaspoon coarse kosher salt □ Optional garnishes: toasted slivered almonds, chopped dark chocolate, cocoa powder

**Preparation:**  
**Chocolate Cream Filling:** □ Whip thick cream to stiff peaks in a standing mixer. □ Sift powdered sugar and cocoa, then fold into whipped cream until fully combined. □ Whipped up to 2 days in advance and refrigerate.

**Crepes:** □ Set up a cooling rack with parchment paper nearby. □ Blend all crepe ingredients in a high-speed blender for 30 seconds; let rest for 5 minutes. □ Heat a 10-inch nonstick pan over medium-low heat, brush with butter, and pour 1/3 cup batter into the center. □ Tilt the pan to spread batter evenly. Cook for 1.5 minutes until bubbles form and edges lighten. □ Loosen edges with a spatula, flip, and cook the other side for 1 minute. Transfer to the rack. Repeat to make 16 crepes.

**Assembly:**  
□ Layer a crepe on a plate, spread 2-3 tbsp chocolate cream, and repeat until all crepes are stacked.  
□ Top the final crepe with remaining cream, smoothing it into peaks and valleys.  
□ Chill for 15 minutes. Decorate with toppings like almonds, dark chocolate, or cocoa powder before serving.



## Yoga for Pregnancy Journey

By JYOTI SINGH

Pregnancy is a transformative journey filled with joy, anticipation, and physical changes. For many expecting mothers, yoga offers a gentle, supportive way to stay active, alleviate discomfort, and connect with their growing baby.

### YOGA IS IDEAL DURING PREGNANCY

Yoga is uniquely suited for pregnant women because it combines gentle movement, breathing techniques, and mindfulness, which cater to the evolving needs of an expecting mother.



### PHYSICAL BENEFITS

□ **Strength and Flexibility:** Prenatal yoga helps strengthen the core and pelvic floor muscles, which play a crucial role during childbirth and postpartum recovery.  
□ **Improved Posture:** As the baby grows, the added weight can strain the lower back. Yoga postures improve alignment and relieve discomfort in the back, hips, and legs.  
□ **Enhanced Circulation:** Gentle yoga sequences boost blood flow, reducing swelling and promoting overall health for both mother and baby.

### EMOTIONAL WELL-BEING:

□ **Stress Relief:** Deep breathing and mindfulness practices help calm the mind, reduce anxiety, and combat pregnancy-related mood swings.  
□ **Connection with the Baby:** Yoga fosters a deeper bond with the baby by encouraging mindful breathing and self-awareness.  
□ **Better Sleep:** Many women find it easier to rest and sleep after practicing yoga, which is essential during pregnancy.

### RECOMMENDED YOGA POSES FOR PREGNANT WOMEN

The author suggests a range of gentle, safe yoga poses that promote strength, relaxation, and

comfort throughout pregnancy:

**Cat-Cow Pose (Marjaryasana-Bitilasana):** This pose improves spinal mobility and alleviates back pain. By alternating between arching and rounding the back, expecting mothers can ease tension in the lower back and pelvis.

**Bound Angle Pose (Baddha Konasana):** Sitting with the soles of the feet pressed together and knees gently opening outward helps stretch the inner thighs and hips, preparing the body for childbirth.

**Wide-Legged Child's Pose (Balasana):** A variation of Child's Pose, this posture provides relaxation and stretches the hips, lower back, and thighs. It's also an excellent pose for calming the mind.

**Side-Lying Shavasana (Rest Pose):** Lying on the left side with a pillow under the head and between the knees promotes deep relaxation and improves circulation.

**Anulom Vilom (Alternate Nostril Breathing):** This breathing technique balances energy, reduces stress, and enhances oxygen flow that is beneficial for both the mother and baby.

### SAFETY TIPS FOR PRACTICING YOGA DURING PREGNANCY

□ **Consult a Doctor:** Always get medical clearance before starting yoga.  
□ **Avoid Intense Poses:** Skip deep backbends, twists, or poses that involve lying flat on the back after the first trimester.  
□ **Use Props:** Props like cushions, bolsters, and blocks can provide additional support and comfort.  
□ **Stay Hydrated:** Drink plenty of water to stay hydrated during practice.

### EMBRACE THE JOURNEY

Yoga during pregnancy is more than just physical exercise, it's a holistic practice that nurtures the mind, body, and soul. With expert guidance from practitioners, expecting mothers can navigate pregnancy with confidence, strength, and serenity.

— The author is the Founder and CEO of Sparsh Yog



# Head dominates Indian attack for back-to-back centuries

PTI ■ BRISBANE

India's nemesis Travis Head smashed his second hundred in as many games to help Australia gain a distinct advantage in the third Test here on Sunday. Australia, who were put under pressure by India in the morning session, gathered 130 runs in the afternoon without the loss of a wicket. Head (103 batting off 118) made the difference in Adelaide and his successive hundred took the hosts to 234 for three at tea on day two. Returning to form, Steve Smith (65 batting off 149) stood solid at the other end as the duo shared an unbeaten 159-run stand for the fourth wicket. The southpaw, who made a match-winning 140 in the previous Test, once again

lorded over the Indian bowlers who ran out of ideas against him. Even the field placements were questionable with the visitors having a deep point and deep square leg early in Head's innings, allowing the explosive batter pace his innings. The short balls were attempted when Head was well set and he duly put them away with disdain. His unconquered effort comprised 13 fours. Akash Deep bowled well, especially to Smith, but could not get a breakthrough. Struggling for runs, Smith reverted to his trademark exaggerated shuffle, to keep the Indians at bay. He found it tough to get going initially before gaining the confidence to go for horizontal bat shots. Earlier, India's pace spearhead Jasprit Bumrah extended his



dominance over the Australian openers before Nitish Reddy got into the act to leave the visitors at 104 for three at lunch. Despite the pressure exerted by the Indian pacer, Australia were able to muster 76 runs in the session. With the majority of day one lost due to rain, play started half an hour earlier than scheduled time and it did not take long for Bumrah what he has done thus far in the series. Resuming at 28 for no loss, Australia lost Usman Khawaja (21 off 54) in the fourth over of the day when Bumrah had him caught behind with a ball that straightened slightly to take a faint outside edge. It was the third time Bumrah had got rid of the left-handed opener in the series. In the following over, Bumrah

sent back Nathan McSweeney (9 off 49) for the fourth time in three Tests, drawing a thick outside edge from an angle that travelled fast to Virat Kohli at second slip. India were able to maintain pressure after the early breakthroughs with under pressure Smith and Marnus Labuschagne (12 off 55) looking to occupy the crease. Smith, batting with a different stance for the third time in as many games, was tested by the Indian pacers repeatedly as they tried to target his stumps. Akash Deep and Mohammed Siraj did a pose a few questions to both Smith and Labuschagne but could not get the desired results. Reddy, who got the ball to swing, ended Labuschagne's vigil in the 34th over of the innings. The India all-

rounder drew the Australian number three to drive off a full ball and Labuschagne took the bait only to be caught by Kohli at second slip, leaving Australia at 75 for three. Two overs later, there was a major scare in the Indian camp as Siraj walked off the field after feeling discomfort in his left leg in the middle of his over. He was seen holding his left knee but returned to the field much to India's relief. The injury scare came after Siraj and Labuschagne shared a light moment as the Indian pacer walked towards the batter to swap the bails only for them to be swapped back. Runs started flowing with in-form Head joining Smith in the middle. His cover drive off Bumrah was easily the shot of the morning.



## New Zealand leads England by 340 runs in the 3rd test

AP ■ HAMILTON

New Zealand showed off its presumptive new ball attack as it took control of the third test against England on the second day Sunday. Matt Henry and Will O'Rourke shared seven wickets as New Zealand bowled out England for 143 in a session and a half to take a 205-run first innings lead. O'Rourke then had to bat for the second time in the day as nightwatchman when Will Young was out for 60 within 20 minutes of the close. He couldn't last to stumps at which New Zealand was 136-3, having increased its lead to 340. Kane Williamson completed his 38th half century just before the close and was 50 not and Rachin Ravindra was 2. Henry and O'Rourke likely will become New Zealand's new ball attack when Tim Southee retires at the end of this, his 107th test. They previewed that partnership Sunday as Henry took 4-48 and O'Rourke took 3-33 in an outstanding New Zealand bowling performance. Left-arm spinner Mitchell Santner took 3-7 including the wickets of Ollie Pope and Ben Stokes after leading a defiant last wicket stand with O'Rourke which occupied the first hour of the day until New Zealand's last wicket fell at 347. O'Rourke, a classic No. 11 with only 13 runs in nine

tests at a strike rate of eight, gave Santner stalwart support in a partnership with frustrated England for 77 minutes at the end of the first day and the start of the second. Santner reached his fourth half century with a six from the last ball of the first day. He carried on, taking the majority of the strike, before being bowled by Matthew Potts with the first ball after the morning drinks break. O'Rourke faced 30 deliveries and was five not out, having taken 25 balls to get off the mark and having hit his first boundary in international cricket, a leg glance from the bowling of Gus Atkinson. The duration of the partnership between Santner and O'Rourke was enough to cause England discomfort as it lifted New Zealand from 303-9 to 315-9 at stumps Saturday and on to 347. O'Rourke went on to play a key role as New Zealand dismantled England's first innings in 35.5 overs. He bowled at pace and found disconcerting bounce on a drying second day wicket at Seddon Park. O'Rourke took the wickets of Jacob Bethell (12) and Harry Brook (0) with consecutive deliveries, then removed Joe Root (32) in his next over. He first worked over Bethell with a series of short balls then offered him a full ball wide of off stump which Bethell sliced to Glenn Phillips in the gully,

## Money isn't the reason I play chess: Gukesh on being 'new multi-millionaire'

PTI ■ SINGAPORE

The "multi-millionaire" tag does "mean a lot" to new world champion D Gukesh but he doesn't play the game for material gains but for that unbridled joy, which he has been able to retain since the time a chess board used to be the "coolest toy" for him. Gukesh, the 18-year-old from Chennai, is now richer by Rs 11.45 crore which he will receive from FIDE as prize money for beating Ding Liren of China in the final. Gukesh's father Rajnikanth gave up his career as an ENT surgeon to accompany his son on the circuit while mother Padmakumari, who is a microbiologist, became the sole earner of the family. Asked what exactly does being a multi-millionaire mean to him, Gukesh said, "It means a lot. When I got into chess, we (as a family) had to make some hard decisions. My parents had gone through financial and emotional hardships. Now, we are more comfortable and parents don't need to think about those



things," Gukesh told FIDE in an interview. "Personally, money isn't the reason I play chess," he said. He always tries to remember why he started playing the game when he got his first chess board. "I am still the kid who loves chess. It used to be the coolest toy," the reticent world champion explained. For him, his parents mean the world. Gukesh's dad doubles up as his manager by taking care of all the off-board activities and allowing him to concentrate on the game, while his mother is the

emotional and spiritual pillar of strength. "She (mother) still says, I will be happy to know that you are a great chess player but I would be happier to hear that you are a greater person," Gukesh said. Still in his teens, Gukesh feels that as a student of the game, the more he learns about chess, the more aware he will become of how little he knows. "Even the greatest of players make a lot of mistakes. Even though technology is so advanced, there is still a lot to learn about chess. I strongly

believe that the more you learn something, more you realise that you don't know that thing. "Whenever I am on the chess board, I feel I learn something new. It's a process of unlimited beauty." Journey and Destination both are "important" The process of the journey is very important but for Gukesh, it is even more important to be clear about the destination. "For example, I played a beautiful game and lost, I will feel sad. And if I win despite not playing a great game, I will be happy. I tend to look at the result," he said. Desire to win is more than the fear of losing The quality of games in the final was found to be pretty drab by experts but Gukesh doesn't believe that his desire to win is trumped by fear of losing. "My desire to win is stronger than the fear of losing," he said, while expressing a bit of surprise as to how Liren easily agreed to a draw in the second game.

## Siraj is getting stick from 'saints' of Australian cricket, writes sarcastic Sunil Gavaskar

PTI ■ BRISBANE

Indian legend Sunil Gavaskar has lashed out at the double standards of the Australian cricket pundits for their criticism of Mohammed Siraj's aggressive send-off to Travis Head in the Day/Night Test in Adelaide. Siraj and Head were at loggerheads after the Indian pacer got the Australian centurion bowled and gave him a send-off. While Head said that Siraj's reaction was uncalled for, the Indian pacer on his part countered that the southpaw never said "well bowled" which he claimed to have told the media. ICC warned Head and Siraj was fined 20 percent of his match fee but what has irked Gavaskar is the holier than thou attitude of some former Australian players. "Siraj is getting the stick from all the 'saints' in Australian cricket who, of course, were known for their



impeccable behaviour on the field. It may have incensed Australian fans that Siraj's fiery send-off was directed at Head, who scored a magnificent century and was also the local boy," Gavaskar wrote in his column for

Sydney Morning Herald. Gavaskar took a dig at the double standards about how the same people support boorish behaviour from their own. "But the same people will cheer if an Aussie quick gives a similar send-off to an English batter during next summer's Ashes." "There were some suggestions in the media that the Australians should get back to being the mongrels they once were. So, do mongrels simply purr, or do they bark, too?" He was however surprised at Siraj's outburst considering that IPL had lessened the animosity among players. "Siraj's outburst was surprising because if the Indian Premier League has done one thing, apart from making Aussie cricketers and coaches millionaires, it has also taken away to a huge extent the animosity that previously existed in the game."



## India needs to get better with old ball between overs 50-80, accepts bowling coach Morkel

PTI ■ BRISBANE

Bowling coach Morne Morkel on Sunday accepted that Indian bowlers failed to execute plans against Australian century-maker Travis Head and exhorted them to tidy up their act with the old ball between overs 50 and 80. Head and fellow centurion Steve Smith helped the hosts to clobber 171 runs in 31 overs in the third session on the second day of the third Test here, adding to a wicketless post-lunch segment. Australia closed the day at a highly satisfying 405 for seven. "First of all, we can say he's (Head) in pretty good form. But I think for us with the ball, if you look at it from overs 50 to 80, even in the last game, is where we fall short, leaking (runs) a little bit. So, that's one area I think we need to get better at," Morkel said in the post-day press conference. Morkel said the Indian bowlers could not sustain the momentum after taking three wickets in the morning session. "First up with the ball this morning, we were pretty good, at 3 for 70, but took nothing away from two world-class players, Smith we know, he's a guy who also can bat long and score runs. They (Smith and Head) put us under pressure with a softer ball. "It's definitely an area that we need to focus on, maybe

deeper in the innings. Yes, we've got the game plans, but are we executing those game plans with a softer ball from both ends? That's something we need to get better at," getting added. The former South African quick explained the pre-set plan against Head, though it eventually fell flat on its back. "Our plan going into this game was to bowl a little bit more over the wicket, a straighter line. We felt he played it quite nicely in Adelaide when we came around (the wicket). The margins to him are just so small and like I said, once he's in, what is the best way for the team and for you (is) to maybe slow down the scoring rate because you know he's going to be aggressive. "The best way (of controlling Head) is bringing a little bit of control into the game and like I said, from over 50 with that softer ball, that's where we're leaking (runs). When Head comes on straight, the pitch kind of feels to (be favourable) a side," he added. "I'm not taking anything away from that, but it is a venue where getting used to bowling the right length and trusting that, it does take a bit of time." Pacer Jasprit Bumrah singlehandedly shepherded India's bowling with a fifer and Morkel did not read too much into the rather underwhelming efforts of other seamers Mohammed Siraj and luck-less Akash Deep.

## India to host maiden World Athletics Continental Tour event on August 10 next year

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

India will host its maiden World Athletics Continental Tour event - a bronze level global meet - in Bhubaneswar on August 10 next year, the national federation said on Sunday. The announcement was made by the Athletics Federation of India (AFI) while releasing the competition calendar for 2025. The Continental Tour is an annual series of track and field competitions held under the aegis of World Athletics and it forms the second tier of international one-day meetings after the prestigious Diamond League. "The Continental Tour will be a good opportunity for the Indian team to showcase their potential on home ground before the World Championships in September,"

AFI President Adille Sumariwalla said. The meet will be a chance for Indian athletes to earn world ranking points (category C) in home conditions for the 2025 World Championships to be held in Tokyo from September 13-21. The bronze level Tour meet is below the gold and silver levels. This will be the first global athletics meet to be hosted by India after the international permit meets, held in the country in the late 1980s and early 1990s. India has also hosted World Half Marathon Championships in 2004 in New Delhi. "This will be the first time and most prestigious global athletics event after the permit meets in the 80s and 90s and the World Half Marathon in 2004. This is a big achievement

and will help athletics grow in the country," an AFI official told PTI. He said that India is also likely to host a "big" global level javelin meet next year. "We are trying for a big global javelin event and hoping to get it," he added. Riding on Olympic gold and silver medallist Neeraj Chopra's success, India is emerging as a global javelin powerhouse in the world. Currently, the country has more than half a dozen javelin throwers who can throw more than 80m. A World Athletics Continental Tour Bronze Level Meet can only be held in a facility which has a minimum sitting capacity of 3000 with a minimum class 2 certified track with six lanes. The equipment to be used will have to be World Athletics-certified.



There will have to be fully automatic timing obtained from a Photo Finish System, two clocks, two electronic infield boards and minimum one video screen. The warm up area will have to be adequate for all disciplines. The Kalinga Stadium in Bhubaneswar is one of the best

facilities in the country and it has hosted several national championships and the Asian Championships in 2017 during which it had earned praise from the current World Athletics President Sebastian Coe. To host a Continental Bronze Level Meet, the organisers shall

provide adequate medical and emergency services on site, including ambulance service, and minor stitching; physiotherapy facilities at the stadium and at the Athletes' hotel. A minimum of five dope tests must be conducted at the event and samples shall be collected in strict accordance with World Athletics Anti-Doping Regulations using qualified doping control personnel. Samples shall be shipped to and analysed by a WADA-accredited laboratory. The organisers must stage a minimum of 12 events, with gender including at least one jumping and one throwing event. They shall make every effort to stage the main programme within two and a half consecutive hours. The participating athletes will

have to be kept at a minimum three-star hotel and a total prize money purse of USD 25,000 must be offered for the meet. Regarding the 2025 calendar, the season will start with the National Cross Country Championships on January 12. The national race walking competition will be organised on April 19 in Chandigarh. The Senior National Federation Cup is scheduled for April 21-24 in Panchkula, Haryana, and will act as a qualification event for the Asian Athletic Championships to be held from May 27 to May 31 in Korea. The National Inter-State Senior Championships will be held from August 20 to 24 in Chennai, while the National Open Championships will be organised either in Pune or Bengaluru from September 27

to 30. The AFI president said elite Indian race walkers will not compete in the Asian Race Walking competition in Nomi, Japan in March as the main focus will be the World Athletics Championships in Tokyo. "The core group of Indian race walkers clocked a good time in March but aren't able to repeat the performance later in the season," Sumariwalla explained. "Since the main focus in 2025 is the global competition in September, we have decided not to send the elite team to Japan in March." The national team will also compete in international events to prepare for the World Athletics World Championships from September 13-21, the AFI president said.

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