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Sensex sinks below 80k

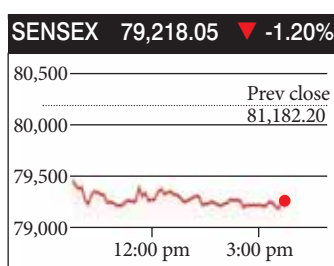


PTI ■ MUMBAI

Equity benchmark Sensex on Thursday plunged about 965 points to crash below the 80,000 level due to heavy selling in global equities after the US Federal Reserve signalled fewer rate cuts next year. Besides, deep losses in consumer durables, banking and IT stocks amid foreign fund outflows added to the gloom, analysts said. Falling for the fourth day running, the 30-share BSE benchmark Sensex tanked 964.15 points or 1.20 per cent to settle at 79,218.05. During the day, the blue-chip index cracked 1,162.12 points or 1.44 per cent to 79,020.08. As many as 2,315 stocks declined while 1,680 advanced and 100 remained unchanged on the BSE. The NSE Nifty tumbled 247.15 points or 1.02 per cent to sink

below the 24,000 mark at 23,951.70. In the past four days, the BSE benchmark tanked 2,915.07 points or 3.54 per cent and the Nifty declined 816.6 points or 3.29 per cent. "The Indian market saw a widespread decline following a global sell-off driven by the US Fed's hawkish stance on interest rates. Sectors sensitive to interest rates, such as banking and real estate, significantly bore the brunt. "However, the BoJ's decision to keep its interest rate steady, which surprised economists, aided in reducing the selling pressure. Despite this, investor caution persisted amid ongoing FII selling, with a strategic shift towards defensive sectors like pharma as evidenced by their outperformance," Vinod Nair, Head of Research, Geojit Financial Services, said.

MARKETS



From the 30 blue-chip pack, Infosys, Bajaj Finserv, JSW Steel, Bajaj Finance, Asian Paints, ICICI Bank, Reliance Industries, Tata Consultancy Services, Infosys, Tata Motors and Mahindra & Mahindra were the biggest laggards. On the other hand, Sun Pharma, Power Grid and Hindustan Unilever were the gainers. "Markets were plundered,

tracking negative global cues as benchmark indices slipped below their psychological levels on broad-based selling after the US Fed's hawkish stance raised concerns over further rate cuts next year. Rising US bond yields have pushed global currencies, including the rupee to new lows, while renewed foreign fund outflows from domestic equities could prompt investors to turn risk averse," Prashanth Tapse, Senior VP (Research), Mehta Equities Ltd, said. The rupee dropped 14 paise and breached the crucial 85 level to close at an all-time low of 85.08 (provisional) against the US dollar on Thursday. The BSE midcap gauge declined 0.30 per cent and smallcap index dipped 0.28 per cent. Among sectoral indices, BSE Focused IT tanked 1.20 per cent, consumer durables (1.15 per cent), IT (1.13 per cent), capital goods (1.07 per cent), teck (1.05 per cent) and financial services (1.05 per cent). BSE Healthcare emerged as the only gainer. In Asian markets, Seoul, Tokyo, Shanghai and Hong Kong settled lower. European markets were trading in the negative territory. Wall Street ended sharply lower on Wednesday. Foreign Institutional Investors (FIIs) offloaded equities worth Rs 1,316.81 crore on Wednesday, according to exchange data. Global oil benchmark Brent crude dipped 0.08 per cent to USD 73.33 a barrel. The BSE benchmark Sensex tumbled 502.25 points or 0.62 per cent to settle at 80,182.20, taking its downward trend to the third day on Wednesday. The Nifty declined 137.15 points or 0.56 per cent to 24,198.85.



Uttar Pradesh, Haryana Govts must impose complete ban on firecrackers: SC

RAJESH KUMAR ■ NEW DELHI

WEATHER

AQI	451
MAX	23°C (+1)
MIN	5°C (-3)

The Supreme Court on Thursday directed the Uttar Pradesh and Haryana Governments to impose a complete ban on firecrackers until further orders. The Delhi Government has also imposed a round-the-year ban on firecrackers in the National Capital. The SC has also ordered the states falling in the National Capital Region (NCR) to constitute teams of various officials to ensure strict compliance with the anti-pollution measures under Stage IV of the Graded Response Action Plan (GRAP). During the hearing, Senior advocate Shadaan Farasat, appearing for the Government, conveyed this to a Bench of Justices AS Oka and AG Masih hearing the question of air pollution in the National Capital. He emphasised that for this measure to be effective, neighbouring NCR states must adopt similar bans, as firecrackers could still be brought into Delhi from those states. "We are of the view that this ban will be effective only when other states forming part of the NCR region impose similar measures. Even the state of Rajasthan has

imposed a similar ban in that part of State of Rajasthan which falls in NCR regions. For the time being we direct the states of Uttar Pradesh and Haryana to impose a similar ban which is imposed by the state of Delhi", the Bench said. The Bench was informed that while Haryana had permitted the use of green crackers, Rajasthan had imposed a complete ban on firecrackers in the areas falling within the NCR. The Bench further stated that such a ban would be effective only if other NCR states imposed similar restrictions. The matter has been listed for further hearing on January 15, 2025, to consider additional directions on the firecracker ban. The Supreme Court had earlier expressed concerns over inadequate enforcement of firecracker bans in Delhi-NCR. On December 12, the Supreme Court directed the Delhi Government and NCR states to decide on a complete

year-round ban on firecrackers, including their manufacture, storage, sale, distribution, and use. "We direct NCR states to constitute the teams of members of police, revenue officials to monitor the implementation of GRAP IV measures. We say this that the members so created in this team will work as officers of this court. They will regularly submit reports of compliance and breaches to CAQM [Commission for Air Quality Management] so that immediate action be taken by all concerned," it directed. The Bench was hearing the case concerning the Delhi air pollution crisis. The Court has been monitoring action taken by authorities in the adjoining States to curb stubble-burning incidents, among other things. Meanwhile, in a notification issued by the Delhi government's environment department on Thursday, "There shall be a complete ban on manufacturing, storage, selling (including delivery through online marketing platforms) and bursting of all kinds of fire crackers in NCT of Delhi throughout the year with immediate effect."

Continued on page 8

"Will run a nationwide movement on Ambedkar issue"



Photo: PTI

Congress on Thursday accused the BJP of diverting attention from the issue of Home Minister Amit Shah's "insult" to BR Ambedkar and said Shah must resign and apologise for his remarks. Addressing a joint Press conference at the AICC headquarters, Congress chief Mallikarjun Kharge and former party chief Rahul Gandhi condemned Shah's remarks on Ambedkar and said they would continue to protest across the country.

"The BJP wants to divert attention from Shah's remarks on Ambedkar and that is why they are raising other issues," Kharge stated. He said they (Congress leaders) were only demanding the resignation of Home Minister Shah and were protesting "in support of our demands, but the BJP MPs blocked us from entering Parliament." "They pushed me, I lost my balance and sat down," the Congress chief said, adding that he condemns Shah's remarks

on Ambedkar. Kharge said they will run a nationwide movement on Ambedkar issue. Rahul said the Bharatiya Janata Party-Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh thinking is "anti-Constitution" and "anti-Ambedkar". "The BJP is indulging in distraction. We want the apology and resignation of home minister over his remarks on Ambedkar," Gandhi said, adding that they would continue to raise their demand and the Adani issue.

"Will physical strength be used in Parliament?"



Photo: Ranjan Dimri/The Pioneer

Accusing Rahul Gandhi of "pushing and shoving" its Members of Parliament at the Parliament premises, Bharatiya Janata Party said he does not deserve to be the Leader of Opposition after an "indecent and shameful" conduct. Addressing a press conference at the BJP headquarters hours after fracas unfolded during protests by the ruling, and Opposition parties, Union Minister Shivraj Singh Chouhan put the blame on

Rahul for bedlam which left two MPs injured. "Rahul Gandhi does not deserve to hold the post of the Leader of Opposition," he said. Chouhan said that the party was also pained at the treatment meted out to its tribal MP from Nagaland, S Phangnon Konyak, who alleged in the Rajya Sabha that Rahul shouted at her after coming in "close proximity" that made her feel uncomfortable during a demonstration outside the Parliament's Makar Dwar.

"Will physical strength be used in Parliament? Will musclemen and goondas come to Parliament? In which direction is the Congress taking the country's democracy?" said the BJP leader, who was flanked by Union Minister Piyush Goyal and party MPs Anurag Thakur and Anil Baluni. The Agriculture Minister said people elect their leaders to Parliament hoping they will put forth issues "with facts and logic. But the Congress is changing it."

Traffic alert: Avoid Kalindi Kunj, congestion due to Delhi-Mumbai Expressway construction

STAFF REPORTER ■ NEW DELHI

Commuters have been reeling under massive disruptions at the busy Kalindi Kunj junction, due to the construction of the Delhi-Mumbai Expressway. The Delhi Police, in an advisory on Thursday, urged the commuters to avoid the area due to the ongoing construction of the Delhi-Mumbai Expressway, including that of a bridge at Agra Canal Road, which is expected to continue for the next couple of months. "The ongoing construction of the delhi-mumbai expressway, including the construction of a bridge at agra canal road, is expected to continue for the next couple of months. Due to

this, significant traffic congestion has been observed at Kalindi Kunj junction, especially as commuters from adjoining states pass through the area," it said. The police instructed the commuters that in light of the ongoing construction and resulting traffic disruptions, the general public is advised to plan their journeys in advance and seek alternate routes to avoid delays. They asked people travelling to avoid the area around Kalindi Kunj junction during peak hours to prevent inconvenience. Commuters travelling from Faridabad to Noida are advised to take Mathura Road and Road number-13 to bypass the congested area. Those

travelling from Noida to Delhi have been advised to use the DND flyover. Public transport is highly recommended to reduce congestion on the roads and avoid roadside parking to ensure smooth traffic flow, the advisory added. A commuter took to X to express his frustration over the persistent jams in the area, stating that while the Kalindi Kunj stretch is hardly 2 km long and should not take more than five minutes to cross the bridge with moderate traffic, it takes 30 to 40 minutes to cross this tiny stretch. Another one asked others to avoid Kalindi Kunj from Noida to Delhi at all cost. Sharing the ordeal he faced to cross the stretch, he said, "It took me an hour just to cover a distance of



just 250 meters recently. They keep constructing new things to cut short duration from one place to another, however they completely forget that in that process we, the ordinary commuters, have to suffer on a daily basis," he said, adding that authorities should first plan the whole thing in a way that it doesn't hamper the day to day lives of the people. Constructed with a budget of Rs 5,500 crore, the expressway offers a new route for travel to Faridabad, Palwal, and Sohna. It is India's longest expressway project, connecting Delhi and Mumbai. The project aims to directly link the national capital Delhi with Mumbai, linking multiple economic centres across five states: Haryana, Rajasthan, Madhya

Pradesh, Gujarat, and Maharashtra. The eight-lane greenfield expressway spans a total length of 1,386 km, designed to reduce travel time between Delhi and Mumbai by 50 per cent, aiming for a travel duration of just 12 hours. Beyond connecting the two major cities, it is intended to improve accessibility to economic hubs such as Jaipur, Kishangarh, Ajmer, Kota, Chittorgarh, Udaipur, Bhopal, Ujjain, Indore, Ahmedabad, Vadodara, and Surat. The project commenced operations with the inauguration of its first segment between Sohna (Haryana) and Dausa (Rajasthan) by Prime Minister Narendra Modi on 12 February 2023.

Yogi hails ABV's legacy



PNS ■ LUCKNOW

Uttar Pradesh Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath on Thursday called former Prime Minister Atal Bihari Vajpayee an icon of good governance, lauding his role in transforming political instability into stability and achieving the goals of effective governance.

The week-long event, marking the 100th birth anniversary of Vajpayee, will continue until December 25. In his address, the CM said, "This year marks the birth centenary of Vajpayee, the former Prime Minister and a great son of Mother India. With the inspiration of PM Narendra Modi, Good Governance Week is being started in the entire country and the state."

"Atalji's ancestral roots are in Uttar Pradesh, which he chose as his karmabhoomi, representing the state multiple times in Parliament from Balrampur and Lucknow," Adityanath added.

"He also provided exemplary leadership to the nation, both as foreign minister and prime minister. Known as the 'Ajatashatru' of Indian politics, Atalji was not only a politician but also a poet, journalist, and litterateur, whose six decades of public life remained untainted," he remarked further.

He commended Vajpayee's visionary initiatives, such as the Antyodaya scheme, aimed at empowering the poor, deprived and marginalised sections of

society, as well as ensuring the rights of Scheduled Castes, Scheduled Tribes, and backward classes. He also highlighted transformative projects like the Pradhan Mantri Gramin Sadak Yojana and the Golden Quadrilateral, which ushered in a new era of world-class infrastructure and highways in India. The CM further said that programmes have begun in every district as part of Good Governance Week, which will continue until December 25. These programmes include essay writing competitions on good governance for school children, speeches at the higher education level, painting competitions, and seminars in rural areas. Additionally, events will be organised throughout the year to continue celebrating Atalji's legacy and the winners of these activities will be honoured on December 25, he added. On that evening, a special poetry session based on Atalji's poems will be held in every district, school and college, providing a platform for budding poets to showcase their talent, the CM said.

Police yet to determine if LLB student shot at deliberately

PNS ■ LUCKNOW

Police have yet to determine whether the victim of a shooting incident in the Madaon police station area, Aryan, was injured accidentally or if his friend-turned-foe Himanshu deliberately shot at him. Aryan suffered firearm injuries on Tuesday night when the two were at a public location. He is currently receiving treatment at KGMU Trauma Centre, where he is having trouble breathing.

He was reportedly intoxicated at the time but kept pleading with bystanders to take him to a hospital. Aryan is now being treated in the surgery department and is on oxygen support due to breathing difficulties. According to sources, Himanshu has admitted to firing the shot but remained silent when questioned about whether the bullet was intentionally fired or if the gun discharged accidentally during a trial. The nursing staff also restricted Himanshu from speaking much due to Aryan's respiratory issues. Initial investigations revealed that both Aryan and Himanshu arrived at the beer shop on a motorcycle.

Aryan, a first-year LLB student from Adarsh Colony in Jankipuram, told the police that on Tuesday evening, he and Himanshu, a resident of Aliganj Sector P, visited a model shop in Sector Q, to buy beer. They later went to a street near Sector P. "While drinking beer, Himanshu took out a pistol and fired. The bullet hit me directly in the stomach, and I fell to the ground in pain. I started vomiting, and a crowd gathered around," Aryan explained. When the police arrived, Aryan provided details about the incident, including Himanshu's involvement. He kept asking people to take him to the hospital. He was first taken to a

hospital and later referred to the trauma centre. Aryan does not know where Himanshu went after the incident, but all of Himanshu's friends arrived afterwards. Aryan's friends are finding it hard to believe that Himanshu shot at him, although no one is willing to speak openly about the incident. Off-camera, they said that Himanshu himself took Aryan to Globe Hospital on his motorcycle, with help from a friend. Aryan was initially but was later transferred to the trauma centre when it was discovered he had been shot. Himanshu reportedly informed other friends about the incident. Himanshu, a motor

mechanic, is under investigation, and the pistol involved will be examined. Madaon Inspector Shivnand Mishra confirmed that both men had arrived at the beer shop on the same motorcycle, and there was no dispute at the shop, nor were they intoxicated at that time. The investigation is focused on how the pistol went off and how it ended up with them. So far, it has been suggested that the bullet was fired during the process of loading or unloading the pistol. Aryan is not yet fully cooperating with the investigation. An FIR has been filed based on a complaint by Aryan's father Kamlesh, and raids are underway to apprehend the accused.

Nephew of nagar panchayat chairman found murdered

Lucknow (PNS): The missing nephew of BKT Nagar Panchayat chairman was found murdered, with his body recovered from an under-construction house in the area. The victim, Piyush Rawat, had gone missing a week ago. Villagers discovered his blood-soaked body on Thursday afternoon in a house under construction in Bhauli village and alerted the police. The body was sent for postmortem. Piyush Rawat (20), a resident of Hajipur village in the Bakshi Ka Tajib police station area, had been missing since December 12 evening. His family had filed a missing complaint with the BKT police.

Dinesh Rawat. The family has accused BKT police station beat in-charge, Vikas Singh, of colluding with the perpetrators of the crime. According to the family, Piyush's last known location was near Bhauli village on the day he went missing. ACP, BKT, Rishabh Runwal arrived at the scene to gather information. He confirmed that a missing report had been filed, and Piyush was being actively searched for. "After the body was found, it was sent for postmortem. The cause of death has not yet been determined. Further action will be based on the postmortem report," he said.

Police sent the body for a post-mortem, after which it was handed over to the family. Shivang, son of Anand Shukla, hailed from Hamirpur but lived with his family in Lucknow. His father Anand, a priest, performs pujas at homes and temples in the city. According to Anand, Shivang was reportedly being blackmailed over the phone by unidentified individuals. On Tuesday, Shivang gave them Rs 7,000 from his savings, and it was revealed that he had previously given them money as well. Anand added that Shivang would use his mother Poonam's phone to communicate, and his own phone had been switched off on Tuesday. The family stated that no suicide note was found at the scene. Initially, they were reluctant to allow a post-mortem, but the police persuaded them to proceed. Inspector, Ghazipur, Vikas Rai confirmed that Shivang's mobile phone has been sent for forensic investigation. He added that further action will be taken based on the findings and any complaints filed by the family.

Elderly man attempts self-immolation near Vidhan Bhawan

PNS ■ LUCKNOW

Frustrated by police inaction in resolving a land dispute, a 75-year-old man attempted self-immolation near Vidhan Bhawan on Thursday afternoon. However, timely intervention of police officers present there prevented him from setting himself ablaze, and he was rushed to Civil Hospital for a medical check-up. The man, identified as Rauf, a resident of Ghughater Bandela in Barabanki, poured some inflammable liquid over his body and was about to ignite a matchstick when on-duty police officers intervened and restrained him. After receiving medical attention, Rauf was taken to the Hazratganj police station. According to Rauf, he has been entangled in a land dispute, which is currently pending in the civil court. He alleged that the accused parties not only abuse him in public but also issue daily death threats to force him to withdraw the

case. Despite filing several complaints, Rauf claimed that the police failed to act, prompting his extreme step. Hazratganj inspector stated that Rauf arrived near the GPO around noon, where he carried out the attempt. "The man poured inflammable liquid on himself and threatened to set himself on fire, demanding action. The on-duty police personnel acted swiftly to save him. The police station concerned and officials have been informed," the inspector said. The incident raises questions about how Rauf managed to breach the heavy security around Vidhan Bhawan, especially during the ongoing winter session. Notably, the incident follows another tragedy on Wednesday when a Congress worker died inside the party office during a demonstration. The protest had been stopped from marching towards the Vidhan Bhawan, further highlighting the tense atmosphere around the government building.

CLASSIFIEDS

NOTICE

I, UMA SHANKAR holding Indian Passport No: M8379438 issued at LUCKNOW on 06/04/2015, Permanent Resident of MUDELA LAPRI SARAIKHWAJA JAUNPUR PIN 222139 UTTAR PRADESH INDIA and presently residing at DUBAI do hereby change my name from UMA SHANKAR to UMASHANKAR (Given name) YADAV (Surname) with immediate effect

CLASSIFIEDS

NOTICE

I have changed my name from Naresh Tejwani to Naresh Kumar Tejwani to be known as Naresh Kumar Tejwani in all future references. Naresh Kumar Tejwani, Add.- 124/A/21 govind nagar, Kanpur

AUCTION NOTICE

दिनांक 30-12-2024 प्रातः 11:00 बजे उ० प्र० राज्य कर्मचारी कल्याण निगम, 742-जवाहर भवन, लखनऊ में निम्नोक्त (एम्बेसडर कारो) :- यू.पी.32-डी.डब्लू- 4062 व यू.पी.32-डी.जे.-7008 की नीलामी, सिवियोरिटी रु०5,000/- नकद प्रति वाहन हेतु फर्म के जी. एस. टी. पंजीकरण के साथ जमा होगी। आई. पी. सिंह एण्ड सन्स.

NOTICE

I hitherto known as Ragini Yadav have changed my name and shall hereafter be known as Payal Yadav. Which may be amended accordingly, Payal Yadav D/o Late Bhawani Deen R/o J-828, Vishwa Bank Colony, Barra Kanpur

AUCTION NOTICE

दिनांक 23-12-2024 प्रातः 11:00 बजे कार्यालय आयकर आयुक्त (विभागीय प्रतिनिधि -1), आयकर अपीलीय अधिकरण, प्लॉट संख्या-2A/INS-01, अवध विहार योजना, अमर शहीद पथ, लखनऊ में निम्नोक्त कार्यालय फर्नीचर, आयरन रैक आदि की नीलामी, सिवियोरिटी रु. 10,000/- नकद, जी. एस. टी. पंजीकरण के साथ जमा होगी। आई. पी. सिंह एण्ड सन्स.

NOTICE

It is informed to the general public that I evict my daughter Shiwani Singh from all my movable and immovable property due to her bad conduct. In future she will be responsible for any work done by her. I and my family will have no connection with her. Vinod Kumar Singh son of late Purohit Singh HN - 19/221, sector - 19 Indira Nagar Lucknow

NOTICE

I, DHANJAY holding Indian Passport No: M7827688 issued at LUCKNOW on 23/03/2015 and Permanent Resident of LAPRI SARAIKHWAJA JAUNPUR PIN 222139 UTTAR PRADESH INDIA and presently residing at DUBAI UAE do hereby change my name from DHANJAY to DHANJAY KUMAR (Given name) PRAJAPATI (Surname) with immediate effect

NOTICE

I, Rita Devi W/o Shailendra Yadav Residing at 42, Kailash Nagar, Jajmau, Kanpur Nagar, UP-208010 have stated that my name is wrongly endorsed as Rita Yadav in place of Rita Devi in my daughter's (Shubhi Yadav) CBSE matriculation certificate No-2404419- R124/74087/005-2024. In future I will be only known as Rita Devi.

AUCTION NOTICE

उ० प्र० कोआपरेटिव फेडरेशन लि० लखनऊ के 6-कैपर रोड, लालबाग, लखनऊ स्थित भूखण्ड पर पड़ी निम्नोक्त सरिया एवं गिट्टी (कोलम में लगी एवं चिह्नित सरिया को छोड़कर) का "जहाँ है-जैसी है" स्थिति में दिनांक 26-12-2024 को प्रातः 11:00 बजे -1:00 बजे तक निरीक्षण करने उपरान्त नीलामी दिनांक 27-12-2024 को अपरान्ह 1:00 बजे प्रथम कार्यालय - 32, स्टेशन रोड, लखनऊ के चंचम तल स्थित सभागार में सिवियोरिटी रु.50,000/- का बेकड्राफ्ट जो उ० कोआपरेटिव फेडरेशन लि० लखनऊ के नाम, फर्म के जी. एस.टी. पंजीकरण, आधार, चैकबुक के साथ प्रातः 10:30 बजे-12 बजे तक जमा करने उपरान्त होगी। आई. पी. सिंह एण्ड सन्स.

NOTICE

I, MANJAY holding Indian Passport No: N2196362 issued at LUCKNOW on 08/08/2015, Permanent Resident of VILL AND POST LAPRI JAUNPUR PIN 222139 UTTAR PRADESH INDIA and presently residing at DUBAI UAE do hereby change my name from MANJAY to MANJAY KUMAR (Given name) PRAJAPATI (Surname) with immediate effect

Bengali drama contest to begin tomorrow

Lucknow (PNS): The 58th All India Prakash Chandra Ghosh Memorial Full-Length Bengali Drama Competition, organised by the Bengali Club and Youngmen's Association in Lucknow, is set to commence at the Atul Sinha Natya Mandir stage from December 21. Secretary of Bengali Club Arun Banerjee said that the competition will offer Bengali drama enthusiasts in Lucknow a unique opportunity to witness performances from the country's finest drama teams, featuring eminent artists from New Delhi, Kolkata, and 24 Parganas (West Bengal). The final performance of the competition will take place on January 11, 2025, with the event concluding with a prize distribution ceremony on January 12. Amit Kumar Ghosh, grandson of the late Prakash Chandra Ghosh (in whose name the competition is organised), will inaugurate the contest. Special guests at the inauguration will include Priya Sinha and Sanjit Bose. This year's jury panel will comprise Prof Mukul Bandhopadhyay from Kolkata, along with Indrajit Mitra and Prabir Dey from Lucknow. The competition will feature three main prizes: the first-place trophy, accompanied by a cash prize of Rs 10,000; the second-place trophy with a Rs 7,000 prize; and the third-place trophy along with Rs 5,000 in cash. Manoj Kumar Banerjee, cultural secretary of Bengali Club, invited all drama lovers to attend and support the competition, ensuring its success.

Cyber crime gang busted; 2 held

PNS ■ LUCKNOW

The recent theft of an iPhone from an Army officer led to the exposure of a gang of cyber criminals operating in the city. The gang specialises in stealing mobile phones and using them for cyber crimes. A team of PGI police and the cyber cell from Hazratganj claimed to have arrested two members of the gang, Govinda Kumar Mahato (32) and Suraj Nonia (25), both from Sahibganj, Jharkhand. A 15-year-old boy, also a member of the gang, was taken into custody. Seven stolen mobile phones and six SIM cards were recovered from their possession. During interrogation, the accused revealed that they and their associates steal phones in crowded places

such as markets, fairs, and vegetable markets in major cities across India. After stealing the phones, they bypass the security features like iCloud locks and the 'Find My Device' function. They then use the stolen phones to create digital e-wallets, linked to the bank accounts and credit cards of the victims. Money is transferred from these accounts to fraudulent bank accounts opened in fake names, using apps like Cred. The phones are later sold, and the proceeds are shared among the gang members. The gang was busted after a complaint from Colonel Santosh Kumar Mishra, who reported that his iPhone-13 Pro Max was stolen from a fruit and vegetable market between Dr Babasaheb Bhimrao Ambedkar University and South City.

His linked accounts were fraudulently accessed, resulting in a loss of Rs. 5.5 lakhs. Similar complaints were received from areas like Phoolmandi Chowk, BKT Sabzi Mandi, Viraj Khand Sabzi Mandi, and Nakhaz Bazaar. The police used technical analysis and surveillance to track down the criminals, leading to their arrest near Utrathiya railway station. Further investigations revealed the gang's involvement in several other cases across Lucknow, including frauds of Rs 5.5 lakh at PGI, Rs 16 lakh at cyber police station, and Rs 6 lakh at cyber police station, Lucknow, among others. The accused have a criminal history, including cases in Hyderabad, and complaints against them have been filed in various states.

Trial run of single window system by LDA begins

Lucknow (PNS): The single window system was launched at the Lucknow Development Authority (LDA) head office on Thursday, marking the beginning of its trial run. According to LDA Vice-Chairman Prathmesh Kumar, the system is expected to be fully operational by January 15, 2025. This new initiative was developed by LDA without external assistance and is designed to streamline processes for the public. The proceedings began at 10 am and concluded by 2 pm. Before the session started, the vice-chairman inspected the venue and expressed satisfaction with the system's setup. He was the

first to lodge a complaint regarding a property transfer, following the process: he took a token from counter number seven, filed his complaint, and it was promptly forwarded to the property department for verification. The issue is expected to be resolved by Saturday morning. The system is designed with over 12 counters in a newly designed hall, aimed at efficiently addressing people's grievances. The primary goal of the system is to eliminate the need for homebuyers or property buyers to navigate through various departments for assistance. Instead, the system ensures that problems are addressed within three days.

Government of Odisha. Directorate of Town Planning, Housing & Urban Development Department. Power House Square, Unit-V, Keshari Nagar, Bhubaneswar, Dist.: Khurda, Odisha. PIN -751001. Notice Inviting RFP. RFP No.: 02 / DTP - HUDD / Bhubaneswar, Date: 18-12-2024. 1. Name of the Work: Consultancy Services for Sub-Scheme on Formulation of GIS based CDPI Master Plan for Class-II Seven towns with Population of 50,000-99,999 under AMRUT 2.0 under Three Packages in Odisha State. 2. Cost of Bid Documents: Rs. 10,000/- (Rupees ten thousand) only. 3. Earnest Money Deposit (EMD): Rs. 5,00,000/- (Rupees five lakh) only. 4. Period of Completion: 365 days. 5. Date & Time of availability of bid documents in the portal: From 10.00 Hrs. of 20.12.2024 to 17.00 Hrs. of 20.01.2025. 6. Last Date / Time for Receipt of Bids in the Portal: 17.00 Hrs. of 20.01.2025. 7. Name & Address of the Officer Inviting Bid: Shri Sushanta Kumar Mishra, OAS (SAG), Director, Town Planning & Add. Secretary to Govt. Housing & Urban Development Deptt. Govt. of Odisha, e-mail: dtpoish@gmail.com. 1. Subsequent corrigendum, if required shall appear in the e-procurement website only. 2. Other details can be seen in the bidding documents, which is available in website www.tendersodisha.gov.in. Director. Directorate of Town Planning, Housing & Urban Development Deptt. Govt. of Odisha. OIPR-13038/11/0001/2425

Repertwahr festival kicks off

PNS ■ LUCKNOW

Thursday marked the opening of the 12th season of Repertwahr, a four-day multi-performing arts cultural festival. The event commenced at Janeshwar Mishra Park, featuring a captivating folk fusion performance by renowned star player, Chandulal Kalburgi. The first day of the festival attracted a large crowd, with standout performances including that of indie-folk singer

and songwriter Prateek Kuhad. The festival's food and artisan stalls proved to be a hit among Lucknow's food and craft enthusiasts. Bhooresh Rai, the founder of Repertwahr, and Priyanka Sarkar, co-founder, said: "The primary goal is to bridge the gap between performing arts and the general public, creating a deeper connection by making art forms more accessible, relatable, and enjoyable for audiences of all back-

grounds." A standout feature of this year's festival was the awe-inspiring 40ft art installation, 'Sarta', made from recycled materials. This monumental installation became a symbol of cultural unity and imagination, seamlessly blending music, theatre, literature, comedy, food, and commerce. It captured the essence of the festival's theme, 'Khwabo Ki Duniya,' where creativity, culture, and the human spirit come together.

Seminar to resolve TDS-related litigation

Lucknow (PNS): Officers of the TDS Wing in Lucknow, under the guidance of the Commissioner of Income Tax, TDS, Lucknow, are organising a seminar and awareness programme on the 'Direct Tax Vivad Se Vishwas Scheme 2024'. The event is scheduled for Friday and will be held at the Conference Room on the ground floor of Pratyaksh Kar Bhawan in Lucknow. The seminar aims to help individuals and entities involved in TDS-related litigation by providing them with insights into how they can benefit from the scheme. The official organisers expressed hope that deductors with pending income tax (TDS) cases will participate, as the scheme provides an opportunity for taxpayers to resolve disputes and avoid prolonged litigation. The Direct Tax Vivad Se Vishwas Scheme, introduced in the Budget 2024, is part of the government's initiative to reduce pending tax litigation, generate timely revenue, and benefit both taxpayers and deductors. The TDS office in Lucknow is working to assist taxpayers and deductors in complying with statutory obligations, thereby reducing grievances and litigation.

Sikh delegation meets CEO of Cantt Board

Lucknow (PNS): A delegation from the Sikh community, led by Satvir Singh Raju (former co-media in-charge of Awadh region BJP, UP), met Abhishek Rathore, the chief executive officer of Cantonment Board, on Thursday. The delegation requested that a road crossing in the Cantonment be named after Guru Tegh Bahadur, who is revered as the 'Chadar of Hind'. Speaking to mediapersons after the meeting, Raju announced that the CEO had agreed to name the MG Nehru Crossing Square as Sahib Sri Guru Tegh Bahadur Chowk. The delegation highlighted Guru Tegh Bahadur's immense sacrifices in protecting the Hindu religion and his legacy, particularly noting that the Sheeshganj Gurudwara in Delhi is dedicated to his memory. The delegation requested the MG Nehru Crossing Chauraha be renamed in honour of Guru Tegh Bahadur. Rathore assured that the proposal would be presented in the upcoming Cantonment Board meeting and, if approved, the intersection would be officially renamed and beautified.

Bank of India BOI Zonal Office: "Star House", Vibhuti Khand, Gomti Nagar, Lucknow-226010, Ph.:0522-2721512 Demand Notice. NOTICE U/S 13 (2) OF THE SECURITISATION AND RECONSTRUCTION OF FINANCIAL ASSETS AND ENFORCEMENT OF SECURITY INTEREST ACT, 2002. In exercise of the power conferred upon under section 13(2) of SARFESI ACT, 2002 being the authorised officer of Bank of India issued Demand Notice to the following borrowers/guarantors and the demand notice were sent through regd. Post in the respective residential address. Again by virtue of this publication following borrowers/guarantors of are inform to pay all their debts mention below within 60 days of this notice. Further the borrowers/guarantors in particulars and public in general are cautioned not to deal with Sale-purchase of the following properties which are kept us as security. S. No. Name & Address of the Borrowers & Guarantors Description of Immovable property mortgaged / Owner of the property Amount o/s (as mentioned in the Notice u/s 13(2) Date of Demand Notice. BRANCH - MUSAFIRKHANA 1. Borrower: Mr. Shailesh Kumar Singh S/o Ram Niranjan Add: Village-Iolepur, Tehsil sadar, Sultanpur, UP-228001 Owner-Vandana Singh w/o Shailesh Kumar Singh Boundaries: East: Road, West: House of Ram Kumar, North:- Road, South: Plot of izhar Ahmad Rs. 10,69,753.97 + Interest & other charges Demand Notice Date 29.10.24 Guarantor: Mr. Hari Prasad Singh Add:- Village & Post Ravaniya Sultanpur -227813 Further with reasons, we believe that you are avoiding the service of said Demand Notice issued under the Act, as stated above hence, we are now constrained to make this publication of Demand Notice, as required U/S 13 (2) of said Act and Rule 3 of the Security Interest (Enforcement) Rules, 2002. You are hereby called upon to pay us, Bank of India, within a period of 60 days from the date of publication of this Demand Notice with the aforesaid amount along with the further interest, cost, incidental expenses, charges etc. failing which, we Bank of India will take necessary action under the provisions of Sec. 13(4) of the said Act against all or any one or more of the secured Assets including taking possession of this secured assets of the borrowers and sale thereof. Further you are prohibited U/s 13(15) of the said Act from transferring either by way of sale/lease etc. and encumber in any other way, the aforesaid secured assets, Please note that no further Demand Notice will be issued. Date: 20/12/2024 Place: Lucknow Authorised Officer, Bank of India

Rai attends Cong worker's funeral

UPCC chief faces wrath of locals

PNS/PTI ■ LUCKNOW/ GORAKHPUR

The funeral of 28-year-old Congress worker turned chaotic in his native village in Gorakhpur on Thursday after Uttar Pradesh Congress chief Ajay Rai arrived to pay his respects, sparking angry reactions from locals who accused him of exploiting the tragedy for political gain.

Prabhat Pandey died during a Congress-led protest near the Uttar Pradesh assembly in Lucknow on Wednesday, with Rai claiming that his death was due to "police brutality." However, the police stated he was brought dead to the hospital from the Congress office.

Pandey's body was brought home for last rites on Thursday. His grieving father, Deepak Pandey, broke down, saying, "This is the result of my deeds. My only son is gone."

His mother fainted at the funeral site, while his grandfather, a retired postal employee, was in shock and unable to speak.

The situation became heated when Rai arrived to pay his respects, prompting locals to shout slogans such as "Ajay Rai go back," "Murderer party go back," and "Rahul Gandhi Murdabad, Priyanka Gandhi Murdabad."

The police intervened as tensions escalated. Angry villagers accused Rai of exploiting the tragedy for political gain.

"No drama here," they shouted and prevented Rai from approaching the pyre.

In an attempt to calm the crowd, Rai showed his janu (sacred thread) and asserted, "I am also a Brahmin, a true 24-carat one." After persistent appeals from other Congress leaders, he was reluctantly allowed to pay his respects.



Police personnel during an investigation at the Uttar Pradesh Congress office after the death of party worker Prabhat Pandey, in Lucknow on Thursday

The controversy surrounding Pandey's death has deepened political tensions. An initial post-mortem report cited a heart attack, but his family suspects foul play and has demanded an impartial investigation into his death.

Based on a complaint by his uncle, Manish Pandey, an FIR for murder against unknown persons has been registered at the Hussainganj police station in Lucknow.

"If Prabhat was unconscious for two hours at the Congress office, why wasn't he taken to the hospital earlier?" Manish Pandey questioned.

Pandey, who served as the secretary of the Youth Congress, had been living with his uncle in Lucknow while pursuing a computer course.

Holding the government responsible for Pandey's death, Rai said, "This is not a death, but a murder. Prabhat told his colleagues he was beaten by the police before he collapsed."

In a press statement on Thursday, Rai alleged that the government had obstructed Congress leaders from attending Pandey's funeral.

"The shameless, insensitive Yogi government has always sought to cover up its failures by undermining democratic values and blaming others," Rai said.

"Stopping us from attending the funeral of late Prabhat Pandey, a former colleague, is a highly insensitive move," he said. He further accused the government of turning political disagreements into personal attacks, saying, "The treatment of opposition leaders as enemies is nothing less than a murder of democracy and an assault on political values."

"It is unfortunate that while late Prabhat Pandey's funeral was taking place, BJP supporters were raising slogans, bringing shame to humanity," Rai said. He described the behaviour as the "pinnacle of the BJP's moral and ethical decline."

Meanwhile, the Uttar Pradesh Congress Committee (UPCC) organised a condolence meeting at its state headquarters in honour of Pandey.

It was attended by several senior leaders, including AICC general secretary Avinash Pande, AICC secretaries

Satyanarayan Patel and Taurik Alam, former UPCC president Brijlal Khatri, and MLA Virendra Chaudhary, among others.

At the gathering, Avinash Pande expressed deep sorrow, saying, "The death of Prabhat Pandey during the struggle against police brutality has left our family in mourning. In this moment of grief, the entire Congress family stands with his relatives."

Pande pledged to continue fighting for justice, stating, "We will not rest until those responsible are held accountable."

He also called on Congress workers across the state to organise condolence meetings at district headquarters and light candles at local memorials as a tribute to Pandey.

Congress leaders, including Rahul Gandhi and Mallikarjun Kharge, had strongly condemned the incident on Wednesday. "Democracy and the Constitution have once again been murdered in Uttar Pradesh. Congress brave lions will continue their fight," Rahul Gandhi posted on X.

Police launch investigation

Lucknow (PNS): Lucknow police launched an investigation on Thursday. On Thursday morning, DCP (Central) Raveena Tyagi, accompanied by a police team, visited the Congress office to begin the search. The DCP also questioned the caretaker and some of the protesters present at the office. In response to the incident, Prabhat's family filed a murder case on Wednesday night, with the FIR registered against unknown persons.

The police have stated that further action will be taken once more facts come to light. Police officers reported that no visible injury marks were found on Prabhat's body.

"No force was used on the protesters," the police clarified, adding that the post-mortem report indicated Prabhat's death was due to a heart attack. It is still too early to draw any conclusions, and the police are considering questioning Congress state president Ajay Rai.

Meanwhile, Congress worker Dwarika, who had taken Prabhat to the hospital, was summoned by the police to record his statement. However, some Congress leaders obstructed the police, stating that they would allow the statement only in the presence of state president Ajay Rai. The workers insisted that the police could only record the statement inside the party office, not at the police station. As a result, the Congress workers closed the gate of the party office, preventing the police from conducting their investigation.

Pandey remained unconscious at the party office for nearly two hours before being transported to the civil hospital in a car (Innova) for treatment. Doctors there confirmed his death. The caretaker's statement will also be recorded, and some CCTV footage has been collected for further analysis.

Remarks on Ambedkar expose BJP's 'anti-democratic mindset': Akhilesh

Lucknow (PTI): Samajwadi Party president Akhilesh Yadav on Thursday accused the BJP of undermining BR Ambedkar and the values enshrined in the country's Constitution that he helped frame.

Shah should take back his words: Mayawati

Lucknow (PNS): BSP president Mayawati on Thursday said Union Home Minister Amit Shah should take back his recent remark on B R Ambedkar, and alleged that it has harmed the Dalit icon's dignity and offended his followers.

The former Uttar Pradesh chief minister's reaction came even as the BJP and the opposition parties at the Centre locked horns over Shah's remark made earlier this week in the Rajya Sabha.

The BSP is aligned with neither the BJP-led National Democratic Alliance (NDA) nor the INDIA bloc, which comprises the Congress, Samajwadi Party and other opposition factions.

"The words used by the BJP's Amit Shah in Parliament about the original architect of the Indian Constitution and the revered God and Messiah of Dalits and other neglected classes, Param Pujya Babasaheb Dr Bhimrao Ambedkar, have greatly harmed Babasaheb's dignity," Mayawati said at a select press

conference here.

"Our party believes that this has insulted him in a way, due to which there is tremendous anger and resentment among his followers in the whole country and I would say that he should take back these words soon and also repent for this. Otherwise, his followers will never be able to forget this incident nor will they ever be able to forgive him," the BSP chief added.

Mayawati also slammed the Congress, accusing it of not giving due respect to Ambedkar in the past.

"Ambedkar's followers have not yet been able to forget the innumerable misdeeds of the Congress party against Babasaheb. They are never going to forgive the Congress party, no matter how much it changes its style and conduct etc," she added.

Mayawati alleged that after Ambedkar's death, the Congress worked to remove his name and his contributions to the making of the Constitution from the pages of history.

remarked. Yadav alleged that the BJP has failed to address pressing issues such as unemployment and farmers' distress, while simultaneously working to undermine the rights of the backward and marginalised communities.

He also highlighted the party's dissatisfaction with the government's mishandling of economic and industrial issues, asking, "Despite their tall claims, when will Uttar Pradesh actually become an 'Uttam Pradesh'?"

He further accused the BJP of misusing government machinery for political gains, referencing raids in Sambhal where officials allegedly harassed local residents and even MPs.

"Instead of targeting the poor and the powerless, the government should investigate BJP leaders involved in power theft. Those big corporate raids? Are they connected to the BJP?" Yadav

alleged.

The SP meeting also reiterated the party's commitment to the PDA (Backward Classes, Dalits, and Minorities) coalition. "Babasaheb's Constitution is the backbone of the PDA, and BJP's disdain for it is clear in their policies and actions," Yadav asserted.

The SP's legislative members expressed concern over attempts to dismantle the reservation system, describing it as a "conspiracy against social justice."

"It's time to hold the BJP accountable for its failure to provide jobs, double farmers' income, and alleviate inflation," he said, emphasising that the fight to protect democracy and the Constitution continues. Earlier in the day, Yadav alleged that the BJP and its leaders harbour animosity toward B R Ambedkar and the Constitution.

Dedicated mobile app for better coordination, crowd mgmt

MAHA KUMBH
PNS ■ MAHAKUMBH NAGAR

A dedicated mobile app is being developed to address challenges like crowd management and quick response in emergencies faced by police personnel during the Maha Kumbh-2025, officials said here on Thursday.

The 'Mahakumbh Mela 2025 Police' app aims to enhance the efficiency, coordination, and responsiveness of the police force during the mega religious event, which is expected to attract crores of visitors, they said. With features like real-time communication, incident reporting, and status updates, the app will serve as a centralised platform for seamless coordination among police officers of all ranks.

The app will also provide comprehensive information about the Mela ground, including detailed routes, key landmarks, and contact details of police officers. Designed with a focus on crowd management, it will also facilitate quick response capabilities in emergencies, the officials said. This cutting-edge tool will play a pivotal role in ensuring public safety, maintaining law and order, and streamlining emergency response efforts, further solidifying the event's digital transformation, they said.

The app is designed to streamline operations, enhance coordination, and equip police personnel with essential tools for managing the massive Maha Kumbh event which will take place from January 13 (Pausa Poonima) to February 26 (Maha Shivratri) at Prayagraj. Senior Superintendent of Police

Sangam boatmen fares hiked by 50 per cent

Mahakumbh Nagar (PNS): Ahead of the Maha Kumbh, scheduled to take place on the banks of the Triveni in January 2025, there is good news for the boatmen of Sangam.

The Kumbh Mela Administration has approved a 50 per cent increase in their fares.

According to ADM, Maha Kumbh Mela, Vivek Chaturvedi, this decision follows prolonged demands from the boatmen and a fruitful discussion between the Prayagraj District Boatmen Association and the Mela administration. Welcoming the move, Pappu Lal Nishad, president of the Prayagraj District Boatmen Association, emphasised that boat fares had remained unchanged for years, despite rising inflation.

He praised the administration's decision as a significant step in favour of the boatmen's welfare.

Following the fare hike, strict measures will be implemented to ensure that devotees are not overcharged. A revised list of boat fares is being prepared to maintain transparency, and it

will be prominently displayed at all ghats and parking areas, according to the ADM.

Meanwhile, the administration has also restricted vehicle movement for devotees' safety. While motorboats remain prohibited, traditional boats can operate even on major bathing festival days.

Given the large crowds expected to gather at Triveni for holy dips during the Maha Kumbh, ensuring the safety of devotees is a top priority of the government.

SDM, Maha Kumbh Mela, Abhinav Pathak stated that decisions regarding boat operations during festivals will be based on weather and crowd conditions.

He added, "Currently, 1,455 boats are in operation at Sangam, but this number is expected to exceed 4,000 during Maha Kumbh as boats from neighbouring districts arrive. All boats will undergo safety inspections before being issued licences, and life jackets will be provided to boatmen. Additionally, every boatman will receive insurance coverage of Rs 2 lakh."

AIIMS head pledges support for Gorakhnath Medical College

Gorakhpur (PNS): The Director of All India Institute of Medical Sciences (AIIMS) Bhopal and Acting Director of AIIMS, Gorakhpur, Prof Ajay Singh visited and inspected Mahayogi Gorakhnath University and Arogyadham in Gorakhpur on Thursday.

Describing the facilities at Guru Gorakhnath Medical College Hospital and Research Centre (Gorakhnath Medical College) as 'excellent', Prof Singh stated that AIIMS, Bhopal and Gorakhpur, will collaborate with the college to provide top medical care to patients in Purvanchal.

The director emphasised that collaborating with the university would lead to significant achievements.

Prof Singh announced that AIIMS, Bhopal and Gorakhpur, will provide live ICU services to Gorakhnath Medical College, adding that with the combined efforts of AIIMS Bhopal, Gorakhpur, and the college's hospital, even better patient care will be delivered.

Prof Singh announced that

Mahakumbh begins and will be pre-installed on every policeman's mobile device. The process for selecting an agency to develop the app is currently underway.

Its integration with the Bhashini app will enable effective interaction with citizens speaking diverse languages, the officials said.

AIIMS, Bhopal and Gorakhpur, will soon provide training in new techniques to the medical, nursing, and paramedical staff, as well as students of Gorakhnath Medical College.

Vice-Chancellor of Mahayogi Gorakhnath University Dr Surinder Singh informed Prof Singh that Medanta Hospital is also linked to Gorakhnath Medical College for live ICU services. Critical patient treatment has already begun, and a 24-hour surgery emergency service is operational.

UP assembly adjourned sine die amid uproar

PNS ■ LUCKNOW

The Uttar Pradesh legislative assembly was adjourned sine die on the fourth day of its winter session on Thursday following a major uproar over Union Home Minister Amit Shah's recent remark in the Rajya Sabha on Dr BR Ambedkar.

The session, which was scheduled to run throughout the day, lasted only for one hour and nine minutes due to the uproar caused by Samajwadi Party (SP) MLAs. As soon as the House convened, SP MLAs stormed the Well, raising slogans and holding placards in protest against Shah's remark.

Despite initial efforts to restore order, Speaker Satish Mahana could not convince the agitated members to calm down.

Amid the chaos, the supplementary budget was passed without any discussion.

Speaker Mahana repeatedly called on the opposition members to speak but none took the floor. After several failed attempts to restore order, he adjourned the assembly sine die, bringing the winter session that

began on Monday to an abrupt end.

Meanwhile, the legislative council was also adjourned sine die on Thursday.

The opposition benches raised questions about the government's decision to present a supplementary budget, despite a significant portion of the previously sanctioned funds remaining unused.

Following the lunch break, the principal secretary, legislative council, presented several bills that were passed by the UP assembly. These included the Uttar Pradesh Goods and Services Tax (Amendment) Bill, 2024, the Uttar Pradesh District Planning Committee (Amendment) Bill, 2024, the Uttar Pradesh Labour Welfare Fund (Amendment) Bill, 2024, and several amendments to the Uttar Pradesh Private Universities Bill, covering the 5th, 6th, 7th, and 8th amendments.

During the general discussion on the second supplementary grants for the financial year 2024-2025, Leader of Opposition Lal Bihari Yadav criticised the government.

इंडियन बैंक Indian Bank

Zonal Office Lucknow, New Building, 2nd Floor, Hazratganj, Lucknow-226001, Ph. 0522-2286272, 2287283, Fax: 0522-2288033, E-mail id: zolucknow@indianbank.co.in

DEMAND NOTICE

NOTICE U/S 13 (2) of the Securitisation and Reconstruction of Financial Assets and Enforcement of Security Interest Act 2002

Whereas the undersigned being the Authorized officer of Indian Bank (erstwhile Allahabad Bank) Issued Demand Notices under Section 13 (2) of SARFAESI ACT 2002 to the Borrower/s/Guarantor/s herein below mentioned. Consequent upon the dispatch of such Notices through Post And returned Bank undelivered from the Borrower/s/Guarantor/s addresses. Through this Publication they are hereby called upon to repay the amount within 60 days from the date of publication of said notice failing which the bank will take the possession of the immovable and movable property will sell it through the process in exercise of powers conferred under section 13(12) read with rule 8 & 9 of the security interest (Enforcement) Rules 2002.

Sl. No.	Name & Address of the Borrower(s)/ Guarantor(s)/Date of Demand Notice	Outstanding Amount/ Date of NPA	Description of the Property
Branch : Jankipuram Branch			
1.	M/s Royal Constructions (Borrower), Registered Office: 5, Durgapuram Colony, Swasthya Vihar, Raibareilly Road, Lucknow	Rs. 13,42,164.36 as on 11.12.2024 + interest & other charges	(a). All part and parcel of the property consisting of Land and building at house at SS-298, Sector G, LDA Colony, Kanpur Road, Tehsil and District, Lucknow measuring 27 square meter (290.52 square feet) in the name of Sri. Atar Singh S/o Dhanantar (Guarantor and Mortgagee) Sale deed Registered in Book No. 1, Jld No.: 13543 on Pages No. 51 to 78 at serial no. 378, dated 14/01/2005 with SR-IV, Lucknow.
2.	Mr. Nam Narayan Dwivedi (Borrower and Guarantor), Address: 5, Durgapuram Colony, Swasthya Vihar, Raibareilly Road, Lucknow	Date of NPA: 10.12.2024	Boundaries: East- House No. 315, West- Road 8 feet wide, North- SS Type House, South- House No. 299
3.	Mr. Atar Singh S/o Shanantar Singh Narayan Tiwari (Guarantor and Mortgagee), Address: SS-298, Sector G, LDA Colony, Kanpur Road Lucknow	Date of Demand Notice: 11.12.2024	(b). All part and parcel of hypothecation of entire current assets of the firm including stock/inventory, Book debts and other movable assets of the firm.

Date: 20.12.2024 Place: Lucknow INDIAN BANK (erstwhile Allahabad Bank)

HDFC BANK BRANCH OFFICE : Hindustan Times House, 2nd Floor, 25-Ashok Marg, Lucknow-226001 Ph : 0522-4272777, 6673726, Fax: 0522-220510
CIN : L65920MH1994PLC080618 Website : www.hdfcbank.com

HDFC Bank Limited **E-AUCTION SALE NOTICE**

The Authorised Officer **HDFC Bank Limited** (erstwhile HDFC Limited having amalgamated with HDFC Bank Limited by virtue of a Scheme of Amalgamation approved by Hon'ble NCLT Mumbai vide order dated 17th March 2023) (HDFC) issues E-Auction Sale Notice for Sale of Immovable Assets under the Securitisation and Reconstruction of Financial Assets and Enforcement of Security Interest Act, 2002 read with proviso to Rule 9 (1) of the Security Interest (Enforcement) Rules, 2002.

Notice is hereby given to the public in general and in particular to the Borrower (s) and Guarantor (s) indicated in Column (A) that the below described immovable property(ies) describe in Column (C) mortgaged/charged to the Secured Creditor, the constructive / physical possession of which has been taken as described in column (D) by the Authorised Officer of HDFC Bank Limited Secured Creditor, will be sold on "As is where is", "As is what is", and "Whatever there is" as per the details mentioned below :

Notice is hereby given to Borrower / Mortgagee(s) / legal heirs, legal representatives (whether known or unknown), executor(s), administrator(s), successor(s) and assign(s) of the respective Borrower(s) / Mortgagee(s) / legal heirs, legal representatives (whether known or unknown), executor(s), administrator(s), successor(s) and assign(s) of the respective Borrower(s) / Mortgagee(s) (since deceased), as the case may be, indicated in Column (A) under proviso to Rule 9(1) of the Security Interest (Enforcement) Rules 2002.

For detailed terms and conditions of the sale, please refer to the link provided in HDFC Bank Limited Secured Creditor's website i.e. www.hdfcbank.com

Sl. No.	(A) Name(s) of Borrower(s)/ Mortgagee(s)/ Guarantor(s)/ Legal Heirs and Legal Representatives (whether known or unknown) Executor(s), Administrator(s), Successor(s) and Assign(s) of the respective Borrower(s) / Mortgagee(s) / Guarantor(s) (since deceased), as the case may be.	(B) Outstanding dues to be recovered (Secured Debt) (Rs.)	(C) Description of the Immovable Property / Secured Asset (1 Sq. Mtr. is equivalent to 10.76 Sq.Ft.)	(D) Type of Possession	(E) Reserve Price (Rs.)	(F) Earnest money deposit (Rs.) Bid Increment amount (Rs.)	(G) Date of Auction and time	(H) Date of Inspection of Secured Asset	(I) Last Date of Submission of Bids
1.	Smt. Sarla Verma Dr. Ram Sagar	Rs. 2,10,604/- due as on 31 Dec. 2007	Plot No. 20, Scheme Situated at Ujiriyon, Khasra Nos. 2675, 2707, 2704, 2709 Minjumla, Pargana & Tehsil Lucknow, Boundaries: E: Rasta 25 Ft., W: Plot Samiti, N: Plot Samiti, S: Plot Samiti, Area-371.74 Sq. Mtr.	Physical	Rs. 85,00,000/-	Rs. 8,50,000/- Rs. 5,000/-	06.01.2025 (10.30 AM to 11.30 AM)	27.12.2024 11.00 AM	03.01.202 10.30 to 5.30 PM
2.	Mohd. Rafiq	Rs. 71,091,62/- due as on 30 Nov. 2013	Arazi Situated at Khasra No. 741, Bhanwara, Lucknow Boundaries: E: Land Society, W: Land Society, N: Land Others: S: Road, Area - 250.92 Sq. Mtr.	Physical	Rs. 37,00,000/-	Rs. 3,70,000/- Rs. 5,000/-	06.01.2025 (10.30 AM to 11.30 AM)	27.12.2024 11.00 AM	03.01.202 10.30 to 5.30 PM

*together with further interest as applicable, incidental expenses, costs, charges etc. incurred up to the date of payment and / or realisation thereof.

Disclosure of Encumbrances/Claims : To the best of knowledge and information of the Authorized Officer of HDFC Bank Limited, there are no encumbrances in respect of the above immovable properties / Secured Assets.

For any assistance related to inspection of the property, or for obtaining the E-Auction Bid document and for any other queries, please get in touch with concerned person of our Authorise Sales & amp ; eAuction Partner M/s. NexXen Solutions Private Limited at 9310029933 or Mr. Indra Bahadur Singh, Authorised Officer of HDFC Bank Limited through Mobile No 9670116677 or Mr. Mukesh Tripathi, Mobile No. 9956399777.

CAUTION NOTE : E-Bidders at large are hereby informed that HDFC Bank Ltd. and its Authorised Officer does not deal in case transaction with respect to Immovable Property mentioned in the Auction sale notice. The name and contact details of the agency / broker, if any, authorised by HDFC Bank Limited to deal with sale of Immovable property can be obtained only from the office HDFC Bank Limited at the address mentioned above.

Date : 20.12.2024
Place: Lucknow

For HDFC Bank Limited
Authorised Office

Guv emphasises girls' education

CORRESPONDENT ■ MIRZAPUR

Governor Anandiben Patel while addressing a public meeting in Barahi village under Chunar tehsil on Thursday exhorted women to be active to bring a positive attitude in the society. Addressing the programme organised under the aegis of Green Army, she praised the goal of women who came forward to strengthen the society. She gave the example of Smart Parent's Club (SPC) active in

Gujarat which has done a lot of work in the field of social reforms. She appealed to the women to come forward against the manufacturing and sale of liquor. Emphasising on girls' education, she made it clear that without empowerment of women the progress of the nation was not possible. She said the role of Aanganwadi worker was very important and they should help in making the entire society aware about cleanliness as

well as environment. She advised the workers to keep mirror, comb, towel, nail cutter and other things in order to dress the kids of their centres properly. In the programme she distributed the certificates and items to beneficiaries of different schemes. Before her address she was welcomed by Uttar Pradesh Minister of Technical Education, Consumer Protection, Weights and Measures Ashish Patel and officials.

KDA gets land worth around ₹316 cr registered in its name

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ KANPUR

The Kanpur Development Authority (KDA) got 8,7342 hectares of land worth around ₹316 crore, hitherto unauthorisedly in possession of farmers, registered in its name in the records of Revenue department on Wednesday. With this the hurdle due to shortage of land in the extension of Jawaharpuram Scheme have been resolved. In the past also, the Kanpur Development Authority had got 15 bighas of land registered

in its name. Under the directives of Vice-Chairman Madan Singh Garbyal, OSD (Zone 2) Dr Ravi Pratap Singh got 8,7342 hectares of land registered in its name by getting the names of farmers fraudulently entered in the records of Revenue department in the current khatauni year. This land situated in villages Panki Gangaganj, Shahpur Mohsanpur, Mohsinpur and Singhpur Kakhar is now registered in the name of Kanpur Development Authority. OSD said efforts were on to identify

such land where, despite the possession of Kanpur Development Authority, farmers and other people had fraudulently got the same registered in their name. The Kanpur Development Authority will get all such land registered in its name by getting their names removed from the revenue department. He said the Kanpur Development Authority will lodge a first information report (FIR) against people who were found again involved in carrying out unauthorised possession on its land.

Liquor salesman looted

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ KANPUR

Car-borne miscreants looted a scanner from a liquor shop salesman in Targaon village under Ghatampur Kotwali police station area late on Wednesday night. The victim immediately informed the shopowner who rushed to the spot and lodged complaint with the police. After lodging an FIR, police launched raids in search of the miscreants whose car has been captured in the CCTV camera installed at a house on the spot. Gyan Singh of Targaon, Ghatampur, in his report, said he is employed as a salesman in a country made liquor shop in the village. On Wednesday night after closing the shop, when he was returning home with the bag containing three days' sale proceeds and a scanner, five car-borne miscreants came from behind and looted his bag. On protest, they also beat him up. Ghatampur inspector Dhananjay Kumar Pandey said he had rushed to the spot and carried out investigation. He claimed that the loot case would be worked out soon. ACP Ranjit Kumar Singh said two police teams had been deputed to work out the case. Meanwhile an illiterate farmer Ram Prasad of Gangpur Chakbada was duped ₹2.51 crore allegedly by a lawyer and his accomplice in Kalyanpur

police station area. On pretext of farmer's land being acquired by KDA, the lawyer got different documents signed by the former and duped him of ₹2.51 crore of compensation by opening a separate bank account. The victim lodged complaint with the police on Thursday. ACP Kalyanpur Abhishek Pandey said cheques worth ₹2.51 crore received from KDA may have been deposited in a separate bank account opened by the lawyer in the name of Ram Prasad and encashed by him. He said a probe was on in the matter. **BODY FOUND:** The body of a teenaged girl, missing for the past two days, was found floating in a well near her house in Tindauli village under Srinagar police area in Mahoba district on Thursday morning. On getting information about the incident police officers along with forensic team rushed to the spot and minutely probed the issue. Her grandfather suspected the killing of his 17-year-old granddaughter. She had suddenly gone missing on December 16 night. On failing to locate her a complaint had been lodged with the Srinagar police on December 17. On Thursday morning her body was found floating in a well near the house. CO Charkhari Ravi Kant Gaud, SHO Shivpal Singh and forensic team reached the spot and carried out investigation.

KVK scientist's advice to farmers

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ VARANASI

On the instructions of Chief Development Officer (CDO) Himanshu Nagpal, Kisan Diwas was organised in Vikas Bhawan Auditorium here on Wednesday. Along with the Agriculture department, many other department officers including from Irrigation, Minor Irrigation, Cooperatives, Fisheries, Horticulture, Tubewell, Animal Husbandry, Krishi Vigyan Kendra (KVK), Silk and UP NEDA, Milk Development Officer, District Lead Bank Manager and farmers of the district participated. Efforts were made by the officials of the departments concerned to connect as many farmers as possible to the schemes by giving information about their respective departments. KVK scientist Dr NK Singh said those farmers who have not sown wheat yet, can select late varieties of wheat and sow it with super seeder and happy seeder till December 31. "Weeds in wheat can be controlled by using BD side chemical. Do top dressing of urea after 48 to 72 hours of spraying BD side", he suggested the farmers. District Agriculture Officer and Assistant Commissioner and Assistant Registrar of Cooperative department informed that sufficient quantity of urea and other phosphatic fertilisers are available in the

district which is being delivered to the committees on priority basis. Also, farmers were expected to use nano urea and nano DAP by spraying method. The district agriculture officer expected from the farmers present that the farmers who want to spray nano urea and nano DAP in their wheat, potato and mustard crops should provide their names, villages, blocks and mobile numbers in the undersigned office so that nano urea and nano DAP can be demonstrated there. The Tubewell department officer informed that a total of 789 government tubewells are installed in the district out of which 12 are closed due to mechanical and eight due to electrical faults, which will be repaired soon. A complaint letter was received from the farmers present to remove various types of defects in tubewell numbers 553, 465 and 171 and it is expected from the officer concerned to immediately get the said government tubewells inspected on the spot and solve the problem as per rules and inform about the action taken. The Irrigation department officer informed that water has arrived in Babatpur canal up to Jaunpur, there is a possibility of water coming in the district within a week. The Animal Husbandry department officer informed that an incentive amount of Rs 10,000 has been fixed for pro-

gressive cattle breeders for high breed indigenous cows such as Gir, Tharparkar, Haryana, Gangatri cows giving milk up to eight to 12 kg per day and Rs 15,000 for giving more than 12 kg of milk. Application form is available at all the veterinary hospitals of the district to get the incentive amount. Farmers can apply by obtaining the application form and the last date of which is December 31. In the meeting, it was told that the National Livestock Mission (NLM) scheme is being run in the district for goat/sheep rearing. Besides free training is given for goat/ heep rearing. The interested farmers can contact the office and get more information. The Fisheries department officer informed that the accident insurance of fish farmers is done by the department. The interested fish farmers can get insurance done. The district agriculture protection officer informed that Beauveria Basiana is available on agricultural protection stores at 75 per cent subsidy and 50 per cent subsidy of sulphosulfuram carbendazim, mancozeb and pendimethylen. Any kind of damage can be avoided by using these chemicals in crops as per rules. The participants expected from all the departments that whatever problems have been raised by farmers they should be resolved immediately as per rules.

Lecture on practical applications of biomechanics in sports

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ VARANASI

The two-day workshop on Electromyographical and Bio-Mechanical Research Activities in Physical Education and Allied Sports (EBMRAPEAS-2024) organised by the Department of Physical Education at Banaras Hindu University (BHU) concluded successfully recently. The workshop aimed to provide a comprehensive understanding of biomechanics and electromyography vital for advancing research in sports science and physical education. The final day commenced with an insightful session on 'Bio-Mechanical Analysis' delivered by Dr Suhel Raza from PPN college, Kanpur. His lecture provided a deep dive into the practical applications of biomechanics in sports, focusing on practical application of motion analysis softwares and how to optimise performance using cutting-edge techniques. Following this the workshop featured a series of online sessions from distinguished experts in the field of sports science. Prof Indu Bora, acting Vice-Chancellor (V-C) of



The concluding function of EBMRAPEAS-2024 at BHU in Varanasi

LNIFE, Prof Dhananjay Shaw from IGIPSS and retired professor Uday Prakash from IMS, BHU joined virtually to discuss various aspects of electromyography and biomechanics, sharing their knowledge and expertise with the participants. The workshop concluded with a certificate distribution ceremony, where participants were recognised for their active engagement and contribution. The successful completion of the event was a testament to the hard work and coordination of the organising team, led by Prof Vikram Singh, Head of the Department of Physical Education, BHU and supported by Prof T Onima Reddy (organising secretary) and Dr Pradeep Singh Chahar (treasurer). Faculty members,

including Prof Sushma Ghildyal, Prof BC Kapri, Prof Rajiv Vyas, Dr Akhil Mehrotra, Dr Binayak Kumar Dubey, Dr Krishnakant, Dr Deepak Kumar Dogra, Dr Abhishek Verma, and Dr Shailesh Kumar marked their esteemed presence. The EBMRAPEAS-2024 was an enriching experience that bridged the gap between academic research and its real-world applications in sports science, leaving participants with valuable insights and practical skills to apply in their respective fields. The event was supported by SRIC BHU and sponsored by Pukhya Pvt Ltd (Delhi) and Khel Sahitya Kendra. **AWARDED:** Aashruti Pathania, a first year PhD student of Department of Surgical Oncology, Institute of Medical Sciences, Banaras Hindu University (IMS-BHU) under the guidance of Prof Manoj Pandey, has been awarded the American Psycho Oncology Society (APOS) Early Career Travel Award (an award for early career professionals pursuing education and with less than 10 years of experience in the field) to attend and present at the annual conference of APOS scheduled to be held at Pittsburgh, USA from March 4-7, 2025. This award provides financial assistance of \$500 along with complementary full waiver of the registration fees for the conference (approx \$300). This award is given to one applicant every year and Pathania has been granted the award for 2025 for her work on psychosexual problems in cancer patients. This award is not just an honorary title but also boosts the career of the young applicant by providing space for young minds to flourish and grow and be a part of an extremely distinguished group of scholars and academics in the field. She is the second candidate of Prof Pandey to get this award.

Rheumatoid arthritis causes more trouble in winter: CMO

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ VARANASI

Chief Medical Officer (CMO) Dr Sandeep Chaudhary said some health problems start increasing in the winter season and arthritis is the main among them. "In this too, rheumatoid arthritis causes more trouble in winter. Due to reduced blood circulation in the cold season, problems like swelling, pain and stiffness start occurring. Also, muscle strain increases. Especially women who often work in cold water complain of arthritis and back pain so be cautious and contact your nearest government hospital immediately", he said. In charge Medical Officer Dr NK Verma said arthritis pain starts increasing in winter because, in the cold, the stretch and swelling in the joints of the body increases. "Apart from this, due to less movement in winter, stiffness in joints starts increasing. Therefore, to avoid the cold, wear warm clothes and take a bath with hot water so that blood circulation improves and muscles also get relief. Use sweaters, shawls, gloves and mufflers. Light exercises and yoga help in controlling the symptoms of arthritis. It would be better to go for a morning walk only after the

atmosphere becomes warm", he suggested. Orthopedic specialist Dr Praveen Kumar said if the pain in the joints persists for more than 12 weeks, then do not ignore it. These can be the initial symptoms of arthritis. These days 70 to 80 patients are coming to the OPD of orthopaedics in the Urban Community Health Centre Durgakund. Out of these, 20 to 25 patients suffer from arthritis and joint pain. Whereas on normal days this number remains between 10 to 12. In the month of November, about 2,086 patients were admitted to the OPD, he said.

He further said people have pain in the joints of toes and fingers, knees and heels etc. "This type of problem is usually seen with increasing age. Usually the cause of joint pain is the lack of calcium in the body because due to calcium deficiency the bones start weakening. But not only calcium, arthritis can also be a major cause of joint pain and pain. In this, crystals start forming in the joints of people, nerves and muscles get swollen, due to which severe pain is seen. Therefore, do not ignore the disease and get it treated immediately", he advised.

Conference on endometriosis begins today

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ VARANASI

The Endometriosis Society of India (ESI) is all set to host the first-ever national conference on endometriosis in Varanasi from December 20 to 22. This three-day event will bring together leading gynaecologists, endometriosis specialists, researchers, and healthcare professionals to engage in scientific discussions and create social awareness about this often-overlooked condition affecting adolescent girls and

women. Giving this information while addressing a press conference at Banaras Hindu University (BHU) here on Wednesday, organising chairpersons Dr Sudha Singh and Dr Neelam Ohri, organising secretary Dr Sangeta Rai and Dr Shikha Sachan informed that the conference will be inaugurated by chief guest and Uttar Pradesh Minister of State (Independent Charge) for AYUSH Dr Dayashankar Mishra 'Dayalu' while the special

guest will be Rajya Sabha MP Seema Dwivedi. They said that this landmark event underscores the importance of addressing endometriosis, which often goes undiagnosed or misunderstood, leading to significant physical and emotional challenges for those affected. "By uniting medical experts and promoting research, the conference seeks to improve diagnosis, treatment, and awareness of endometriosis in India", they said.

GOLD MEDAL AWARD: Dr Mayuri Pandey, Assistant Professor at Department of Geology, Institute of Science, BHU, has been awarded the much-coveted late Dr SC Srivastava Gold Medal-2024 for excellent contribution in geochemistry for her research in understanding of sub-ice geology, oceanic sediment provenance, and paleoclimatic conditions with contributions to numerous high-impact publications in journals.

Hindi workshop on e-office conducted at CORE



PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ PRAYAGRAJ

A Hindi workshop on e-office was organised in Central Organisation for Railway Electrification (CORE) here on Thursday to train officers and employees with the aim of moving the organisation towards complete digitalization in compliance with the guidelines of the Railway Board. Addressing the officers and employees speaker, Field

Engineer, Rail-Tel Office, Prayagraj, Tahira, said through e-office we can easily do government work in both Hindi and English languages in less time and without paper. During the practice session, all doubts related to e-office of the officers and employees were resolved. Deputy Chief Official Language Officer Kalyan Singh, who was chairing the workshop, motivated to work on e-office and emphasised on paperless working style. He said if necessary a workshop will be organised again on this subject. A large number of employees from all the departments concerned, including Senior Law Officer Sandeep Narayan Srivastava, AMM Mrudul Srivastava of the headquarters were present in the workshop which was conducted by office superintendent Brijendra Singh.

Man dies in road accident

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ PRAYAGRAJ

A 45-year-old man died in a road accident near Areeva Company in Naini of Prayagraj here on Thursday. Due to the accident a huge crowd of people gathered on the road for an hour. On getting information police reached the spot and took the body in their possession and sent it for post-mortem examination after Panchnama. Rajendra Prasad Prajapati of Chak Abhayram village of Naini was going to the market on a bicycle when a truck hit

him from behind as a result of which he died on the spot. Naini police station in charge Vaibhav Singh said further action is being taken by sending the body for post-mortem. **DEFRAUDED:** Surya Prakash Mishra, posted as an administrative officer in the regional office of Uttar Pradesh Madhyamik Shiksha Parishad (UPMSP) was defrauded of ₹18 lakh by cyber thugs. The fraudsters duped him of ₹18 lakh by luring him to invest in crypto currency. He informed the cyber police and registered a case in this connection.

'SWACHHATA HI SEVA-2024' CAMPAIGN CONCLUDES

BLW GM highlights harmful effects of using plastic



General Manager NP Singh presenting a memento to RPF team for its contributions in 'Swachhata Hi Seva-2024' campaign at BLW in Varanasi on Thursday.

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ VARANASI

The 'Swachhata Hi Seva-2024' campaign concluded in Banaras Locomotive Works (BLW) here on Thursday with a grand ceremony where departments, employees, and teams who made outstanding contributions to cleanliness were honoured. The chief guest and General Manager (GM) Narendra Pal Singh stated, "Cleanliness is not just a habit but a lifestyle. The efforts made by BLW have turned this into a social movement. The enthusiasm and dedication with which all departments have contributed to the success of this campaign are commendable." Singh emphasised the harmful effects of plastic usage, stating, "While plastic may seem con-

venient due to its handling, cost-effectiveness and utility, it is polluting the entire environment. Therefore, minimise the use of plastic and adopt the habit of carrying cloth bags", he appealed. For their exceptional contributions throughout the campaign, the GM honoured the Railway Protection Force (RPF) for their support, the Public Relations Department for outstanding coverage in media and the Safety department for effective planning, coordination, monitoring and compliance. During the event, the general manager interacted with children who were awarded in the painting competition. He praised their extraordinary imagination and creativity and presented them with shields as a token of appreciation. For

mega 'shramdaan', the Civil department was awarded while for clean workshops, first prize was won by Truck Machine Shop, followed by Loco Frame Shop and Ward Number 32 (Paint & Acid Depot). In clean offices, Marketing department won the first place while Production Control Office and Vigilance Department second and third respectively. During the event, a video clip created by the Public Relations department showcasing the campaign highlights was also presented. Principal Chief Mechanical Engineer (PCME) Subroto Nath, in his address, highlighted the importance of cleanliness and lauded the efforts of all departments. Chief Safety Officer (CSO) SB Patel

encouraged the winners and participants, reiterating BLW's commitment to the 'Swachh Bharat Mission'. The vote of thanks was proposed by Safety Officer Anup Singh Vats.

BLW to be awarded 'Railway Minister Rajbhasha Shield' The Banaras Locomotive Works (BLW) will be awarded the prestigious 'Railway Minister Rajbhasha Shield' by the Ministry of Railways for its commitment and outstanding contribution in the promotion of Hindi language. Under the base year 2023, the Banaras Locomotive Works has done exemplary work in the use and promotion of official language Hindi. For this achievement 'Railway Minister Rajbhasha Shield' and a cash prize of ₹14,000 will be awarded as the first prize. The formal distribution ceremony of this award will be held on December 30 in the Conference Hall of Rail Bhavan, New Delhi. This achievement underlines the hard work of BLW officers and employees and their dedication towards Hindi. This proud moment for BLW not only reflects the institute's commitment towards the Rajbhasha Policy but will also become a source of inspiration for other institutes. This honour will encourage the use of Hindi even more and BLW's name will be glorified at the national level.

Kanpur girls excel in boxing, felicitated



The girls' boxing team was felicitated by District Magistrate Rakesh Kumar Singh on Thursday.

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ KANPUR

District Magistrate Rakesh Kumar Singh felicitated the girls who emerged champions in state-level boxing championship held in Prayagraj at a function organised at new auditorium, Sarsaiya Ghat, here on Thursday. They also did the district proud by clinching the title of best team. The event was jointly organised by the Sports Directorate, Uttar Pradesh, Lucknow and Boxing Association in Prayagraj from December 16 to 18. Kanpur girls won four gold, one silver and two bronze medals to emerge champions. **GIRL KILLED AS TRACTOR HITS BIKE:** A girl was killed while her brother and elder sister were injured when an uncontrolled tractor hit their bike near Harbaspur village under Vidhnu police station area on Wednesday afternoon. On getting information police rushed to the spot and got the injured admitted to the community health centre

(CHC) from where after first aid, they were discharged. After the incident the tractor driver escaped by leaving his vehicle on the spot. The father-in-law of mason Santosh of Pal Colony, Shashtri Nagar, had died in Mahoba. On Wednesday, his son Shivam was going to attend 'teharvi' of maternal grandfather along with both sisters Shivani and Kalpana (13). On the way the speeding tractor-trolley hit them from behind near Harbaspur village on Sagar highway. As a result Shivam and Shivani fell on the side of the highway while Kalpana sustained serious injuries after falling in the middle of the highway. Police sent the injured to the Vidhnu CHC from where on their way to LLR (Hallet) hospital, Kalpana succumbed to her injuries. Vidhnu Inspector Jitendra Pratap Singh said after impounding the tractor, the body has been sent for autopsy. Raids are being conducted in search of the tractor driver, he added.

SC questions WB on creating excess posts in teachers recruitment scam

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

The Supreme Court on Thursday questioned the West Bengal Government why it had created supernumerary posts of teachers and non-teaching staffs instead of weeding out persons who were allegedly appointed illegally. "Why did you create supernumerary posts? What was the purpose of creating that?" a bench comprising Chief Justice Sanjiv Khanna and Justice Sanjay Kumar asked the West Bengal counsel.

Senior advocate Rakesh Dwivedi, appearing for the West Bengal Government, informed the bench about a report by committee appointed for a thorough investigation into the selection process. The bench observed the committee's report and noted some irregularities. Dwivedi argued the committee found some irregularities but not as extensive as the CBI's report.

"So, they found there were irregularities committed. So, in order to deal with that situation, instead of weeding out the persons who have been appointed illegally, you say,

okay create supernumerary posts?" asked the bench. "Mr Dwivedi, tell me one thing, if you find the irregularity committed, will you not throw them out first?" the CJI asked further.

Dwivedi said the order had specifically mentioned it was for the appointment from the wait-listed candidates. "Correct. The reason is this, that you don't want to throw out the tainted candidates," the CJI said.

The top court was hearing arguments on a batch of pleas challenging the Calcutta High Court's April 22 decision invalidating the appointment of 25,753 teachers and non-teaching staff in state-run and state-aided schools of West Bengal. On May 7, the apex court stayed the high court's order over the appointments made by the state's School Service Commission (SSC). The top court, however, permitted the CBI to continue with its probe in the matter.

In its May 7 order, the apex court noted that on May 19, 2022, the state government issued an order creating 6,861 supernumerary posts of teachers and non-teaching staff for



absorbing the wait-listed candidates. The top court further noted it was directed that appointment letters to such wait-listed candidates should be issued in terms of the recommendation of the SSC subject to the outcome of the pending litigation before the high court.

During the hearing on Thursday, the bench asked, "Is the state of West Bengal supporting the proposition that it is not possible to segregate the tainted from the untainted?" Dwivedi however said the state was supporting the segregation. He argued the division bench of the high court "went too far ahead" and passed a "blanket

Supreme Court asked the CBI's counsel whether the probe agency was able to ascertain the date on which the OMR data was captured. "One thing is very strange that people who are not even recommended and who have not qualified... They were issued letters," the bench observed, "it was a very serious thing". During the day-long hearing, the bench heard submissions from senior advocates Kapil Sibal, Abhishek Manu Singhvi, Shyam Divan, Jaideep Gupta, Sanjay Hegde and others. The hearing would continue in January, 2025.

On May 7, the apex court had said the CBI's investigation, which was ordered by the High Court, would continue but no coercive steps would be taken. The top court, however, had made it clear that the teachers and non-teaching staff of the state, whose appointments were cancelled by the high court, will have to refund the salaries and other emoluments if their recruitment was found illegal. Over 23 lakh candidates had appeared for the state level selection test-2016 for 24,640 vacant posts. A total of 25,753 appointment letters were issued against 24,640 vacancies.

CBSE busts 29 dummy schools enrolling non-attending students

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

The Central Board of Secondary Education (CBSE) conducted a series of surprise inspections at 29 schools in Delhi, Bengaluru, Varanasi, Bihar, Gujarat and Chhattisgarh to check enrolment of 'dummy' students, officials said on Thursday. According to CBSE Secretary Himanshu Gupta, a total of 29 teams, comprising a CBSE officer and a principal from an affiliated school, conducted the inspections.

"Majority of the inspected schools were found to have violated the Board's Affiliation Bye-Laws by enrolling stu-

dents beyond their actual attendance records, effectively creating 'non-attending' enrolments. Additionally, schools were found to be flouting infrastructural norms of the board," Gupta said.

"CBSE has taken these violations seriously and is in the process of issuing show-cause notices to the schools found in breach of regulations. The Board is also considering legal action against the defaulting institutions," he added. The inspections were conducted on Wednesday and Thursday. Eighteen of the violating schools are in the national capital, while there are three in Varanasi, two each in Bengaluru, Patna, Ahmedabad,

Bilaspur, and Chhattisgarh. Scores of students preparing for engineering and medical entrance exams prefer to take admission to dummy schools so that they can focus solely on their preparations for the competitive exams. They do not attend classes and straight-away appear in the board examinations. Aspirants also choose dummy schools keeping in mind the quota in medical and engineering institutes available for the students from certain states. For example, the candidates who have completed classes 11 and 12 in Delhi are considered for admission to the medical colleges of the national capital under the Delhi State Quota.



Kejriwal Questions Nitish, Naidu on Amit Shah's Ambedkar Remarks

STAFF REPORTER ■ NEW DELHI

The Aam Aadmi Party (AAP) national convenor and former Delhi Chief Minister Arvind Kejriwal on Thursday wrote to key allies of the BJP, Bihar Chief Minister Nitish Kumar and Andhra Chief Minister Chandrababu Naidu, questioning their stance on home minister Amit Shah's recent remarks about architect of Constitution, Dr BR Ambedkar.

In a post on X in Hindi, Kejriwal said, "The people of the country want to ask Honorable Nitish Ji and Chandrababu Naidu Ji - 'Do you support the insult of

Baba Saheb done by Amit Shah Ji?" In his letter to Naidu and Kumar, Kejriwal voiced his concern over Shah's statement in Parliament over Ambedkar. "Recently in Parliament, a statement made by the home minister of the country, Amit Shah Ji, regarding Babasaheb has left the entire nation stunned," he wrote.

AAP supremo referred to Shah's remark, which claimed that "chanting Ambedkar-Ambedkar has become a fashion these days," as deeply disrespectful. He said that it is "not only disrespectful but also reveals the BJP's perspective towards Babasaheb and our Constitution."

He further added, "Babasaheb Ambedkar was honoured with a 'Doctor of Laws' degree by Columbia University, he authored the Indian Constitution, and he championed equal rights for the most marginalised sections of society—how did the BJP have the audacity to make such a comment about him?"

"This has hurt the sentiments of millions of people across the country. Instead of apologising for his statement, Amit Shah Ji justified it. The Prime Minister publicly supported Amit Shah Ji's remark, which added insult to injury," former Delhi CM said in his letter.

MHA reimposed Protected Area Permit in Manipur

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ IMPHAL

The Union Ministry of Home Affairs has reimposed the Protected Area Permit in Manipur in view of security concerns arising out of influx from neighbouring countries, a state government statement said.

The statement issued late on Wednesday night said, "With this reimposition, the movement of foreigners visiting Manipur will be closely monitored, and they are required to obtain the necessary Protected Area Permit (PAP) in accordance with the Foreigners (Protected Areas) Order, 1958. It said the Centre has reimposed the Protected Area Permit in Manipur, Nagaland and Mizoram. The statement also said that the state government has taken notice of the warning issued by an organisation which asked Chief Minister N Biren Singh not to travel to Senapati district to attend a cultural programme by passing through Kangpokpi district by road.

It stated "Upon investigation, it has been found that no such organization (Kuki Zo Council) exists in Manipur. The origin and authenticity of this group are highly questionable." The statement said that police are actively looking into this matter and an FIR will be lodged to ascertain the true nature and intent behind such misleading activities.

The government also advised the people "to exercise caution and not to pay heed to statements or claims from organisations of dubious origins, which have been surfacing recently with the apparent intention of creating confusion and unrest."

Impeachment notice against Dhankhar rejected by RS deputy chair Harivansh

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

Rajya Sabha Deputy Chairman Harivansh on Thursday dismissed the impeachment notice given by the Opposition seeking the removal of Vice President Jagdeep Dhankhar while ruling it as an act of impropriety, being severely flawed and drawn in haste to mar his reputation.

In his ruling, which was tabled in the House by Rajya Sabha secretary general P C Mody, the deputy chairman said the impeachment notice is part of a design to denigrate the nation's constitutional institutions and malign the incumbent Vice President, the sources said. Deputy chairman Harivansh was entrusted to deal with the notice after Chairman Dhankhar recused himself from it.

At least 60 opposition members had signed the notice for removal of Dhankhar from his post on December 10, alleging that they did not have trust in him and that he was "biased". The notice was moved by the opposition members under Article 67(b) of the Constitution as intention of a no-confidence motion against the Vice President of India. The deputy chairman ruled that the gravity of this "personally targeted" notice which is bereft of facts and aimed at securing publicity. He also held that the notice was a "misadventure" in "deliberate trivialising and demeaning" of the high constitutional office of

the Vice President of the largest democracy. Worrisomely for the prestige of Parliament and its members, the notice is replete with assertions only to malign the incumbent Vice President, the deputy chairman ruled, the sources added.

The deputy chairman in his ruling said the notice invoked Article 67(b) peremptorily mandates at least 14 days' prior notice for any resolution contemplating the Vice President's removal.

Thus the December 10, 2024 notice of intention could permit such a resolution only after December 24, 2024, he noted, adding that the current 266th session of the Council of States, as notified on November 6, 2024, commenced on November 25 and is scheduled to conclude on December 20, 2024, as known to all signatories.

In full know of the situation that the resolution cannot be brought during this session, this was initiated only to set a narrative against second highest constitutional office and the Vice President, the deputy chairman said in his ruling. Harivansh also said the notice's "lack of bona fides", and subsequent events unfolding revealed "it being a calculated unwholesome attempt to tarnish publicity; run down the constitutional institution; insinuate the personal image of the incumbent Vice President—notably, the first from the agricultural community to hold this office in the history of inde-

pendent India". Sources said the deputy chairman has also ruled that the prejudicial intent manifested through orchestration of a coordinated media campaign, including a televised press conference initiated by the LoP and Chief whip of the Indian National Congress, main opposition party, on December 12, 2024.

They added that the impeachment notice was "an attempt to set afloat a narrative as if the authority was sitting over the notice of intention and thereby not discharging expectedly". The deputy chairman ruled that constitutionally after the intention of the notice to bring a resolution seeking removal of Vice President has been initiated, those taking such step had to move the resolution after 14 days, with no step called for from any quarter.

Sources said Harivansh also ruled that this coupled with the Leader of Opposition's subsequent 10-point social media input on December 12, 2024, apart from being distanced from institutional decorum, "forces a conclusion to be part of a design to denigrate nation's constitutional institutions and malign the incumbent Vice President".

He also cited past precedent when on September 21, 2020, then then-Chairman Venkaiah Naidu rejected a similar removal notice against the Deputy Chairman, citing procedural impropriety under a provision pari materia to Article 67(b).

Plate cutting ceremony for new ICG vessels held in Mumbai

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

Plate Cutting Ceremony for the first of the 14 Fast Patrol Vessels (FPV) and first of the six Next-Gen Offshore Patrol Vessels (NGOPV) being constructed by Mazagon Dock Shipbuilders Ltd. (MDL) for the Indian Coast Guard (ICG) took place in Mumbai on Thursday, defence ministry said here.

Giving details, officials said MDL was awarded a Rs 2,684 crore contract under the 'Buy (Indian-IDDMM)' category to build these vessels which will feature advanced technologies like drones for surveillance, AI for decision-making, an Integrated Bridge System for maneuverability, and an Integrated Machinery Control System for efficient operations.

These state-of-the-art vessels are being indigenously designed, developed and constructed and will be delivered over the next few years, reinforcing the Government's vision of 'Aatmanirbhar Bharat' and enhancing the nation's defence production capabilities.

Omar Abdullah meets Amit Shah, discusses restoration of Statehood, anti-terrorism efforts

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

Jammu and Kashmir Chief Minister Omar Abdullah on Thursday met with Union Home Minister Amit Shah here and discussed various key issues, including an early restoration of statehood and involving the elected government in the fight against terrorism.

Meeting Shah for the second time after taking over as the chief minister of the Union territory on October 16, Abdullah said the talks took place in a "cordial manner". "We hope to always work in a better environment so that the people of Jammu and Kashmir are benefited from this," he added.

After the meeting that lasted 30 minutes, the chief minister told reporters that he briefed the Union home minister about the situation in the Union territory and the experience of his government in the last two months.

"Yes, I raised the issue of early restoration of statehood with the home minister," Abdullah said, adding that "we hope that Jammu and Kashmir gets its statehood restored soon". On whether the talks included the military situation in the Union territory, he said secu-



J&K CM Omar Abdullah arrives to meet Union Home Minister Amit Shah. PTI

urity and law and order are the responsibility of the lieutenant governor.

"I have always said and I told the home minister that 'you cannot fight militancy and terrorism in a vacuum, you will have to take the public of Jammu and Kashmir in confidence... They will also have to be brought into this battle, and for that, you will have to take into confidence their elected representatives and their elected government,'" Abdullah said.

The chief minister said the talks did not include the framing of business rules for the division of powers between the elected government and the lieutenant

Nadda drags ruckus over Ambedkar in Lok Sabha after Opposition corners Shah

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

The Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) on Thursday launched a fresh attack on the Congress over its treatment of Dr BR Ambedkar as the ruling party's president JP Nadda asked the opposition party to "stop lying".

Nadda reiterated his party's accusations against the Congress for insulting and ignoring Ambedkar and his legacy, and cited the work undertaken by the Narendra Modi government to honour his legacy. His social media posts came amid the Opposition's attack on home minister Amit Shah for allegedly insulting Ambedkar during his Rajya Sabha speech. He told the Congress and its "rotten ecosystem" that they lost Lok Sabha polls for a third consecutive time in June and performed badly in a number of assembly polls.

"In November, you lost badly in Maharashtra. At least now stop lying. Because your lies will not go unchecked. The truth will always win. Jai Bhim," he

said. Shah has in turn accused the Congress of distorting his remarks and has received strong support from the ruling party, including Prime Minister Modi.

Nadda claimed the Congress and its rotten ecosystem have been exposed since Wednesday by all those who believe in truth, democracy and social justice. He said, "So, I thought of sharing some facts to illustrate the deep Congress hate towards Dr Ambedkar. Pandit Nehru hated Dr Ambedkar. Yes, it was unfiltered hate. That is why Pandit Nehru got Dr. Ambedkar defeated twice." Nehru, he alleged, was proudly writing to people overseas, expressing joy that Ambedkar was no longer in the Cabinet.

Referring to the house in Alipur Road in the national Capital where he breathed his last, Nadda said it should have been converted into a grand memorial that would inspire people long back.

But "Ambedkar-hating Congress" did nothing and it was the BJP-led National Democratic Alliance government which

developed it into an "iconic place". The "self-proclaimed custodians" of social justice in the Congress made empty promises of making a grand memorial at "Chaitiya Bhoomi", where he was cremated, in Mumbai, but it was the Modi government which ensured in 2015 that the land transfer was done. Modi prayed there twice in recent years, Nadda added.

The BJP president also shared a post, now deleted, allegedly of Congress leader Sam Pitroda in which he had rated Nehru's contribution to the Constitution bigger than Ambedkar.

Nadda said, "The most loyal courtier of the Dynasty spelt out what the Congress really thinks of Dr. Ambedkar - ?that he had no role in the making of our Constitution. Some screenshots indeed speak a thousand words." The post can be deleted but their real feelings will never go, he added.

He also highlighted the Modi government's development of the Ambedkar International Centre against the Congress' alleged neglect to make his point.

India reiterates concerns over violence against minorities in Bangladesh

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

India on Thursday said it is concerned over incidents of violence against Hindus and other minorities in Bangladesh and asserted that the primary responsibility to protect their life and liberty rests with the interim government in Dhaka.

These remarks by Minister of State for External Affairs Kirti Vardhan Singh in Rajya Sabha came days after Foreign Secretary Vikram Misri travelled to Dhaka and conveyed New Delhi's concerns on the matter to the top political brass of Bangladesh's interim government.

India continues to monitor the situation related to the minorities in Bangladesh closely, he said, adding, the government in that country has reportedly arrested 70 people and filed 88 cases in connection with violence involving minorities.

"India's concerns regarding the need to ensure safety and protection of Hindus and all other minority communities in Bangladesh have been conveyed and reiterated to the authorities of the Interim gov-

ernment of Bangladesh on various occasions, including at the highest level," Singh said.

The minister made the remarks responding to separate questions on the situation in Bangladesh.

"The high commission of India in Dhaka also continues to be in regular touch with the authorities of Bangladesh with regard to the welfare of minorities," he said.

"The primary responsibility for the protection of life and liberty of all citizens of Bangladesh, including minorities, rests with the government of Bangladesh," he added.

Singh also cited instances of attacks on Hindus and other minorities, and at their homes, businesses, and temples across Bangladesh.

"Reports of attacks on temples and puja mandaps also came to light during the recent Durga Puja festival in Bangladesh," he said.

"The government had expressed its serious concerns regarding the attack on a Puja mandap in Tantibazar, Dhaka and theft at

the Jeshoreshwari Kali temple at Satkhira during Durga Puja," Singh said.

Following these attacks, the Bangladesh government issued instructions for providing special security, including deployment of army and Border Guards, to ensure peaceful celebrations of Durga Puja, he said.

The minister said Bangladesh is expected to take all necessary measures to ensure safety and welfare of Hindus and other minorities. "The same has also been reiterated during the visit of the foreign secretary to Bangladesh on December 9," Singh said.

Ties between India and Bangladesh came under strain after deposed prime minister Sheikh Hasina was forced to leave the country in the face of a massive anti-government protest in August. Nobel Peace laureate Muhammad Yunus came to power days after Hasina took shelter in India.

The relations deteriorated further in recent weeks over attacks on the Hindus and the arrest of Hindu monk Chimroy Krishna Das.



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PAPER WITH PASSION

Clamour for caste census

While the exercise is fraught with challenges, its potential to uplift marginalised communities cannot be ignored

The demand for a caste census in India has been a recurring topic of debate, reflecting the country's complex socio-political fabric. While proponents emphasise its importance for targeted development and policy-making, critics raise concerns about its potential to exacerbate social divisions. The nuanced arguments surrounding this issue highlight both its necessity and its challenges. The caste census refers to the systematic collection of data on the caste composition of the population. India has not conducted such a comprehensive exercise since 1931, even though caste remains a significant determinant of socio-economic status in the country. Proponents of the caste census argue that it is essential for ensuring equitable development, especially for historically marginalised communities. As Lok Janshakti Party (Ram Vilas) leader Chirag Paswan points out, specific data on caste populations is critical for designing and allocating funds for community-based development schemes. Paswan's endorsement of the caste census is pragmatic. However, he also issues a cautionary note: while the government should collect such data, making it public might deepen societal divisions by reinforcing caste identities.



A caste census would provide granular data on the socio-economic conditions of various communities. This information is crucial for crafting effective affirmative action policies and welfare programmes. Historical injustices and systemic exclusion of certain communities require targeted interventions. A caste census would help identify the actual beneficiaries of reservation policies and assess whether they are achieving the intended outcomes. The Opposition, including Congress leader Rahul Gandhi, has emphasised that a caste census is a step toward realising the promise of social justice. By understanding the precise demographic composition, governments can ensure proportional representation and resource allocation. But having said that, making caste census data public could lead to heightened caste consciousness and further fragment society. India's socio-political landscape is already fraught with identity-based divisions, and the misuse of such data could deepen these fault lines. There is a legitimate fear that caste census findings might be weaponised for political gain. Instead of addressing inequities, the data could fuel caste-based mobilisations, electoral strategies and even conflicts. This aspect must be looked into and safeguarded before taking up this mammoth exercise. Besides, conducting a caste census is a massive logistical challenge. The accuracy of data collection and classification would be critical, as any errors could lead to disputes and undermine the credibility of the exercise. The caste census is essential and must be conducted, but it requires careful attention to ensure its accuracy and to address potential repercussions.

they are achieving the intended outcomes. The Opposition, including Congress leader Rahul Gandhi, has emphasised that a caste census is a step toward realising the promise of social justice. By understanding the precise demographic composition, governments can ensure proportional representation and resource allocation. But having said that, making caste census data public could lead to heightened caste consciousness and further fragment society. India's socio-political landscape is already fraught with identity-based divisions, and the misuse of such data could deepen these fault lines. There is a legitimate fear that caste census findings might be weaponised for political gain. Instead of addressing inequities, the data could fuel caste-based mobilisations, electoral strategies and even conflicts. This aspect must be looked into and safeguarded before taking up this mammoth exercise. Besides, conducting a caste census is a massive logistical challenge. The accuracy of data collection and classification would be critical, as any errors could lead to disputes and undermine the credibility of the exercise. The caste census is essential and must be conducted, but it requires careful attention to ensure its accuracy and to address potential repercussions.

PICTALK



A person dressed as Santa Claus rows a boat as seagulls fly past, near Causeway of Tapi River in Surat

Victory Day: Bangladesh's legacy of liberation

Victory Day serves as both a celebration of freedom and a reminder of the challenges ahead in safeguarding its democratic and inclusive aspirations



SANTHOSH MATHEW

Victory Day holds profound significance for Bangladesh, marking its liberation and the triumph over the Pakistan Armed Forces in the Bangladesh Liberation War of 1971. Celebrated annually on December 16, the day symbolises the birth of a sovereign state and the culmination of a long struggle for self-determination, where India played the pivotal role of midwife in the creation of the newest state in South Asia. The Bangladesh Liberation War was not merely a conflict confined to its borders but a defining moment in the geopolitics of the region. The roots of this war were entrenched in the systemic neglect and exploitation of East Pakistan by the ruling elite of West Pakistan.



Decades of economic disparity, cultural suppression, and political disenfranchisement laid the foundation for a movement demanding autonomy, which was catalyzed by the brutal military crackdown on March 25, 1971. Operation Searchlight unleashed a reign of terror that sought to silence the aspirations of millions but instead ignited a people's resistance. Sheikh Mujibur Rahman, the towering leader of the Awami League, became the symbol of this resistance. His leadership united the Bengali population, and his call for independence resonated with millions who yearned for freedom. As the conflict escalated, millions of refugees poured into India, creating a humanitarian crisis of unparalleled magnitude. India's intervention under the leadership of Prime Minister Indira Gandhi was both a strategic and moral decision. The Indian Armed Forces, working in coordination with the Mukti Bahini, mounted a joint operation that decisively defeated the Pakistani forces within a mere 13 days. The surrender of the Pakistani military on December 16, 1971, in Dhaka is one of the most iconic moments in modern history. The image of General AAK Niazi signing the Instrument of Surrender in the presence of Lieutenant General Jagjit Singh Aurora remains etched in the collective memory of both nations. This marked not

only the liberation of Bangladesh but also a significant blow to the two-nation theory that had led to the partition of the Indian subcontinent in 1947. The emergence of Bangladesh was hailed globally, but it also underscored the complexities of international politics. The then-US President Richard Nixon and his National Security Advisor Henry Kissinger, who had been staunch supporters of Pakistan due to Cold War dynamics, were caught off guard. Nixon's infamous remark about South Asia becoming an "international basket case" was a harsh reflection of the scepticism with which the new nation was viewed. Yet, Bangladesh defied the odds and began its journey toward self-reliance and growth. Over the past five decades, Bangladesh has transformed remarkably, earning the moniker "the garment factory of the world." Despite initial challenges, including political instability, natural disasters, and infrastructural deficits, Bangladesh has managed to sustain an impressive growth trajectory. Today, Bangladesh stands as a significant player in South Asia, with a GDP growth rate that often outpaces its neighbours. The country's success in achieving many of the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals, particularly in areas such as gender



BANGLADESH DEFIED THE ODDS AND BEGAN ITS JOURNEY TOWARD SELF-RELIANCE AND GROWTH. OVER THE PAST FIVE DECADES, BANGLADESH HAS TRANSFORMED REMARKABLY, EARNING THE MONIKER "THE GARMENT FACTORY OF THE WORLD"

equality, education and healthcare, is commendable. It has become a model for other developing nations, showcasing how strategic planning and a focus on human development can lead to sustained progress. Victory Day is not just a celebration of past triumphs but also a moment to reflect on the challenges and opportunities ahead. The geopolitical landscape of South Asia has evolved significantly since 1971. While the ties with India remain strong, underpinned by historical bonds and mutual interests, Bangladesh has also embraced China's Belt and Road Initiative, balancing its foreign policy to maximise economic benefits. Victory Day also underscores the importance of remembering the sacrifices that led to Bangladesh's independence. The war claimed the lives of countless freedom fighters and civilians, whose bravery and resilience paved the way for a new nation. The liberation struggle also left deep scars, including the atrocities committed by the Pakistani military, which continue to evoke strong emotions. Efforts to bring justice through war crimes tribunals and to preserve the memory of the Liberation War are vital in honouring this legacy. As Bangladesh celebrates another Victory Day, it does so as a nation that has defied expectations and charted its path to

progress. The dreams of Sheikh Mujibur Rahman and the Mukti Bahini have been realised in many ways, with a vibrant democracy, a thriving economy, and a resilient population. However, recent political instability has cast a shadow over Bangladesh's progress. The fall of Sheikh Hasina's Awami League, after years of dominance, has left a power vacuum, fueling uncertainty and unrest. Political polarisation has deepened, and concerns over democratic backsliding have surfaced. The status of minorities, particularly Hindus and indigenous groups, remains precarious, with reports of rising communal tensions and targeted violence. Ensuring minority rights and fostering inclusivity will be critical for Bangladesh to maintain its social fabric and democratic principles. The anniversary of Victory Day is a reminder of the enduring spirit of a people who fought for their right to self-determination and emerged victorious against overwhelming odds. It is a celebration of freedom, a tribute to those who made the ultimate sacrifice, and a pledge to build a future worthy of their dreams. Bangladesh's story, from a war-torn newborn state to a thriving economy, stands as a beacon of hope and inspiration, not just for South Asia but for the world. (The writer is an associate professor; views are personal)

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

G7 FACES CRISES

Madam — The 'Group of Seven' or G7 countries are considered to be the group of the richest countries in the world. But after the Covid pandemic, their economic condition also seems to be almost in shambles. Especially three of those countries can be named here, in which political turmoil has been seen within the last 10 days. Those countries are Germany, the biggest economic power in Europe. France, the third biggest economy there, and the North American country Canada. In France, four prime ministers have been sworn in within the last one year. Emmanuel Macron's government can fall at any time. German Chancellor Olaf Scholz had announced the dismissal of Finance Minister Christian Lindner, citing breach of trust and economic policy differences. Now he himself has lost the vote of confidence. Due to which elections will be held again there in the coming February. On the other hand, Canada's Finance Minister Chrystia Freeland, has resigned from her post, citing disagreement with Prime Minister Justin Trudeau. She has expressed disagreement on how to respond to the tariff threat of incoming President Donald Trump. Meaning, here too the main reason for instability is economic and financial problems. France has been affected by Europe's energy crisis and high interest rates, which have weakened the country. In 2024, Europe's largest economy will be stuck in recession for the second consecutive year. More and more businesses are under pressure and are suffering from falling sales, high energy costs and taxes, and Germany's overly cumbersome bureaucracy. Starting from 2022, per capita production in Canada has declined in six of the last seven quarters. Unemployment has also increased by a full percentage point compared to last year. Jang Bahadur Singh | Jamshedpur

TRUMP DEMANDS EQUAL TARIFFS

Madam — Donald Trump, the newly elected President of the United States,

R Ashwin retires from international cricket



Ravichandran Ashwin, India's second-highest Test wicket-taker (only behind Anil Kumble's 619 wickets), announced his retirement from international cricket at the age of 38. He expressed gratitude to his teammates and the BCCI, highlighting his fulfilling career. While he feels he still has more to offer, he'll focus on club-level cricket. Ashwin concluded his international career with 537 Test wickets, 156 ODI wickets and 72 T20I wickets. His crick-

et journey, from a fringe player in the 2011 World Cup to one of India's greatest match-winners, has been marked by trials, triumphs, and unwavering dedication. Despite overseas challenges and controversies, his innovative approach and analytical mind have solidified his place in cricketing history. The 38-year-old Ashwin, with 537 Test wickets and six centuries, will continue playing franchise cricket, notably for Chennai Super Kings in the next edition of the IPL in 2025. We should not forget that Ashwin is the man who played his cricket all through with cleverness and dignity and decided to retire cleverly and in a dignified manner too. We should not be ungrateful and miss recognising and saluting him for his immense contribution to Indian cricket after Anil Kumble hung up his boots. Love you, champion! Cricket lovers will miss you for sure! Bidyut Kumar Chatterjee | Faridabad

has proposed a "Reciprocal Tariff" policy, signalling a new direction in global trade. Criticising the high tariff policies of countries, including India, he highlighted them as a source of inequity. Trump stated that if any country imposes tariffs on American products, the US will respond with equivalent tariffs. He specifically pointed to developing countries like India, which levy high tariffs to protect domestic industries. Using bicycles as an example, he alleged that India imposes over 100 per cent duty on American bicycles, while the US does not charge such high tariffs on Indian products. This policy, claimed to be based on reciprocity and fairness, is likely to promote protectionism, potentially destabilising the global trade system. It raises concerns about increasing trade tensions between India and the US. Higher product prices could add economic burdens on consumers and strain bilateral relations. For India, it is crucial to engage in dialogue with the US administration to maintain trade balance. This tariff

conflict will not be limited to economic impacts; it will also have far-reaching diplomatic and social consequences. R K Jain | Barwani

TABLA MAESTRO'S LEGACY

Madam — Zakir Hussain's music was intertwined with his all-encompassing love for everyone without an iota of bias or prejudice. In fact, it reminds one of a popular Kishore Kumar number, "Pyaar Baantte Chalo" (Keep spreading love), from the 1965 Hindi movie "Hum sab ustaad hain." Apart from his divine renditions on the tabla, what endeared him most to his audiences was the halo of love and humility that surrounded him. In an interview with the BBC, he once said that all his shows were sold out well in advance, not because of him, but because of the power and attraction of music. Avinash Godbole | Dewas

Send your feedback to: letterstopioneer@gmail.com

Vipul Nautiyal: Chandan Mitra's calamity reporter

Whether it was crafting flawless editorial pages or recounting tales of his newsroom days, Vipul Nautiyal's legacy is one of dedication, warmth and passion for his craft



NEERAJ KUMAR

He flaunted the title "calamity reporter" with pride as he vividly narrated the story behind how Dr Chandan Mitra, editor-in-chief of The Pioneer, gave him the name. Known to friends as Nauty (that's how he spelled it) and to juniors as Vipul Sir, or Nauty Sir, I was introduced to him in August 2021, while writing a test for an editorial role at The Pioneer. I hadn't met him before, but had heard things about him — his co-workers respected him, but they feared him even more. It was my first stint in the media and I was nervous.



ended up addressing this "old-looking, humbly dressed" fellow as "Vipul Sir" ever since. I learned an important lesson that day. Nevertheless, I was hired. A few weeks of working with him I realised that he was extremely honest towards his job, so much so that he made me question myself. He would reach the office sharp at 2 pm, retouch his already super-organised desk and begin the thinking work — often with a glass in his hand. He was proud of the work he did, he knew he was good. He had an impeccable eye for detail — if it was Vipul Nautiyal's page then it had to be error-free, even if nobody was going to read it, even if he hadn't been paid in months. Headlines were paid even

more attention, they had to be perfectly symmetric — a habit that I picked involuntarily. This was the Vipul effect. He once recounted an incident from his days at The Times of India, when Dr Mitra had asked him to return to The Pioneer. Later, during the exit interview at TOI, when Mr Nautiyal was asked "TOI chhod kar Pioneer kaun jata hai?" (Who leaves TOI to join Pioneer) he replied with lit-up eyes: "Jisko Chandan Mitra bulaata hai." He knew how to efficiently run a desk and bring the team up to speed with some flair. A senior editor at TOI says, "Vipul Sir could beat you in a game of table tennis single-handedly, with his favourite drink in his other hand." Mr Nautiyal often mentioned that he received job offers from almost all leading media houses, except for The Indian Express, for which, he said, he waited for quite some time. In my five months of working with him, I never saw him snap at anybody — unless somebody caught him on the phone during work hours. He was known to be unpredictable at times. But he was there for his colleagues —

those who worked with him will agree. His way of getting his point across was his own. When I had to negotiate my salary while joining TOI — where he had referred me — he told me to ask for a massive raise, saying: "Purse bhailey hi HR ke paas hai, but tu journalist hai, boli tu lagayega" (Even though the purse is with HR, you are a journalist, so you will call the shots). He had more confidence in me than I had in myself. Those who teamed up with him absorbed a great deal of wisdom in all walks of life. That's how Vipul Nautiyal was. Besides being an exceptional storyteller, he had a song, a sher or an anecdote for almost every occasion. He was a fanboy when it came to Dev Anand. He often wrote an editorial piece on Dev Sahab's birth anniversary. He was proud of the fact that he had seen Guide several times. He would often play Mohammed Rafi songs or Mehdi Hassan ghazals, lower the volume, and write the edit columns. (The writer is a former staffer of The Pioneer; views are personal)



FIRST COLUMN

SRI LANKA-INDIA:
ON THE SAME PAGEBoth nations reiterate commitment to defence
collaboration and regional stability

KUMARDEEP BANARJEE

India strengthened its ties with its closest maritime neighbor, Sri Lanka, this week, countering the growing influence of China in the island nation. Sri Lanka's President, H.E. Mr. Anura Kumara Disanayaka, made his first bilateral visit to New Delhi following the recent presidential and parliamentary elections. Earlier this year, President Disanayaka had also visited Delhi at a time when Sri Lanka's political future, including the timing of its elections, was still uncertain. The new President came to power riding on the left-leaning party, which is known to have harboured some Anti-Indian sentiments in the past. However, New Delhi chose to bet on the relatively young Marxist leader, hoping for a sense of prudence in future. Disanayaka in the past, has managed to maintain a fine balance in Sri Lanka's bilateral relations with India and China, not trying to get caught in any crossfire.

Meanwhile, while India's military tensions with China have de-escalated in the recent past, it still chooses to be cautious. Special Representatives from India and China also met this week in Beijing, to discuss their mutual bilateral relations. It seems that with the Trump administration back in the Oval Office in January, China wants to de-escalate military tensions with countries it considers as rivals. China is aware that Trump is likely to impose tariffs on many of its exports to the US, and perhaps further tighten the transfer of high-end technology from America. It is acutely aware that, India would not join an economic dialogue unless the overarching military issues are sorted. It is against this background, that Sri Lanka President's visit to India assumes significance. It may be recalled that China had in the past, sent spy ships



(which it calls maritime research vehicles) to Sri Lankan waters, which have raised many red flags for the Indian security agencies.

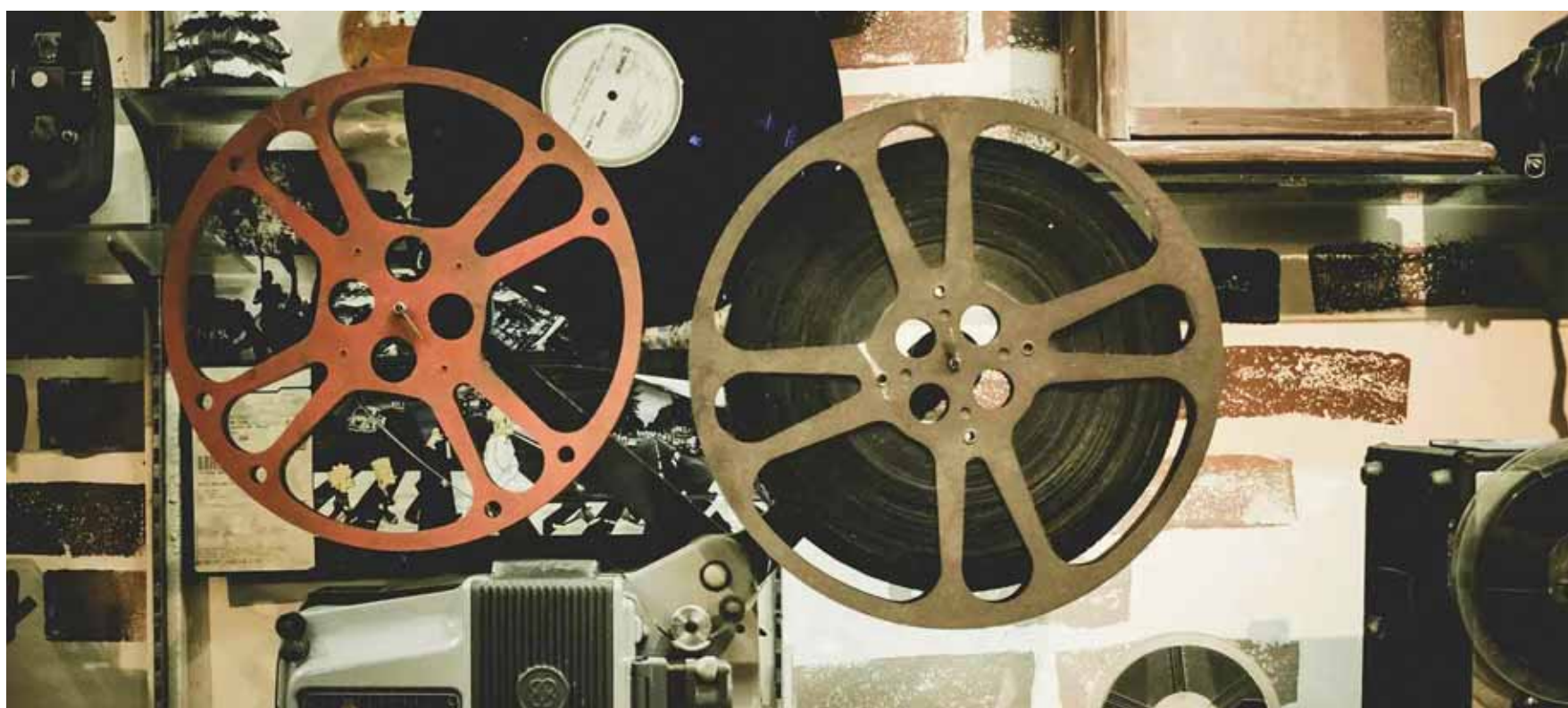
China also controls critical ports in Sri Lanka, which during any military conflict could be used for strategic purposes. Sri Lanka's President is aware of his country's dependence on China to keep its economy afloat, while, also not trying to disturb the deep bilateral partnership with India. It was heartening for policy watchers in India to note that the Sri Lankan President chose Delhi to be his port of call after getting elected and came out with some emphatic statements, regarding not allowing, their national territory to be used for any anti-India activities. The joint statement released after the President and Indian PM's meeting read "Recognising shared security interests of India and Sri Lanka, both leaders acknowledged the importance of regular dialogue based on mutual trust and transparency and giving primacy to each other's security concerns. India is Sri Lanka's closest maritime neighbour, President Disanayaka reiterated Sri Lanka's stated position of not permitting its territory to be used in any manner inimical to the security of India and towards regional stability."

Taking cognisance of India's security concerns the two nations further reiterated to "Explore the possibility of concluding a framework Agreement on Defence Cooperation; Foster cooperation in hydrography; Provision of defence platforms and assets to augment Sri Lanka's defence capabilities; Intensify collaboration through joint exercises, maritime surveillance, and defence dialogue and exchanges; Extend assistance to strengthen capabilities of Sri Lanka on disaster mitigation, relief and rehabilitation, including through training, joint exercises and sharing of best practices; and Enhance capacity building and training for Sri Lankan defence forces and conduct tailor-made training programmes, wherever required." The bedrock of this relationship is India's generous economic support to Sri Lanka without putting it through non-transparent, self-serving infrastructure loans, which has led to the loss of strategic ports for the island nation.

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

The evolution of cinema
through technology

CHAITANYA K. PRASAD

Whether through sound, colour, digital effects, or immersive technology,
filmmakers have always sought to expand the boundaries of what is possible

Beneath the flickering lights of an old projector, cinema was born—a dance of shadows and light, whispering stories into the dark. From silent dreams projected on silver screens to the roaring worlds of colour and sound, cinema has always been a magician, conjuring entire universes with the stroke of a reel. As technology sprinkled its magic dust over time, the cinematic world transformed, evolving from simple moving pictures into immersive journeys that now wrap us in their digital embrace, where imagination knows no bounds. In the late 19th century, cinema was a purely visual experience. Films like Raja Harishchandra (1913), India's first feature film, relied entirely on visuals, as sound was not yet a part of cinematic storytelling. Globally, the Lumière brothers' early works, such as L'Arrivée d'un train en gare de La Ciotat (1895), left audiences mesmerised.

The technology was simple—manual cameras, mechanical projectors, and natural light. But this early era laid the foundation for the visual storytelling techniques that filmmakers would continue to refine for decades to come. The advent of sound in cinema was a game-changer. Alam Ara (1931) became India's first talkie, marking the beginning of an era where dialogue and music played a crucial role in storytelling. Globally, The Jazz Singer (1927) made similar waves, showcasing the transformative power of synchronized sound. Colour, too, began to seep into cinema's world. While Kisan Kanya (1937) was India's first colour film, it wasn't until Mughal-e-Azam (1960) and Hum Dono (1961) that colour became a truly artistic element, bringing emotional depth and grandeur to the screen.

The partially colourised Mughal-e-Azam in particular stunned audiences, giving the larger-than-life historical drama a visual vibrancy that was previously unimaginable. Ramesh Sippy's Sholay (1975) was a groundbreaking film, being the first Indian movie shot on a 70mm screen. Indian theatres were not initially equipped to accommodate this scale, but the format gave Sholay's action sequences a larger-than-life feel, adding to its epic narrative. The film also introduced enhanced stereophonic sound, a novelty in Indian cin-



THE TECHNOLOGY WAS SIMPLE—MANUAL CAMERAS, MECHANICAL PROJECTORS, AND NATURAL LIGHT. BUT THIS EARLY ERA LAID THE FOUNDATION FOR THE VISUAL STORYTELLING TECHNIQUES THAT FILMMAKERS WOULD CONTINUE TO REFINE FOR DECADES TO COME

ema. Shan (1980) followed, introducing impressive special effects such as explosions, action choreography, and stunt sequences, drawing comparisons to Western films like James Bond, with a blend of spectacle and style that had rarely been seen in India. The onset of digital technology and CGI changed the landscape of Indian cinema in the 2000s. Films like Krrish (2006) and Ra. One (2011) ushered in a new era of superhero films and futuristic themes, using advanced CGI and motion capture. Robot (2010), featuring a humanoid robot protagonist, combined impressive VFX with engaging storytelling, marking a turning point in Indian cinema's relationship with technology. As CGI became increasingly prevalent, Hollywood and Indian cinema both embraced digital effects as a core component of storytelling.

Hollywood's Jurassic Park (1993) and The Matrix (1999) showcased the immense potential of CGI. Indian films like Baahubali (2015-2017) set new standards with their breathtaking visual effects, making Indian cinema a global player in the visual effects arena. R (2022) followed suit, pushing the envelope with dynamic CGI-enhanced action scenes. Cinema is now becoming more immersive than ever. James Cameron's Avatar (2009) brought 3D to the forefront of mainstream cinema, while Indian cinema explored immersive experiences with films like Kaala (2018), which offered a 360-degree VR experience. Technologies like VR and AI are now beginning to merge with traditional filmmaking, pushing the boundaries of storytelling even further. Technological advancements have transformed both the creative and commercial aspects of cinema, allowing films to evolve into multifaceted brands. Innovations like high-definition cameras, VFX, and animation have significantly elevat-

ed the quality of filmmaking, enabling large-scale productions such as RRR and Baahubali to create immersive experiences that attract global audiences.

These technological tools have expanded the branding potential of films, positioning them as not just stories, but as global entertainment products. Furthermore, the media and entertainment sector's growth, particularly in India, reflects this shift, with theatrical revenues reaching an all-time high of INR 120 billion in 2023. The business model of cinema has expanded beyond traditional box-office revenue, thanks to digital platforms like OTT services, which offer new avenues for distribution and monetisation. These platforms provide filmmakers with the opportunity to market their films globally, turning local content into international brands. Films now capitalise on multiple revenue streams, including merchandising, digital rights, and exclusive streaming deals. Additionally, high-end multiplexes have begun focusing on premium cinematic experiences, creating "experience zones" that cater to affluent audiences and further enhance the brand identity of films.

Cinema has also become a significant platform for advertising and brand collaborations. FMCG, e-commerce, and tech companies increasingly use films for product placements and promotions, contributing to the industry's revenue.

Meanwhile, Indian films are reaching wider audiences across 160 countries, thanks to advancements in content production and global distribution. This expanded global reach is turning Indian cinema into a formidable international brand, with films frequently topping global streaming charts, further proving that technological advancements are integral to both the branding and business of cinema. Recently released films like

Kalki 2898 AD and Stree 2 have pushed the envelope for Indian cinema by leveraging advanced CGI and innovative storytelling techniques. Kalki 2898 AD embraced futuristic narratives, with its visually rich depiction of a dystopian future made possible through cutting-edge visual effects, similar to global sci-fi films. Stree 2 blended horror, comedy, and CGI to craft a unique, immersive experience, further proving that Indian filmmakers are increasingly adept at balancing narrative depth with technological prowess, placing them on the global stage. From the early days of silent films to today's CGI-driven spectacles, cinema has continuously evolved with technological advancements.

Whether through sound, colour, digital effects, or immersive technology, filmmakers have always sought to expand the boundaries of what's possible. The future of cinema technology promises exciting advancements. Virtual reality (VR) and augmented reality (AR) are set to provide even more immersive storytelling experiences, allowing audiences to interact with cinematic worlds in unprecedented ways. Artificial intelligence (AI) is also emerging in post-production, helping streamline visual effects and editing processes. Additionally, innovations in 3D and holographic projections could redefine how we experience films in theatres and at home. Advances in sound technology, like spatial audio, will make the viewing experience more immersive, ensuring cinema continues to evolve. The cinematic journey, it seems, is far from over—technology is pushing the boundaries further, transforming both the art of storytelling and the audience.

(The writer is a former additional DG, DFF and Festival Director, IFFI; views are personal. Inputs by Zoya Ahmad and Vaishnavi Srinivasan)

Rajasthan's Golden Horizon: From cultural marvel to investment powerhouse

With the success of 'Rising Rajasthan Investment Summit 2024,' the state is poised for an economic transformation

Sone ri dharti jathe-ar chandi ro aasman - translates to "Where the earth is made of gold and the sky is built with silver." This cherished folk song beautifully captures the essence of Rajasthan's Thar Desert. Today, these words remain as relevant as ever, reflecting the state's unique charm and its emergence as a hub of global investment opportunities. Rajasthan, India's largest state, is rich in minerals, endowed with vast solar and wind energy resources, and brimming with potential for investors worldwide.

The Rajasthan Government has successfully hosted the 'Rising Rajasthan Investment Summit 2024' in Jaipur this week. Throughout the event,



MOHIT TANTIA

memorandums of understanding (MOUs) totalling over Rs 35 lakh crore were signed, highlighting the immense investment potential of the state. Actually, very few places can match with Rajasthan's allure. It boasts nine UNESCO World Heritage Sites, iconic palaces and forts, 320 sunny days a year, powerful winds, and expansive land. Combined with excellent law

and order and robust rail connectivity, these factors place Rajasthan in a league of its own as a destination for investment. Currently, the state is undergoing an economic transformation. The government aims to propel Rajasthan's economy from \$180 billion to \$350 billion by enhancing the Ease of Doing Business and creating employment opportunities for the youth.

Over the next five years, the administration seeks to generate one million jobs across private and public sectors, with a focus on attracting significant investments. Chief Minister Bhajan Lal Sharma envisions Rajasthan as a pivotal player in India's economic growth. His administration is fostering a

pro-business environment across industries, recognising that Rajasthan's development is integral to achieving the vision of a "Developed India" by 2047. Rajasthan's rich natural resources, skilled workforce, and outstanding connectivity make it a magnet for investments.

Over 58 per cent of the Delhi-Mumbai Industrial Corridor (DMIC) and 39 per cent of the Dedicated Freight Corridor (DFC) pass through the state. This infrastructure connects Rajasthan to domestic and export markets, while its proximity to northern states and western ports ensures seamless trade access. With the third-largest national highway network and second-largest rail network in India, along with



nine inland container depots, seven airports, and an air cargo complex, Rajasthan is a logistical powerhouse. Rajasthan's investment prospects span diverse sectors: petroleum infrastructure, food processing, education, chemicals, electronic systems, automotive, electric vehicles, and renewable

energy. Traditional industries like tourism, and emerging fields like startups, also offer immense potential.

For instance, in agriculture and agro-processing, Rajasthan is a top producer of mustard, millet, guar gum, fenugreek, isabgol, and medicinal crops. The sector contributed 29 per cent to the state's Gross State Value Added (GSVA) in 2022-23. The state also ranks second in livestock population and milk production and is a leader in spices, organic farming, and coarse wool. With these advantages, the agriculture sector presents vast opportunities in agri-food parks, warehousing, and cold chain facilities. Rajasthan's journey from a

cultural and historical treasure to a thriving investment hub reflects its unparalleled potential and forward-looking vision. The state's abundant natural resources, excellent infrastructure, and strategic location make it an ideal destination for investors across various sectors, from renewable energy and agriculture to manufacturing and technology. With an ambitious economic transformation underway, Rajasthan's government is committed to creating a pro-business environment that will not only attract global investments but also create employment opportunities for its youth. As the state continues to capitalise on its diverse strengths, the "Rising

Rajasthan" initiative stands as a testament to its growing prominence on the global stage.

The government's efforts, backed by strategic partnerships and forward-thinking policies, position Rajasthan as a key player in India's economic future, driving growth, prosperity, and development.

The initiative seeks to bolster Rajasthan's industries, create jobs, and amplify its economic potential, ensuring the timeless folk song "Sone ri dharti jathe-ar chandi ro aasman" resonates on a global stage.

(The writer is Executive Member, National Institute for Locomotor Disabilities, Kolkata. Views expressed are personal)

Mahayuti pays tributes to Hegdewar amidst internal disquite over RSS legacy



Maharashtra CM Devendra Fadnavis, Deputy CM Ajit Pawar and Eknath Shinde during a group photo session in Nagpur on Thursday.

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ MUMBAI

BJP leader Chitra Wagh on Thursday said there should not be any objection if Maharashtra Deputy Chief Minister Ajit Pawar visits the RSS founder's memorial as the Sangh had contributed to the victory of all Mahayuti allies. The Mahayuti, comprising the BJP, Eknath Shinde-led Shiv Sena and Ajit Pawar's NCP, secured a landslide victory in the Maharashtra assembly elections last month by securing 230 of the 288 seats. On Thursday, Chief Minister Devendra Fadnavis, Deputy CM Shinde, several other BJP and Shiv Sena leaders as well as some NCP legislators visited the memorial of RSS founder Dr K B Hegdewar at Reshimbagh in Nagpur during the legislature session underway in the city. After visiting the memorial, Shinde said no one can ignore the Rashtriya

Swayamsevak Sangh's (RSS) contribution to nation-building and that the ideologies of the Sangh Parivar and Shiv Sena are same. Ajit Pawar did not visit the memorial, though two legislators of his party went there. Speaking to reporters during her visit to Hegdewar's memorial, BJP MLC Chitra Wagh said there should not be any problem with NCP leaders, including Ajit Pawar, visiting Reshimbagh. "They (RSS) indeed have played a crucial role. Nobody can deny the contribution of the RSS in winning so many seats. The RSS not only helped the BJP candidates to win but even worked in support of its allies during the assembly polls," she said. Wagh also said it was important to embrace positive ideologies. "It is a good thing to embrace a good school of thought. Hence, I feel they (NCP leaders) will visit the RSS headquarters. The RSS worked for the

Mahayuti and made a significant contribution. Neither the NCP nor Shiv Sena can ever deny the contribution of the RSS," she added. When Shiv Sena leader Dada Bhuse was asked about Pawar skipping the visit, he said, "I am a junior party worker; I cannot comment on his decision." Everybody has the right to decide whether to visit such places or not, he said. "But it is true that the RSS definitely played a key role and helped the Mahayuti in the state polls," Bhuse added. NCP MLA Raju Karemore, who visited Hegdewar's memorial, said he went there on his own and not on the instruction of his party. "The chief whip of the BJP in the legislative assembly had circulated messages encouraging visits to the place, which prompted me to go there," he said.

Shinde claims RSS teaches selfless service and unity

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ MUMBAI

Maharashtra Deputy Chief Minister Eknath Shinde paid tributes at the memorial of RSS founder Dr KB Hegdewar here on Thursday and said no one can ignore the Sangh's contribution to nation-building. The ideologies of the Sangh Parivar and Shiv Sena are same, Shinde told reporters after visiting the Dr Hegdewar Smriti Mandir at Reshimbagh in Nagpur, where Chief Minister Devendra Fadnavis and other leaders of the ruling allies BJP and Shiv Sena also paid respects. NCP leader and Deputy CM Ajit Pawar, who outfit is also a constituent of the ruling Mahayuti, was not present, while two of his party legislators visited the memorial. The winter session of the state legislature is currently underway in Nagpur. As an organisation, the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS) works selflessly, Shinde said. The Shiv Sena head further said that he earlier also visited Hegdewar's memorial and had a relation with the Sangh Parivar since childhood. "I started with a Sangh shakha and then with a Shiv Sena shakha, Shiv Sena chief Balasaheb Thackeray's ideology and Anand Dighe sahab's teachings.

Police bust call centre in Gurugram for cheating US nationals, 18 arrested

STAFF REPORTER ■ GURUGRAM

Cyber crime team of the Gurugram police busted an illegal call centre operating at Plot No 270 Udyog Vihar Phase-2 in Gurugram on Wednesday. The call centre mostly used to cheat US nationals on the pretext of technical support by creating a fake website of an accounting company, police said on Thursday. According to the police, a team of the cyber crime police station led by ACP (cybercrime) Priyanshu Diwan raided the call centre following a tip-off. During the raid, the police arrested 18 people, including 8 women and the call centre operator, in connection with the matter and seized 17 CPUs along with other electronic gadgets. The arrested accused have been identified as Gaurav Bakshi, Debashish Chatterjee, Anmol, Kanishk, Ajeesh Mathew, Kunal, Devender Devgan, Hitesh Malik, Rohit Singh, Aryaman Thakur, Nidhi, Sita, Muskan Rajput, Bhavana, Shivani, Lahinganhath Haikip Sharon and Nagmathingcho. The police team registered a case against the accused under sections 318 (4), 319 BNS and IT Act in Police Station Cyber Crime South, Gurugram and arrested the accused as per the rules in the case. During interrogation, it was found that the accused, Gaurav Bakshi, is the operator of this call centre, and he runs this call centre along with his companions at the behest of his other partner. Bakshi used to get a salary of about Rs 1.5 lakh and his other employees used to get a salary of about Rs 30,000 per month.

"We received specific inputs that a fake call centre had cheated several US nationals on the pretext of technical support. The youths were employed at the call centre, which was being operated without a license issued by the Department of Telecommunications (DOT)," said Priyanshu Diwan, ACP (Cyber Crime). The accused was allegedly running this illegal call centre with his fellow accused since February 2024. The accused were cheating foreign nationals in the name of providing customer care service of Software Support/Accounting Support. The accused used to run ads on Google from the customer care helpline number of a famous company. When foreign nationals call on the toll-free number, the call comes to their call centre through VCL Dialer, 3CX Dialer. "The accused introduced themselves as representatives of a famous company and got remote access to the computer system of foreign nationals by getting them to download screen-sharing applications in their system. In the name of solving their problem, they used to get 200-1000 dollars from them through a payment gateway. The accused used to commit the fraud by creating a phishing website of an accounting company named Quick Books," Diwan added. "The matter is under investigation. How the accused was operating the fake call centre is part of an investigation. The involvement of other people cannot be ruled out. The culprits are on police remand for further questioning," the officer said. An FIR under relevant sections of the Indian Penal Code (IPC) and the IT Act has been registered at the Cyber Crime South police station..

Longest surviving Hizbul Mujahideen commander killed in Kashmir encounter

MOHIT KANDHARI ■ JAMMU

A joint team of security forces Thursday killed one of the longest surviving terrorist commanders belonging to the Pro-

top Hizbul Mujahideen Commander Inspector General of Police, Kashmir range, VK Birdi said Hizbul Commander Farooq Ahmed Bhat, also known as Farooq Nali, a resident of Yaripora in

terrorism in South Kashmir. With the neutralization of these 5 terrorists, we will gain speed in eliminating terrorism in J&K. The army officer said during this operation, our two



Different identity documents seized from terrorists killed during the encounter on Thursday.

Pakistan Hizbul Mujahideen terrorist outfit along with four others during a six-hour-long fierce gunfight in the Kadder village of Behibagh area in South Kashmir's Kulgam district. Two army jawans also received injuries during the successful operation as no other collateral damage was reported from the ground zero of the encounter site. To prevent any civilian from getting trapped during the gunfight the security forces had safely evacuated local villagers to safety before killing the group of terrorists holed up inside a safe hideout. Five AK-47 rifles, 20 magazines, two grenades and other arms and ammunition have been recovered from the encounter site. Confirming the killing of a

Kulgam, was among those killed in the encounter in the Kadder area of the district. According to police records, Farooq Nali had been active since 2015 and was one of the longest-surviving terrorists. He was categorised as "A++". He played a key role in radicalizing local youth and reviving terrorist activities in South Kashmir. Addressing a press briefing after the encounter was called off Brigadier Anirudh Chauhan, Commander of 2 Sector RR said, "Five top active terrorists of Hizbul Mujahideen were neutralized in the Kadder area of Kulgam. All five terrorists were involved in many criminal and terrorist activities. The Army officer claimed Hizbul Mujahideen commander Farooq Bhat played a big role in reviving

security personnel suffered bullet injuries. They are being treated at 92 Base Hospital. The army officer also acknowledged the role of the people of Kulgam for the success of this operation..." According to police records, Farooq Bhat took control of the HM outfit after the death of Hizbul Mujahideen operational commander Saifullah in a 2020 gunbattle in Srinagar. Four other slain terrorists have been identified as Mushtaq Itoo, active since March 2020, from Mohamad Pora, Kulgam, Adil Hussain, active since August 2023, from Khandipora, Mohd Irfan, active since June 2022 from Hawoorah and Yassir Javaid Bhat from Yaripora.

Navy and Coast Guard continue search and rescue efforts in Mumbai boat collision, two still missing

TN RAGHUNATHA ■ MUMBAI

A day after the boat disaster off the Gateway of India that claimed 13 lives, the ships and aircraft of the Indian Navy and Indian Coast Guard on Thursday continued their search for two persons - an adult male and a male child - who went missing after a Navy speed boat collided with a passenger ferry in the Arabian Sea. Within hours after the boat tragedy, the Indian Navy set up a Board of Inquiry into the mishap to establish the circumstances leading to the mid-sea collision and to fix the responsibility. Of the 113 persons on board both the vessels, 13 persons drowned while 98 others, including two injured, were rescued, after a Navy speed boat undergoing engine trials lost control and collided with a passenger ferry Neel Kamal off Karanja, Mumbai at 4 pm on Thursday. The ferry was carrying passengers from Gateway of India to Elephanta Island at the time of mishap.

The two missing passengers have been identified as 43-year-old Hansraj Bhati and seven-year-old Johan Mohammad Nisar Ahmed Pathan. A defence official said that Indian Navy and the Coast Guard deployed their vessels and their helicopters to search the two persons who were thrown into the waters after the mid-sea collision between a naval speed boat and a ferry in the water channel near the tiny Butcher Island oil terminal, 5 km from the Gateway of India. "Search and rescue efforts have continued throughout the intervening night of Wednesday and Thursday in the vicinity of the accident. Search and rescue operations are in progress by eight Navy craft, a naval helicopter and a Coast Guard vessel to search for the two missing persons," a defence spokesperson said. The rescued persons are still in different hospitals of Mumbai and Raigad district. While the condition of 100 is now stable. Official sources said that 57 survivors are currently in JNPA Hospital, 24 in Naval

Dockyard medical facility, 13 in INHS Sanghani (Karanja), 10 in St. George Hospital, 12 in a hospital on the mainland at Karanja and one in INHS Ashvini Hospital. Eight survivors who recovered have been discharged from different hospitals. All the persons killed in the boat disaster have been identified. Of those 13 killed in the boat tragedy, there were two minors Nidhish Rakesh Ahire (8 year-old boy from Nashik), Mahi Sairam Pavra (3-year-old girl from Dhule), five women -- Harshada Rakesh Ahire (31 years, Nashik), Shafina Ashraf Pathan (34 years from Goa), Rama Ratidevi Gupta (50 years from Palghar) and Pragnya Vinod Kamble (39 years from Navi Mumbai). Meanwhile, acting on a complaint lodged by survivor Natharam Chaudhary, the Colaba police have registered an FIR under sections 106(1), 125 (a) (b), 282, 324 (3) (5) of Bharatiya Nyay Sanhita has been registered in Colaba police station against people responsible for the tragedy.

CM Himanta calls for stronger ties with Bhutan

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ GUWAHATI

Assam Chief Minister Himanta Biswa Sarma on Thursday reiterated the commitment of ensuring that the northeastern state plays a pivotal role in strengthening the bond between India and Bhutan. Sarma made the remarks as he concluded his four-day trip to the neighbouring country on Thursday. "As Riniki and I conclude our unforgettable visit to Bhutan, we extend our heartfelt gratitude to His Majesty Jigme Khesar Namgyel Wangchuck and the wonderful people of Bhutan for their warmth and generosity," Sarma wrote on X.

Sawant defends self, government of graft charges in Goa Liberation Day address

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ PANAJI

Chief Minister Pramod Sawant greeted people on Goa's Liberation Day on Thursday and said his government was progressing while overcoming personal criticism, prejudices and 'tool kit of jealousy'. Sawant's remarks come in the wake of a personal attack on him and his wife by the opposition leaders in connection with a cash-for-jobs scam in the state. Addressing the Goa Liberation Day function in Panaji, Sawant also said his government was working towards making the dream of the freedom fighters a reality through an all-inclusive growth.

The Goa Liberation Day is celebrated on December 19 every year to mark the success of 'Operation Vijay' undertaken by the armed forces to liberate the state from the Portuguese in 1961. "We are providing a positive governance surpassing personal criticism, preconceived notions, and tool kit of jealousy," Sawant said. Notably, Pramod Sawant's wife Sulakshana Sawant filed a defamation suit against AAP leader Sanjay Singh on Tuesday in a court in North Goa. She has sought Rs 100 crore in damages from the AAP politician for allegedly naming her in the cash-for-jobs scam. The CM said, "Sabka saath, sabka

vikas, sabka vishwas and sabka prayas" are the hallmark of the Bharatiya Janata Party's rule in the coastal state, as he addressed a gathering comprising state ministers, people from various sections of the society and students. Sawant further said his government was working proactively so that the state gets justice on the issue of the Mhadei river diversion through the central government authority PRAWAH. The Centre constituted the Progressive River Authority for Water and Harmony (PRAWAH) last year to enable the compliance and implementation of the award and decisions of the Mahadayi Water Disputes Tribunal.

The Mhadei River originates in Karnataka and runs through Maharashtra into Goa, meeting the Arabian Sea near Panaji. Goa and Karnataka are locked in a dispute over the diversion of the river water. Sawant said steps have also been taken to ensure resumption of the iron ore mining in Goa through sustainable and environment-friendly way, which will provide employment opportunities to thousands of youth living in the mineral rich belt of the state, he said. "We have also focussed on the ease of doing business, encouraging the new businesses and existing industries," the chief minister said.

Uttar Pradesh, Haryana Govts must impose complete ban on firecrackers...

From page 1

"The Delhi Police and Revenue Department, GNCTD shall ensure implementation of the directions under their respective jurisdiction in letter and spirit. The violation of the directions issued under Section 5 of the Environment (Protection) Act, 1986 shall be punishable under Section 15 of the said Act," the notification read. Meanwhile, Delhi and its neighboring areas like Noida, Ghaziabad, and Gurugram

woke up to a thick blanket of dense fog on Thursday morning, adding to the chill of an already cold day. The fog reduced visibility significantly, while the region's air quality remained perilously high in the 'severe' to 'severe-plus' category, prompting health concerns. Calm winds and high humidity contributed to shallow fog in various parts of Delhi-NCR, further worsening pollution levels. The air quality index (AQI) stood at 451, crossing over the severe plus threshold while the AQICN.Org's real time

data recorded AQI 999 at ITI Shahdara Jhilmil in east Delhi. With 13.182 per cent, the Transport sector is the key contributor to air pollution in Delhi, followed by Industry (6.418 per cent), Residential (3.422 per cent), Waste (1.238 per cent), Constructions (1.723 per cent), and Dust (0.916 per cent). The PM2.5 particles, measuring 2.5 micrometers or less in diameter pose significant health risks as they can penetrate deep into the lungs when inhaled. The India Meteorological

Department (IMD) has issued a yellow alert for the next five days for Delhi, forecasting the persistently low visibility to continue until December 23. The IMD also indicated that the cold and fog conditions would likely worsen due to northern winds. Out of the 36 air quality monitoring stations across Delhi, 32 reported AQI levels in the 'severe plus' category, with several locations recording values exceeding 480, posing extreme health risks to residents. Alarming figures have been reported from Anand Vihar (478), Ashok Vihar (472), Bawana (454), Burari Crossing (473), Mathura Road (467), Dr. Karni Singh Shooting Range (451), Dwarka Sector 8 (460), ITO (475), Jahangirpuri (478), and Punjabi Bagh (476). Other notable locations include Nehru Nagar (485), Rohini (470), Vikas Marg (466), and Vivek Vihar (475) while the remaining stations reported 'severe' levels. The situation in the National Capital Region (NCR) cities also remains critical, with Haryana's Faridabad at 289,

Gurugram at 370 and Uttar Pradesh's Ghaziabad at 386, Greater Noida at 351, and Noida at 366. The conditions are a result of the ongoing influence of western disturbances, which are also responsible for a drop in minimum temperatures. As per IMD, the minimum temperature in Delhi had dipped to 5°C on Thursday morning, while earlier this week, the city recorded a low of 7.4°C. Early morning visuals from areas such as Ashoka Road, Kushak Road, and Maulana Azad Road on

Thursday showed thick fog enveloping the National Capital. Moderate fog reported at Safdarjung airport. Safdarjung airport recorded lowest visibility 250m between 7 am to 7.30 am which improved thereafter becoming 300m at 8 am. Palam airport recorded lowest visibility 600 m during 7.30 am to 9 am which improved thereafter becoming 700m at 9.30 am. The ventilation index lower than 6000 m2/s with average wind speed less than 10 kmph is unfavourable for dispersion of

pollutants. The Delhi Airport, considering the situation, issued a passenger advisory on a post on X (formerly Twitter) on Thursday, requesting the passengers to contact their concerned airlines for updated flight information before travelling. "Low visibility procedures are still in progress at Delhi Airport. However, there has been no impact on flight operations. Passengers are requested to contact the airline concerned for updated flight information," the post read.

Israeli airstrikes hit Yemen's capital and port city

AP ■ DUBAI

A series of intense Israeli airstrikes shook Yemen's rebel-held capital and a port city early Thursday and killed at least nine people, officials said, shortly after a Houthi missile targeted central Israel. Thursday's strikes risk further escalating conflict with the Iranian-backed Houthis, whose attacks on the Red Sea corridor have drastically impacted global shipping. The rebels have so far avoided the same level of intense military strikes that have targeted Palestinian militant group Hamas and Lebanon's Hezbollah, fellow members of Tehran's self-described "Axis of Resistance." Israel's military said that it conducted two waves of strikes in a preplanned operation that began early Thursday and involved 14 fighter jets. The military said the first wave of strikes targeted Houthi infra-

structure at the ports of Hodeida, Salif and the Ras Isa oil terminal on the Red Sea. Then, in a second wave of strikes, the military said its fighter jets targeted Houthi energy infrastructure in Sanaa. The Houthi-controlled satellite channel al-Masirah said that some of the strikes targeted power stations in the capital, posting videos of flames engulfing one structure, as civil defense workers doused it in water, trying to extinguish the fire. The channel, citing its correspondent in the port city of Hodeida, said that at least seven people had been killed at Salif, while another two had been killed at the Ras Isa oil terminal. Others suffered wounds at the Hodeida port as well, it said. An Israeli military statement offered no damage assessment. Rear Adm Daniel Hagari, an Israeli military spokesman, said the strikes hit energy and port infrastructure, which he alleged

the rebels "have been using in ways that effectively contributed to their military action." "I suggest the leaders of the Houthis to see, to understand and remember: Whoever raises a hand against the state of Israel, his hand will be cut off, whoever harms us — will be harmed sevenfold," Israeli Defense Minister Israel Katz said. Rebel-held Hodeida, about 145 kilometres southwest of Sanaa, has been key for food shipments into Yemen as its decade-long war has gone on. There's also longstanding suspicion that weapons from Iran have been transferred through the port. The strikes happened just after Israel's military said that its air force intercepted a missile launched from Yemen before it entered the country's territory. The waves of strikes on Yemen early Thursday weren't a direct response to the missile hit, said a military official, but rather a preplanned response to

months of Houthi aggression. Israel's fighter jets were already in the air when the missile was launched. "Rocket and missile sirens were sounded following the possibility of falling debris from the interception," the Israeli military said. Sirens sounded near Tel Aviv and the surrounding areas, and a large explosion was heard overhead at the time. In Ramat Gan, a suburb of Tel Aviv, a large piece of shrapnel from the missile collapsed a school building there, without causing any injuries. The military official said that the Houthis have fired more than 200 missiles and UAVs, or unmanned aerial vehicles, at Israel since October 7, 2023. Brig Gen Yahya Saree, a Houthi military spokesman, claimed the attack hours later in a pre-recorded video statement, saying the rebels fired two of its "Palestine" ballistic missiles at Israel.

'Israel's restriction of water supply in Gaza amounts to acts of genocide'

AP ■ NEW YORK

Human Rights Watch on Thursday accused Israel of causing the deaths of thousands of Palestinians by systematically restricting and targeting Gaza's water supply in a campaign that amounted to "acts of genocide." The rights group was the latest among a growing number of critics to accuse Israel of genocidal acts in its war in Gaza. Israel vehemently denies the allegations, saying its war is directed at Hamas militants, not Gaza's civilians. In Thursday's report, HRW alleged that countless infants, children and adults have died from malnutrition, dehydration and illness as a result of actions by Israeli authorities over more than a year of war to deliberately cut the flow of water and electricity to Gaza, destroy infrastructure and prevent the distribution of critical supplies. "As a state policy, these acts constitute a widespread or sys-

tematic attack directed against a civilian population. Israeli officials are therefore committing the crime against humanity of extermination," the New York-based group said. The rights group said that the "pattern of conduct" outlined in its report and statements from Israeli officials "may indicate" genocidal intent, but it did not come down definitively on one side. Under international law, proving intent is key in concluding whether the crime of genocide has been committed. Israel, founded as a refuge for Jews in the wake of the Nazi Holocaust, strenuously denies such allegations. It says Hamas is responsible for the destruction in Gaza because the group hides and operates in schools, hospitals and residential areas. It says the October 2023 Hamas attack that triggered the war — the deadliest attack on Jews since the Holocaust — amounts to genocide. "Human Rights Watch is once more spreading

its blood libels in order to promote its anti-Israel propaganda," Israel's Foreign Ministry said. It claimed Israel has worked to facilitate the flow of water and humanitarian aid into Gaza throughout the war. "Israel will continue to ensure humanitarian aid enters Gaza, in full compliance with international law," the statement said. The new report by Human Rights Watch outlined what the organisation described as an extended, methodical campaign by Israeli officials to deprive Palestinians in Gaza of water. That has drastically reduced the water supply in Gaza, from about 83 litres per person each day before the war began to between two and nine litres in the months since, the human rights group says. The World Health Organisation says people require 50 to 100 litres per day to meet basic needs and keep sickness in check. Human Rights Watch said Israeli forces deliberately razed

the solar panels that powered four of Gaza's six wastewater treatment plants and destroyed a key reservoir. The group alleged Israel also cut off electricity required to run desalination plants and other infrastructure and restricted fuel for backup generators. When the International Court of Justice issued orders in January that Israel provide Palestinians with basic services and assistance, officials ignored them, the group alleged. Human Rights Watch said its findings were based on interviews with more than 60 Palestinians, accounts from utility employees, doctors and other healthcare workers and aid workers, and analysis of satellite images, photos and video. "Doctors and nurses told Human Rights Watch that they had seen numerous infants, children, and adults die from a combination of malnutrition, dehydration, and disease," the group said.

Wisconsin school shooter had two guns, got texts from attack plot suspect

Madison (AP): The shooter who killed a student and teacher at a religious school in Wisconsin brought two guns to the school and was in contact with a man in California who authorities say was planning to attack a government building, according to authorities and court documents that became public Wednesday. Police were still investigating why the 15-year-old student at Abundant Life Christian School in Madison shot and killed a fellow student and teacher on Monday before shooting herself, Madison Police Chief Shon Barnes said. Two other students who were shot remained in critical condition on Wednesday. "We may never know what she was thinking that day, but we'll do our best to try to add or give as much information to our public as possible," Barnes said. A California judge, meanwhile, issued a restraining order Tuesday under California's gun red flag law against a 20-year-old Carlsbad man. The order requires the man to turn his guns and ammunition into police within 48 hours unless an officer asks for them sooner because he poses an immediate danger to himself and others.

Gisele Pelicot speaks after ex-husband found guilty of rapes, sentenced to 20 yrs in France

AP ■ AVIGNON

Gisele Pelicot said after 51 men were all found guilty Thursday in the drugging-and-rape trial that turned her into a feminist hero that the ordeal had been "very difficult" and expressed support for other victims of sexual violence. "We share the same fight," Gisele Pelicot, 72, said in her first words after the court in the southern French city of Avignon handed down prison sentences ranging from three to 20 years in the shocking case that stunned France and spurred a national reckoning about the blight of rape culture. Gisele Pelicot — whose courage and stoicism have turned her into an internationally recognised figure and an icon for many women — said she was thinking of her grandchildren after enduring more than three months of court hearings that dealt with the nearly decade of rapes and

other abuse inflicted on her by her now ex-husband and his accomplices. "It's also for them that I led this fight," she said of her grandchildren. The court sentenced her ex-husband, Dominique Pelicot, to 20 years in prison for drugging and raping her and allowing other men to rape her while she was unconscious. The sentence was the maximum possible under French law. He was declared guilty of all charges against him. At age 72, it could mean that he spends the rest of his life in prison. He won't be eligible to ask for early release until at least two-thirds of the sentence has been served. Roger Arata, the lead judge of the court in the southern French city Avignon, told Pelicot to stand for the sentencing. After it was delivered, he sat back down and cried. Arata read out verdicts one after the other against Pelicot

and the 50 other men tried in the case. "You are therefore declared guilty of aggravated rape on the person of Gisele Pelicot," the judge said as he worked his way through names on the long list of defendants. Gisele Pelicot was seated on one side of the courtroom, facing the defendants and sometimes nodding her head as verdicts were announced. Delivering the guilty verdicts and sentences took Arata just over an hour. Dominique Pelicot's lawyer, Beatrice Zavarro, said that she would weigh a possible appeal, but also expressed hope that Gisele Pelicot would find solace in the court's rulings. "I wanted Mrs Pelicot to be able to emerge from these hearings in peace, and I think that the verdicts will contribute to this relief for Mrs Pelicot," she said. Of the 50 accused of rape, just one was acquitted but was found guilty of aggravated sexual assault.

Another man was also found guilty on the sexual assault charge that he was tried for — meaning all 51 of the defendants were found guilty in one way or another. In a side room where defendants' family members watched the proceedings on television screens, some burst into tears and gasped as the sentences were revealed. Protesters gathered outside the courthouse followed the proceedings on their phones. Some read out the verdicts and applauded as they were announced inside. Some were carrying oranges as symbolic gifts for the defendants heading to prison. Prosecutors had asked that Dominique Pelicot get the maximum penalty of 20 years and for sentences of 10 to 18 years for the others tried for rape. But the court was more lenient than prosecutors had hoped, with many sentenced to less than a decade in prison.

Macron in Mayotte to survey Cyclone Chido damage

Mamoudzou (AP): France's President Emmanuel Macron arrived Thursday to the Indian Ocean archipelago of Mayotte to survey the devastation that Cyclone Chido wrought across the French territory as thousands of people tried cope without the bare essentials such as water or electricity. "Mayotte is demolished," an airport security agent told Macron as soon as he stepped of the plane. The security agent, Assane Haloi, said small children are without water or electricity and have nowhere to go because "everything is demolished." "There's no roof, there's nothing. No water, no food, no electricity. We can't even shelter, we are all wet with our children covering ourselves with whatever we have so that we can sleep," she said, asking for emergency aid. Macron went on an helicopter for an aerial appraisal of the damage. He then headed to the hospital in Mamoudzou, Mayotte's



A boy stands amidst debris in the Kaweni slum on the outskirts of Mamoudzou in the French Indian Ocean island of Mayotte, Thursday, after Cyclone Chido. AP/PTI

capital, to meet with medical staff and patients. He will then visit a destroyed neighbourhood. French authorities said at least 31 people have died and more than 1,500 people were injured, more than 200 criti-

cally. But it's feared hundreds or even thousands of people have died after the strongest cyclone in nearly a century ripped through the French territory of Mayotte off the coast of Africa on Saturday.

Trump's demands derail govt funding plan ahead of shutdown

AP ■ WASHINGTON

President-elect Donald Trump abruptly rejected a bipartisan plan on Wednesday to prevent a Christmastime government shutdown, instead telling House Speaker Mike Johnson and Republicans to essentially renegotiate — days before a deadline when federal funding runs out. Trump's sudden entrance into the debate and new demands sent Congress spiralling as lawmakers are trying to wrap up work and head home for the holidays. It leaves Johnson scrambling to engineer a new plan before Friday's deadline to keep government open. "Republicans must GET SMART and TOUGH," Trump and Vice President-elect JD Vance said in a statement. The president-elect made an almost unrealistic proposal that combined some continuation of government funds along with a much more controversial provision to raise

the nation's debt limit — something his own party routinely rejects. "Anything else is a betrayal of our country," they wrote. Democrats decried the GOP revolt over the stopgap measure, which would have also provided some USD 100.4 billion in disaster aid to states hammered by Hurricanes Helene and Milton and other natural disasters. "House Republicans have been ordered to shut down the government and hurt everyday Americans all across this country," said House Democratic Leader Hakeem Jeffries. Jeffries said "an agreement is an agreement", and by backing out of it, "the House Republicans will now own any harm that is visited upon the American people." Already, the massive 1,500-page bill was on the verge of collapse, as hard right conservatives rejected the increased spending, egged on by Trump's billionaire ally Elon Musk who

rejected the plan almost as soon as it was released late on Tuesday night. Rank-and-file lawmakers complained about the extras, which included their first pay-raises in more than a decade — a shock after one of the most unproductive chaotic sessions in modern times. Even the addition of much-needed disaster aid, some USD



100.4 billion in the aftermath of hurricanes and other natural calamities that ravaged states this year, plus USD 10 billion in economic assistance for farmers failed to win over the budget-slashing GOP. A number of Republicans had been waiting for Trump to signal whether they should vote yes or no. "This should not pass," Musk posted on his social media site X in the wee hours of Wednesday. One lawmaker said office phone lines were flooded with calls from constituents. "My phone was ringing off the hook," said Rep. Andy Barr, R-Ky. "The people who elected us are listening to Elon Musk." The outcome comes as no surprise for Johnson, who like other Republican House speakers before him, has been unable to convince his majority to go along with the routine needs of federal government operations, which they would prefer to slash.

It all shows just how hard it will be for Republicans next year, as they seize control of the House, Senate and White House, to unify and lead the nation. And it underscores how much Johnson and the GOP leaders must depend on Trump's blessing to see any legislative package over the finish line. Musk, who is heading Trump's new Department of Government Efficiency, warned that "Any member of the House or Senate who votes for this outrageous spending bill deserves to be voted out in 2 years!" It is not an idle threat coming from Musk, the world's richest man, who helped bankroll Trump's victory and can easily use his America PAC to make or break political careers. Democratic Rep. Jamie Raskin of Maryland said this is the problem with "an oligarchy, a handful of wealthy people run everything and everyone is supposed to live in fear of them."

Senators from both parties were watching from across the Capitol with dismay. "Is this going to be the norm? Is this going to be how we operate?" said Sen. Josh Hawley, R-Mo., putting the blame on Johnson. Democrats, who negotiated the final product with Johnson and Senate GOP leadership, will be expected to provide enough support to help ensure passage, as is often the case on big, bipartisan bills. "Republicans need to stop playing politics," said White House Press Secretary Karine Jean-Pierre. However, Trump's new demands on the debt limit pose a daunting test for Johnson, who has worked hard to stay close to the president-elect — even texting with Musk and DOGE co-chair Vivek Ramaswamy — only to have him turn against his hard-fought plan. Trump posted later that he was insisting on the debt ceiling: "I

will fight till the end." The nation's debt limit expires in 2025 and Trump appears to want the issue off the table before he returns to the White House, a reasonable idea but one that typically is tough to negotiate. The last House speaker, Kevin McCarthy, worked for months with President Joe Biden to raise the debt limit. Even though they struck a bipartisan deal that cut spending in exchange for additional borrowing capacity, House Republicans said it did not go far enough, and it ended up costing McCarthy his job. Now, Trump is looking for Johnson to pass a debt ceiling extension some 48 hours before a partial government shutdown. Meanwhile, the bipartisan package that Trump rejected extended existing government programmes and services at their current operating levels for a few more months, through March 14, 2025.

Indian, US officials meet to chart next steps in space collaboration

PTI ■ WASHINGTON

Officials from India and the United States have charted next steps in space collaboration, including human spaceflight, joint space exploration and a commitment to facilitating commercial partnerships between space companies to advance the shared interests in the growing space economy, the White House said on Wednesday. A meeting in this regard was held in Houston on December 17. The participants in the meeting were US Principal Deputy National Security Advisor Jon Finer, Deputy Secretary of State Kurt Campbell and Indian Ambassador to the United States Vinay Kwatra. "Following President (Joe

Biden and Prime Minister (Narendra) Modi's June 2023 commitment to work together to 'reach new frontiers across all sectors of space cooperation' and India's signing of the Artemis Accords, our two nations reached an inflection point on collaboration across civil, security and commercial space sectors," the White House said in a fact-sheet. "This includes human spaceflight, joint space exploration and a commitment to facilitating commercial partnerships between US and Indian space companies to advance our shared interests in the growing space economy," it said. As part of their visit to Houston, Finer and Campbell met with representatives from the National Aeronautics and Space Administration (NASA),

Indian Space Research Organisation (ISRO) and space industry leaders to identify new opportunities to further strengthen the two countries' burgeoning space partnership. They also reflected on the accomplishments of the past few months and charted next steps to take the India-US partnership to the next level, including selecting two ISRO astronauts to train at the NASA's Johnson Space Centre for the first-ever joint effort between American and Indian astronauts at the International Space Station, with Axiom Space serving as the provider of the mission. The launch of the Axiom-4 mission as soon as spring 2025 will mark a significant milestone in the US-India space partnership and space exploration.

UK PM hosts Indian business chiefs to boost investments

PTI ■ LONDON

Prime Minister Keir Starmer hosted a delegation of 13 Indian companies at 10 Downing Street in London on what the British government described as a "curated visit" to enhance the bilateral partnership and boost investment flows. The visit on Wednesday follows Starmer's meeting with Prime Minister Narendra Modi on the sidelines of the G20 Summit last month, when the leaders committed to take forward an "ambitious" UK-India Comprehensive Strategic Partnership with collaboration opportunities on economic growth, security and defence, technology, climate, health, and education. According to a readout from the British High Commission in New Delhi, the Indian investors and CEOs also met



Britain's Prime Minister Keir Starmer, left, shakes hands with the Sultan of Brunei Haji Hassanall Bolkiyah ahead of a meeting at 10 Downing Street, London, Thursday. AP/PTI

senior Cabinet ministers to discuss job creation and growth opportunities under a proposed India-UK trade deal after Starmer had confirmed the relaunch of Free Trade Agreement (FTA) negotiations early in the new year. "India is a vital partner for the UK and we have huge ambition to unlock more opportunities together, building on our already strong relationship," said Starmer, with reference to the business meeting. "I'm delighted to welcome some of India's most senior business leaders to Downing Street and to outline the UK's ambitious focus on economic growth and innovation," he said. The delegation, supported by the Confederation of Indian Industry (CII), discussed deepening ties with Chancellor of the Exchequer Rachel Reeves and Foreign Secretary David Lammy. Meanwhile, Business

and Trade Secretary Jonathan Reynolds and minister for trade policy Douglas Alexander discussed bilateral trade, worth GBP 42 billion a year and supporting over 600,000 jobs across both economies as per UK government statistics. "As one of the most globally connected economies in the G20, the UK provides unmatched opportunities for Indian businesses to thrive. India already accounts for the second highest number of FDI projects into the UK, and this government is committed to deepening our trade and investment links with India even further," said Reynolds. "Boosting investment is a mission at the heart of this government. It was great to hear firsthand from Indian business leaders on why so many of them have given us a vote of confidence and chosen to invest here," he said.

India's EV market to reach ₹20 Lakh Crore, to create five Crore jobs by 2030

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

Union minister Nitin Gadkari on Thursday said the Indian electric vehicle market potential is likely to touch Rs 20 lakh crore and will create around 5 crore jobs across the entire EV ecosystem by 2030. Addressing the '8th Catalyst Conference on Sustainability of E-Vehicle Industry - Evexpo 2024', Gadkari said estimated electric vehicles finance market size will be around Rs 4 lakh crore by 2030. "The Indian electric vehicles market potential is of Rs 20 lakh crore by 2030, creating five crore jobs across the entire EV ecosystem," he said. The road transport and highways minister said 40 per cent of air pollution in India is



because of the transport sector. "We import fossil fuels worth Rs 22 lakh crore, that is a big economic challenge. And this import of fossil fuels is creating a lot of problems in

our country," Gadkari said. According to Gadkari, the government is concentrating on green energy as 44 per cent of India's power basket is solar power. "We are giving highest priority for development of

our hydro power, then solar power, green power, particularly from biomass. And now solar power is one of the important sources for all of us," he said. The minister pointed out that

India is facing shortages of electric buses. "Our country requires one lakh electric buses but our capacity is 50,000 buses. I request all of you that this is the appropriate time that you can expand your factory," he said. Gadkari asked electric vehicle manufacturers not to compromise with the quality. He said the size of India's automobile industry was Rs 7 lakh crore when he took charge as transport minister in 2014. "Today it (the size of the automobile sector) is Rs 22 lakh crore. Our number is third in the world. We just surpassed Japan," he said. The size of the USA's automobile industry is Rs 78 lakh crore, followed by China (Rs 47 lakh crore) and India (Rs 22 lakh crore).

Union Minister Nitin Gadkari urges sugar industry to diversify into ethanol, green hydrogen

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

Road, Transport and Highways Minister Nitin Gadkari on Thursday called upon the sugar industry to explore multiple avenues for diversification, including ethanol-diesel blending and green hydrogen production. Addressing the annual general meeting of the Indian Sugar and Bio-Energy Manufacturers Association (ISMA) virtually, the minister emphasised the need for setting up ethanol and CNG pumps, including through private sector participation. There is a huge potential for flex engines, ethanol-based engines, and bioCNG as alternatives to fossil fuels. Five automakers including Tata, Suzuki, and Toyota are set to launch flex engine fuel cars in the market, he said and urged the tractor makers to start manufacturing tractors on alternative fuels. The minister suggested



examining possibilities of exporting ethanol to neighbouring countries like Bangladesh, Bhutan, Nepal and Sri Lanka to expand market opportunities. Bio-bitumen production using lignin and biomass sources, along with green hydrogen generation from sugar industry infrastructure, were highlighted as potential areas for expansion. He emphasised the potential of green hydrogen as an alternative fuel source and suggested using existing infrastructure in the sugar and ethanol industries to

examine green hydrogen. "I know that making sugar is not an attractive job, but at the same time, because of ethanol, CNG, hydrogen and other by-products, we can increase the productivity and profitability in the industry," he said. "The industry must focus on increasing sugarcane productivity through modern techniques like nano-fertilizers and drone spraying," the minister said. The government will also consider the industry's request for sugar exports and minimum selling price (MSP), the minister said.

Sebi introduces timelines for NFO fund deployment, eases AMC employee interest alignment rules

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

Markets regulator Sebi has decided to introduce timelines for deploying funds raised through New Fund Offers (NFOs) by asset management companies (AMCs) and relaxed regulatory framework regarding the alignment of AMC employees' interests with those of unitholders. Additionally, the regulator has mandated disclosure of stress testing for all mutual fund schemes to provide greater transparency to investors.



These proposals, approved Wednesday, aimed at enhancing operational

flexibility for mutual funds while ensuring greater accountability and trust among investors. Regarding deployment timelines, Sebi said that fund managers must deploy funds collected during an NFO as per the specified asset allocation of the scheme, typically within 30 days. If funds are not deployed within the specified timeline, investors will have the option to exit the scheme without paying an exit load, through regulator said in a statement. The framework discourages

AMCs from collecting excess funds during NFOs, as investors can invest in open-ended schemes later at the prevailing Net Asset Value (NAV). "The new framework is aimed at encouraging AMCs to collect only as many funds in NFOs as can be deployed in a reasonable period of time (i.e. Ordinarily 30 days) since in the open-ended funds investors always have the option to enter the scheme at a later date at the prevailing NAV," Sebi said. "The framework provides an option to investors to

exit the scheme without exit load in case the fund manager is unable to deploy the fund within the specified timeline," it added. To address the issue of possible mis-selling in NFOs, for switch transactions, the distributor shall be entitled to the lower of the two commissions offered under the two schemes of the switch transaction, Sebi said. To facilitate ease of doing business for asset management companies' employees, Sebi has decided to relax the regulatory

framework pertaining to the 'Alignment of interest of AMC employees' with unitholders. Under this, the regulator has decided to reduce the minimum investment amount required for designated employees, reduce the frequency of disclosures related to compliance relaxed requirements for employees managing liquid funds and simplified redemption norms. Additionally, Sebi said that employees who resign will now have a reduced lock-in period for their

investments. The regulator has empowered the committee to oversee compliance by designated employees. Sandeep Bagla, CEO, TRUST MF, said that Sebi having a look at the 'Skin in the Game' regulation is a welcome step in the right direction. The MF industry is expanding fast and needs to retain quality professionals to serve and safeguard the interests of unit holders. One needs to examine the relevance, context and effectiveness of regulations regularly," he added.

Flyzy partners with Adani Digital Labs to enhance dutyfree, Pranaam Service

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

Flyzy on Wednesday announced a partnership with Adani Digital Labs, a subsidiary of the Adani Group. This strategic collaboration will enable Flyzy customers to conveniently purchase duty-free items and avail Adani Pranaam services directly through the Flyzy's dashboard. The integration is now live, offering Flyzy users the ease of accessing these premium Adani services from their devices. The signature Pranaam meet and greet services by Adani Digital Labs are designed to ensure a seamless experience, addressing key pain points for modern travellers. "We at Flyzy are always thinking of solutions that will streamline travel experience for our users. This partnership with Adani Digital Labs is also a step in that direction. Airport travel is all about convenience today and not many companies address the pain points of the travellers. By integrating Adani services with Flyzy dashboard we aim to make airport travel smoother for millions of our users," said Deepak Meena, Co-founder & CEO, Flyzy. Flyzy has disrupted the traditional B2B travel industry by redefining travel operations for its clients by ensuring transparency, profitability, and scalability.

Rupee falls 14 paise to close at all-time low of 85.08 against US dollar



PTI ■ MUMBAI

The rupee dropped 14 paise and breached the crucial 85 level to close at an all-time low of 85.08 (provisional) against the US dollar on Thursday, as a hawkish stance from the US

Federal Reserve sparked a broad dollar rally. Forex traders said the Indian rupee breached the 85-mark for the first time and fell to a new record low on Thursday, as the US Federal Reserve adjusted its projections for 2025, signalling a more cautious monetary policy stance, pressuring emerging market currencies, including the Indian rupee. The US Federal Reserve cut interest rates by 25-bps to 4.5 per cent, in line with estimates. However, it signalled only two rate cuts in 2025 from its previous expectations of four rate cuts.

At the interbank foreign exchange, the rupee opened on a weak note and breached the crucial 85.00 level against the greenback. It fell further to an all-time low of 85.08 against the American currency, registering a fall of 14 paise over its previous close, as dollar demand from importers, foreign fund outflows and a muted trend in domestic equities further dented investor sentiments. On Wednesday, the rupee dropped 3 paise to close at an all-time low of 84.94 against the US dollar. "We expect the rupee to trade with a negative bias on global equities following a

hawkish Fed and a strong dollar. Concerns over slowdown in the economy may further weigh on the rupee," said Anuj Choudhary - Research Analyst at Mirae Asset Sharekhan. Choudhary further noted that any intervention by the Reserve Bank of India (RBI) may also support the rupee. "Traders may take cues from final GDP, weekly unemployment claims, and existing home sales data from the US. USD-INR spot price is expected to trade in a range of 84.9 to 85.25," he said. Meanwhile, the dollar index, which gauges the

greenback's strength against a basket of six currencies, was trading lower by 0.13 per cent at 107.88. Brent crude, the global oil benchmark, fell 0.05 per cent to USD 73.35 per barrel in futures trade. In the domestic equity market, the 30-share BSE Sensex closed 964.15 points, or 1.20 per cent, down at 79,218.05 points, while Nifty settled down 247.15 points, or 1.02 per cent to 23,951.70 points. Foreign Institutional Investors (FIIs) offloaded Rs 1,316.81 crore in the capital markets on net basis on Wednesday, according to exchange data.

Air India places order for 34 trainer aircraft

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

Air India has placed an order for 34 trainer aircraft, including 31 single engine planes, for its flying training organisation in Maharashtra that is expected to come up by the second half of 2025. The order includes 31 single-engine aircraft from Piper Aircraft in the US and three twin-engine planes from Austria-based Diamond Aircraft, the airline said in a release on Thursday. The Flying Training Organisation (FTO) is being

set up at Belora airport in Amravati, Maharashtra. It is expected to be operational by the second half of next year post-regulatory approvals. Sunil Bhaskaran, Director of Air India's Aviation Academy, said the FTO will help in building a self-reliant ecosystem of qualified pilots for both Air India and the country's aviation industry. The Tata Group-owned airline has opened its new Aviation Training Academy in Gurugram, Haryana. Air India group is expanding its fleet and network.

Indian Oil Corporation to invest over ₹21,000 Crore in Bihar refinery expansion

PTI ■ PATNA

Indian Oil Corporation (IOC) - the nation's top oil firm - will invest over Rs 21,000 crore to expand the Barauni refinery in Bihar as well as in setting up a city gas distribution network across the state, a senior executive said on Thursday. IOC is expanding its Barauni refinery to 9 million tonnes per annum from current 6 million tonnes together with a petrochemical plant at a cost of about Rs 16,000 crore and invest another Rs 5,600 crore in setting up network to retail CNG to automobiles and piped cooking gas to households and industries in 27 cities of



Bihar, company Executive Director Suman Kumar said while speaking at the Bihar Business Connect 2024 investor summit here. "IOC is the oldest investor in Bihar, setting up the Barauni refinery in 1964.

The initial capacity was 3 million tonnes per annum which was later expanded to 6 million tonnes. Now we are expanding the capacity from 6 million tonnes to 9 million tonnes per annum. Alongside, a 200,000 tonnes polypropylene is also being set up," he said. Polypropylene will be the raw material for the plastic industry. The expansion and PP plant is scheduled to be commissioned by 2025-end. Besides, IOC is also investing Rs 5,600 crore in setting up city gas distribution (CGD) network in 27 districts of Bihar, he said. Previously, the company, along with partners, had spent Rs 9,512 crore in revival of the Barauni fertilizer plant, starting urea production in October 2022. The plant was part of a government initiative to revive closed urea units and

increase the availability of domestically produced urea. The investments are part of the IOC's aim to become a USD 1 trillion company by 2047, he said. The USD 110 billion oil major has drawn up an aggressive capital expansion plan, proposing to invest more than Rs 2 lakh crore through the decade to expand refining capacity, petrochemical integration, allied infrastructure and renewable energy assets. With India's economy on the rise, the energy needs of the country are growing exponentially. As 'The Energy of India', the firm aims to become the nation's lead energiser, fulfilling 12.5 per cent

(1/8th) of India's energy needs by 2050, he said. Besides Barauni, the state-run refiner is expanding the Panipat Refinery from 15 million tonnes to 25 million tonnes a year and the Gujarat refinery from 13.7 million tonnes to 18 million tonnes, along with its integration to lube and petrochemical production units. While the first phase of petchem expansions at Panipat in Haryana and Paradip in Odisha is complete, the one at Gujarat refinery is scheduled for commissioning in 2024-25. Alongside, it is pursuing green initiatives, including hydrogen mobility, hydrogen transportation,

biofuels, electric mobility, solar cooktops, and minimising water footprint. Oil demand in India, the world's third-largest energy consumer, is projected to rise from 5.4 million barrels per day (bpd) in 2023 to 9.3 million bpd by 2040. Fulfilling this rising demand will require augmenting the country's refining capacity progressively, from the current 256.8 million tonnes per annum to 450 million tonnes. In addition, the country is set to add 50 GW of renewable energy capacity annually, aiming to achieve 500 gigawatts (GW) of installed renewable capacity by 2030.

Nearly half of Indian international travellers made last-minute flight bookings in 2024: report

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

The year 2024 witnessed a rise in spontaneous travel among Indian international travellers, with nearly half of them making last-minute plans, barely less than a week before their departure, reveals a new report. The travel report, conducted by travel-banking fintech platform Niyoo, highlights the evolving mindset of Indian travellers, who are embracing flexibility, prioritising experiences, and benefiting from streamlined travel processes. "Forty eight percent of international flight



bookings by Indians this year were made just 0-7 days before travel. This trend was supported by easier travel access, with 58

countries offering visa-free or visa-on-arrival options to Indian passport holders," reads the report findings. While many travellers

booked international flights at short notice, the report said "30 per cent of visa applications" were submitted 16-30 days before travel, implying a certain degree of preparation. Dubai, which according to the report was by far the most preferred destination for Indian travellers, attracted "45 per cent" of holidaymakers with its luxurious shopping and entertainment. The list was followed by Vietnam, known for its culture and natural beauty, which drew 15 per cent travellers. Smaller number of travellers, accounting for one per cent each, chose Oman and Japan. Pop culture also played a

significant influence on the travel choices of Indians this year. For instance, web series like "Emily in Paris" inspired many Indian women to visit France, with 30 per cent Indians choosing France as their destination, followed by the UK (29 per cent) and Singapore (26 per cent). The preferred travel destinations for Indian males were different. "Male travellers leaned towards Thailand, with 80 per cent preferring its beaches and vibrant nightlife, followed by the UAE (77 per cent) and the USA (76 per cent)," it added. Additionally, short holidays were the most popular in 2024, with "66 per cent" of

trips lasting less than seven days. The number of travellers choosing extended vacations lasting 15 days or more was recorded "17 per cent". With the increase in travel, more people also focused on safety as the report witnessed a record sale of 7,395 travel insurance policies in 2024, worth a total of Rs 43.2 crore. "Younger travellers especially prioritised protection, often choosing insurance plans ranging from Rs 50,000 to Rs 1,00,000," it added. The findings were based on the sample size of 1 million Indian international travellers.

Koelnmesse India launches ORGATEC India for workspace design and technology

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

Koelnmesse India has announced the launch of ORGATEC India, the premier event for workspace design, furniture and technology, aimed at bringing global expertise to country's evolving workspace ecosystem. Slated to debut from November 4 to 6 next year, at the Jio Convention Centre, Mumbai, ORGATEC India will bring together global and local leaders to explore business opportunities, foster connections, and showcase

innovations shaping the future of workspaces. The event will showcase transformative innovations in workplace design, including sustainable building technologies, adaptive workspaces, and advanced design solutions. With Global Capability Centers reshaping the office landscape, it is projected that GCCs will lease 40-45 per cent of total office space in India this year, expanding to over 1,900 centers supporting 2 million professionals by 2025, Koelnmesse India said.

UNITING ART AND PHILANTHROPY

COMING soon

KHUSHII NGO launched the Art Design Culture (ADC) Collective, a unique event combining Indian art and design with a mission to uplift communities in need. The evening also featured the launch of Rajan Kapoor's book *The Serengeti: Wild Wonders of Africa*, adding a thoughtful dimension to the celebration, writes **SAKSHI PRIYA**



In a world where art and culture come together, it's refreshing to see an event that not only celebrates creativity but also serves a greater purpose. The unveiling of the Art Design Culture (ADC) Collective, hosted by KHUSHII NGO at Bikaner House, was a perfect example of such an initiative. This special event seamlessly combined India's rich artistic traditions with the mission of supporting underprivileged communities through KHUSHII's educational and community development programs. The evening began with a gathering of art lovers, patrons and philanthropists who were eager to engage in thoughtful discussions about the role of art in society. Among the highlights of the event were the insightful conversations with celebrated personalities such as *Shabana Azmi* and *Javed Akhtar*. Their reflections on their contributions to Indian art and culture provided valuable perspectives, sparking a meaningful dialogue about the future of Indian creativity. One of the key moments of the evening was the launch of *Rajan Kapoor's The Serengeti: Wild Wonders of Africa*, a



stunning visual exploration of Africa's natural beauty. The launch was accompanied by a discussion on wildlife conservation led by *Dr. Rajiv Bhartari*, which highlighted the importance of preserving nature and the role that art can play in raising awareness about such critical issues.

Design also took centre stage, with renowned designer *Sussanne Khan* sharing her journey in the world of design. Her inspiring words about perseverance, creativity, and pushing boundaries resonated with everyone present. The evening also featured a lively art dialogue moderated by *Rahul Kumar*, where Padma



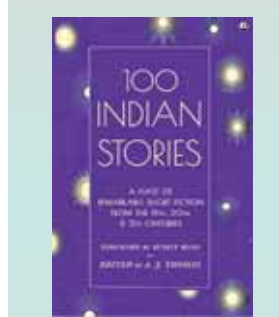
ABOUT THE BOOK
 Book: *The Serengeti wild wonders of Africa* by **Rajan Kapoor**
 Publisher: Niyogi Books
 Price: ₹4,500

Shri awardee *Paresh Maity* and textile revivalist *Karishma Swali* discussed the evolution of Indian art over the last decade. Their conversation underscored the importance of innovation and tradition in shaping the future of Indian art. The ADC Collective isn't just a celebration of creativity; it's an opportunity to connect with the vibrant world of Indian culture while supporting a meaningful cause. The event will give the public a chance to explore a stunning collection of artworks and interact with talented Indian artisans. All proceeds from the event will go directly towards supporting KHUSHII's philanthropic work, making it an impactful experience for both art enthusiasts and those eager to contribute to a greater cause. This initiative highlights how art can be a powerful tool for social change. By combining the beauty of Indian craftsmanship with the mission of uplifting communities, the ADC Collective offers a perfect example of how culture and philanthropy can work hand in hand to create positive change.

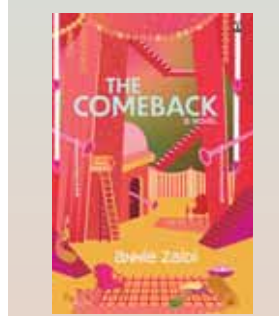
PHOTOS: PANKAJ KUMAR



Book: The Tamils
 A Portrait of a Community
 Author: Nirmala Lakshman
 Publisher: Aleph book Company



Book: 100 Indian Stories
 A Feast of Remarkable Short Fiction from the 19th, 20th, and 21st Centuries
 Author: Edited by A. J. Thomas.
 Foreword by Ruskin Bond
 Publisher: Aleph book Company

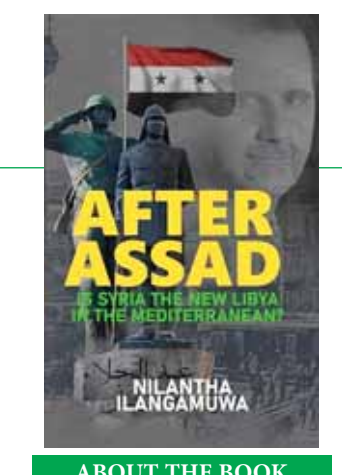


Book: The Comeback A Novel
 Author: Annie Zaidi
 Publisher: Aleph book Company

SHATTERED SYRIA: CHAOS AFTER ASSAD

By **GYANESHWAR DAYAL**

Our Regular columnist, *Nilantha Ilangamuwa's After Assad: Is Syria the New Libya in the Mediterranean?* is a compelling exploration of the geopolitical chaos unleashed by the fall of Bashar al-Assad's regime. Independently published in 2024 and available on Amazon, the book offers a stark analysis of a nation fractured by war, foreign interference, and sectarian tensions, drawing thought-provoking parallels with Libya's disintegration post-Gaddafi. *Ilangamuwa* delves into the complex aftermath of *Assad's* collapse, illustrating how the removal of a dictator does not necessarily lead to stability or democracy. Instead, the power vacuum has given rise to militias, territorial struggles, and foreign interventions. The narrative paints a grim picture of a nation torn apart by competing agendas, with Turkey, Iran, Israel, Russia, and Western powers vying for influence, often at the expense of Syria's sovereignty and its people's welfare. This multi-layered analysis is not just a critique of these powers but a searing indictment of how global ambitions exploit fractured states. The book contextualises the Syrian conflict within a broader historical framework, tracing the roots of sectarian manipulation and authoritarian rule under the *Assad* dynasty. *Ilangamuwa* connects these factors to the current fragmentation, showing how decades of repression and inequality laid the groundwork for the present turmoil. His parallels with Libya highlight the recurring failures of external interventions, where short-term strategic goals leave behind a legacy of chaos and suffering. The human cost of this conflict is at the heart of *Ilangamuwa's* narrative. He vividly describes the destruction of key Syrian cities, the displacement of millions, and the rise of extremist factions like Hay'at Tahrir al-Sham. He challenges the ethical basis of foreign powers' involvement, arguing that their actions often prioritise geopolitical objectives over humanitarian considerations. The looting of Damascus following *Assad's* downfall is capturing the collapse of state authority and the pervasive violence engulfing the capital. The author's critique extends to the duplicity of international media and foreign policy actors. By juxtaposing Syria's fate with Western portrayals of regime change, *Ilangamuwa* exposes the contradictions and hypocrisies in global narratives about intervention and democracy. His insights into how powers such as the United States and Turkey manipulate proxy wars underscore the cynical exploitation of regional instability. This is not merely a political or historical study; it is also a distressing reflection on the enduring suffering of the Syrian people. *Ilangamuwa's* writing is enriched by his encounters with Syrian activists, journalists, and intellectuals, lending authenticity to his analysis. These voices, often overshadowed by dominant geopolitical discourses, remind readers of the resilience and hope that persist amidst devastation.



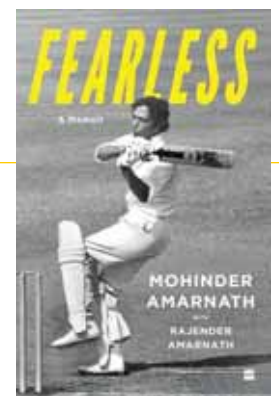
ABOUT THE BOOK
 Book: *Ilangamuwa's After Assad: Is Syria the New Libya in the Mediterranean?* by **Nilantha Ilangamuwa**

THE UNTOLD JOURNEY OF A CRICKET LEGEND

By **KUMAR CHELLAPPAN**

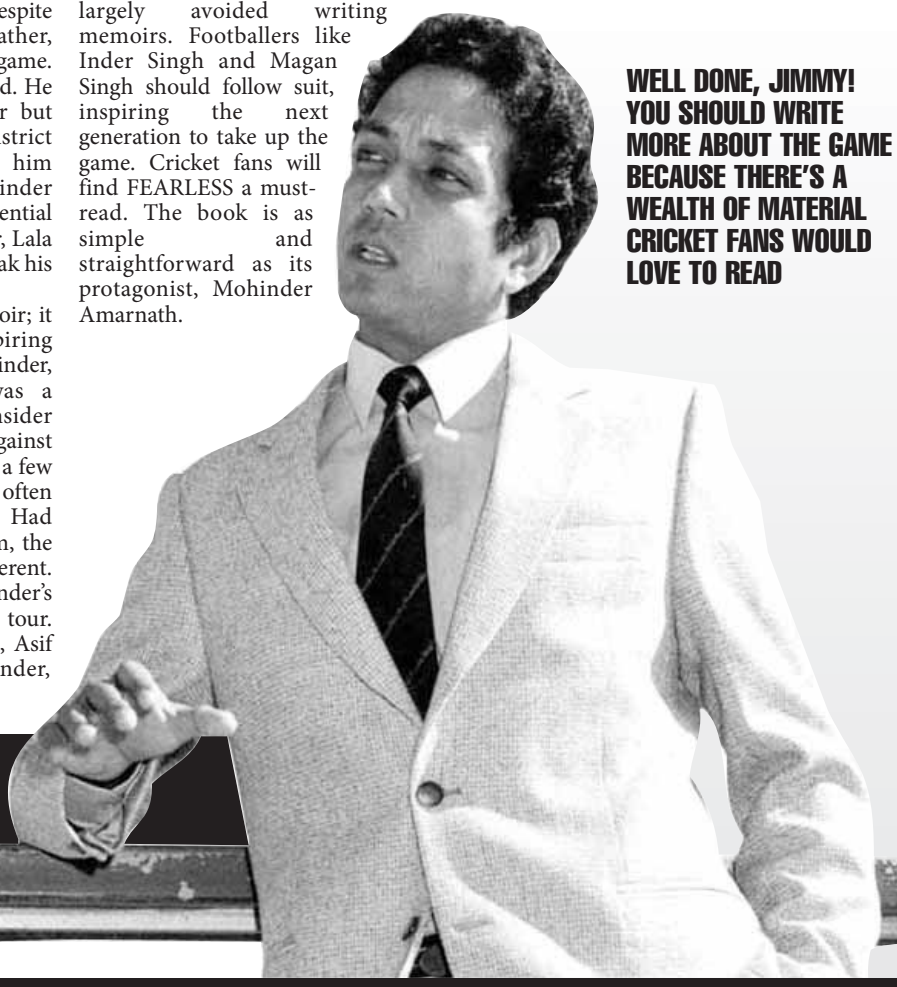
The game of cricket remains a mystery to me even in the autumn of life. My first encounter with it occurred in the 1960s when I witnessed this strange game being played at a maidan in Fort Kochi, where our teachers had taken us for a day-long excursion. The picturesque maidan had two screens made of white cloth stretched across the ends, while 'gentlemen' in white trousers and shirts played the game with bats and a ball. Sreedharan Pillai, the teacher who accompanied us, told me that it was 'cricket', a game played by royalty. Months later, I came across this game again at my school in Perumbavoor, where the royalty had assembled to play cricket. They arrived in cars such as Herald, Fiat, Vanguards, Chevrolet, and the occasional Ambassadors. One of the spectators told me that the players were from Kannan Devan Tea Estates in Munnar and shipping agents based in Kochi. Since I couldn't grasp the nuances of the game, I asked my classmate Sundararajan, son of a senior manager at Travancore Rayons, who often spoke of Pataudi, Sarbadhikari, and others. "You will not understand this game because it's played by educated and wealthy people," Sundararajan told me. In every place, there are those who are considered masters of all topics. We had Gopalakrishnan, the local tailor, who was an encyclopedia of knowledge. There was nothing he didn't know. "Arrey, you will not understand it. It's a game played by officials like engineers, adhikaris, contractors, sarvadhikaris, and vakeels," Gopal Ji ticked me off. It was years later that I heard names like Farook Engineer, Nari Contractor, Hemu Adhikari, Berry Sarvadhikari, and the occasional Smiths and Tailors who toured India! Cricket got a major boost in 1983 when India won the World Cup in England under the captaincy of Kapil Dev, the Haryana Hurricane. Alongside him, another player emerged as the darling of the masses: the unassuming Mohinder Amarnath, whose stellar performance with both bat and ball led India to triumph. Before the World Cup, Mohinder had already earned a reputation as a fantastic all-rounder, particularly in the 1977-1978 series in Australia, which is often remembered as the 'Mohinder Amarnath series.' It's shocking that such a brilliant cricketer had to spend many years in the wilderness due to the callous attitude of Indian selectors, who overlooked him despite his exceptional performances. Though he played against the touring Australian side in 1969, he was sidelined for years. The reason for this remains a mystery. After three decades of first-class cricket, Mohinder penned his memoirs, *FEARLESS*, with his younger sibling Rajinder. The three sons of legendary Lala Amarnath—Surinder, Mohinder, and Rajinder—had made their father proud with their performances, though Rajinder never made it to the national side. Despite being born to a legendary father, Mohinder had no godfathers in the game. His memoirs detail the trials he faced. He doesn't blame anyone in particular but does highlight how the Delhi District Cricket Association's actions kept him from the national team. Mohinder attributes this to the authorities' potential frustration with his outspoken father, Lala Amarnath, who didn't hesitate to speak his mind. *FEARLESS* is more than just a memoir; it offers valuable lessons for aspiring cricketers. Life wasn't easy for Mohinder, despite having a father who was a flamboyant cricketer. Critics consider Mohinder the best Indian batsman against fast bowling. Indian players, barring a few like Farook Engineer and Viswanath, often collapsed against pace bowlers. Had Mohinder been included in the team, the outcomes would likely have been different. An interesting anecdote from Mohinder's memoir involves the 1978 Pakistan tour. In the midst of a contentious series, Asif Iqbal, the Pakistani all-rounder,

approached the Indian team with an offer from Kerry Packer, the founder of World Series Cricket. Iqbal, eager to distract the Indians, sent a WSC representative with a lucrative offer, but despite Mohinder's signed contract, nothing came of it. Mohinder describes it as a strategic move to disrupt their focus before a crucial Test match. The chapter on the 1983 World Cup transports readers back in time, immersing them in the spirit of the game. There are many cricketer memoirs, but *FEARLESS* stands out as monumental. The book captures the sweat and blood of Mohinder and Surinder (who was also dropped despite impressive performances). The discrimination faced by northern players at the hands of the western zone selectors is another compelling aspect of *FEARLESS*. Indian sportsmen, unlike their cricketer counterparts, have largely avoided writing memoirs. Footballers like Inder Singh and Magan Singh should follow suit, inspiring the next generation to take up the game. Cricket fans will find *FEARLESS* a must-read. The book is as simple and straightforward as its protagonist, Mohinder Amarnath.



ABOUT THE BOOK
 Book: *FEARLESS - A Memoir* Mohinder Amarnath with Rajinder Amarnath
 Publisher: Harper Collins
 Price: ₹799

WELL DONE, JIMMY! YOU SHOULD WRITE MORE ABOUT THE GAME BECAUSE THERE'S A WEALTH OF MATERIAL CRICKET FANS WOULD LOVE TO READ



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India to play its Champions Trophy matches at neutral venue

PTI ■ DUBAI

The deadlock over the hosting of next year's Champions Trophy finally ended on Thursday when the ICC announced that India will play their matches of the 50-over event at a neutral venue instead of host country Pakistan, which will get a similar arrangement for tournaments to be held in India till 2027. The agreement will also extend to the 2028 women's T20 World Cup, which will be held in Pakistan. Although no formal announcement has been made, but India's Champions Trophy matches are likely to be held in the UAE. "The ICC Board has approved that all matches between India and Pakistan played at ICC Events during the current rights cycle from 2024 to 2027 (which are to be hosted in India or Pakistan)

will be played at a neutral venue proposed by the tournament host," said the ICC in a statement, confirming what PTI reported on December 5. The arrangement will also cover next year's women's World Cup in India and the T20 World Cup in 2026, to be jointly hosted by India and Sri Lanka. "India's Champions Trophy games will most likely be played in the UAE. As far as the Women's ODI World Cup in India is concerned, the India-Pakistan game could be held in Sri Lanka," said a source. India had refused to travel to Pakistan for the event scheduled in February-March due to security concerns. The Indians have not played in Pakistan since the 2008 Mumbai terror attacks in which 150 people were killed. The two countries' last bilateral engagement was



back in 2012. Travelling to Pakistan also requires Indian government's clearance which has remained firm on the status quo. "The schedule for the ICC Champions Trophy 2025 is set to be confirmed soon," the ICC added. The decision, that came after a series of back-channel talks, was on expected lines after the sport's governing body maintained prolonged silence on the contentious matter during the previous set-up led by chairman Greg Barclay. His successor Jay Shah took charge on December 1 and all stakeholders, including the Pakistan Cricket Board, the BCCI and the broadcasters, were running out of time to organise the 50-over event that was last played in the UK in 2017. Thursday's announcement meant it was the first major decision taken in Shah's tenure.

While BCCI's stance was always clear, the matter got stretched because of PCB's refusal to allow a "one-sided" arrangement of neutral venues. Led by Pakistan interior minister Mohsin Naqvi, the PCB was determined not to lose face in front of the local public. PCB, which had sent its team to India for the ODI World Cup last year, had categorically opposed the hybrid model but eventually agreed to it on reciprocal grounds. The PCB had earlier indicated that it wanted a greater share in the annual revenue cycle to accommodate the Indian demand for a hybrid model but there is no word yet on whether that has been discussed or accepted. The tournament will feature eight teams, divided into two groups. The top two teams from each group will advance to the semifinals.



Ashwin deserved a fitting farewell: Kapil Dev

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

Unable to comprehend R Ashwin's sudden decision to retire from international cricket, a shocked World Cup-winning skipper Kapil Dev says the premier off-spinner deserved a fitting farewell, ideally on home soil. Ashwin stunned one and all by calling it quits on Wednesday, right after the Brisbane Test against Australia ended in a draw. Kapil felt Ashwin seemed unhappy with something. "I was shocked by how one of India's greatest cricketers chose to leave the game. The disappointment among the fans was widespread, but I also saw a tinge of hurt on his face. He looked unhappy, and that was sad. He deserved much better, a fitting farewell," Kapil said in a statement to PTI. As has been his wont, Ashwin chose to walk his own way while retiring in the middle of an important series. Kapil said he would like to hear the Tamil Nadu man's side of story. "He could have waited and announced his retirement on Indian soil, but I don't know why Ashwin called it a day. I would want to hear his side of the story. Give him that respect. He has played 106 Tests for the country. I don't think anyone can match his

humongous contribution to Indian cricket." Kapil hoped that the Board of Control of Cricket in India (BCCI) would arrange a "grand farewell" to Ashwin. "I'm sure the parent body of cricket in India, BCCI, shall plan a grand farewell for this giant match-winner of Team India," he said. Kapil, 65, said Ashwin was a stalwart, a versatile and unorthodox bowler, who constantly hustled the batters with his change of pace and cleverly disguised line and length. "He was ready to experiment, and that is what set him apart. In a game where the batters get the most accolades, Ashwin stood out with his prowess. "Ashwin was brave. He could bowl at any stage of the contest. Do you find bowlers with such tremendous tactical sense who can adapt quickly? He was his captain's go-to man," he said. Praising both his crickering brain and off-field character, Kapil said Ashwin was a match-winner with no parallel in modern cricket. "He has won India's highest number of Man of the Series awards. That is a tremendous compliment that puts his game and consistency in perspective. He was not a "yes" man and came across as a gritty fighter.

ISL: FC Goa aim to end Mohun Bagan's unbeaten streak

PTI ■ MARGAO

FC Goa will seek to snap a rampaging Mohun Bagan Super Giant's eight-match unbeaten streak in the Indian Super League (ISL) when the two sides square off in a 12th round match here on Friday. FC Goa, under India head coach Manolo Marquez, will also aim to improve their record against the Mariners, having lost five of their eight meetings in the ISL, including a narrow 0-1 defeat in their most recent fixture in February. Super Giant's unbeaten run has seen them win seven and draw one of their last eight ISL games, and that has put them on top of the league leaderboard with 26 points from 11 matches, winning eight, drawing twice and losing once. On the other hand, the Gaurs



are placed fourth with 19 points from the same number of games. Both these teams have been in equally efficient form upfront, with the Kolkata-based side netting 22 times in the competition thus far, as compared to the 21 of the Goan club. However, the visitors have

been comparatively better organised at the back, as they have conceded 10 goals as opposed to the 15 of FC Goa. Head-to-head, FC Goa have won twice, whereas Super Giant have emerged victorious five times in the eight times these two teams have faced each other in the ISL.

FC Goa head coach Marquez admitted that the Mariners have a nice mix of international and domestic stars that make them a strong opponent. "I feel that we are playing one of the strongest teams in the competition. Mohun Bagan have most of the top national team players, and they've spent a lot on getting good foreigners too," Marquez said. "We need to keep fighting to win" Super Giant head coach Jose Molina lauded his team for not giving up under any circumstance. "The mentality of Mohun Bagan Super Giant is to fight every game till the end. We have to attack and defend well, communicate properly, but most importantly we need to keep fighting to get the win," Molina said.

Hazlewood 'frustrated' at missing remainder of India series due to 'random' injury

PTI ■ BRISBANE

Australia fast bowler Josh Hazlewood is "frustrated" by the timing of his injury after he was ruled out of the remaining two Tests against India due to a right calf strain sustained during the drawn third match at the Gabba. Hazlewood, who had also missed the second Test (pink-ball) in Adelaide - which Australia won by 10 wickets - due to a side strain, described the latest injury as "random". "Just frustrating really. Ticked every box heading into the (third) Test, I could understand if it was my side again, but it was just a random calf strain," he told 7NEWS. "It's just the timing again, they are only little 2-3 week injuries, it's just the timing of



it and missing big games is the frustrating thing." The 33-year-old Hazlewood was sent for scans after just one over of bowling on the fourth day after hurting his right calf in the warm-up before play. The injury only

turned out to be a strain, but it's expected to be serious enough to end his home Test summer early. "Obviously, do a deep dive into it and see what we can come up with ... Feels pretty random," he said.

"I've had a history of sides and calves, they're probably the two things that have kept me out for the majority over the last four years. "But yeah I sort of just keep adding another layer to the defence hopefully, get back into the gym, I've ticked a lot of boxes over the last 12 months." Hazlewood said he does not want to rush back to action before regaining full fitness, which he is hoping to achieve by the two-match Test tour of Sri Lanka in late January and February. "That's probably the goal, just take it as it comes over the next few weeks," he said. "No rush to get anything in a hurry, it's just getting everything right. Probably take a few extra days here and there. Ticking things off and getting everything right."



Australian top-three seriously out of form, should go back to basics: Ian Healy

PTI ■ MELBOURNE

A head of the crucial Boxing Day Test against India from December 26, legendary wicketkeeper Ian Healy has pointed out the serious lack of form of the top-three Australian batters and advised them to go to the basics and perform if they want to continue in the team. Australia made 445 in the first innings of the rain truncated third Test at Brisbane with Travis Head and Steve Smith smashing centuries but the home team did miserably in the second innings before declaring at 89 for 7. The match ended in a draw with the five-match Test series level at 1-1. "I don't see them (Australia) regressing going into Melbourne, but they are out of form, they're seriously out of form," Healy told SEN Radio. Openers Usman Khawaja, Nathan McSweeney and one-

drop batter Marnus Labuschagne performed below expectations at the Gabba before Smith and Head halted the slide with centuries in the first innings. The second innings was even worse with the top three managing just 13 runs. "Questions have got to be asked of George Bailey: 'Can we get this form back? Are you confident that form will reemerge in our top three?' "Otherwise changes have to be made, and what suggestions might you have for us, George? That type of thing." Healy opined that the Melbourne Test should be Khawaja, McSweeney and Labuschagne's best chance to redeem themselves and asked the trio to get back to the basics. "The Melbourne Test is probably the least volatile wicket they'll play on and that's their best chance. But form takes a little longer than a week to turn around,

IOC publishes manifestos of 7 candidates running to be president and lead Olympics

AP ■ GENEVA

The seven candidates running for International Olympic Committee president had their manifestos published on Thursday, and one is offering to take just half of the eight-year mandate on offer and stand again in 2029. Sebastian Coe, the World Athletics president who turned 68 this year, pledged to embed "transformative change over the next four years" then seek re-election ahead of schedule. Coe was among several candidates offering to give back to IOC members - who elect their president at a March 18-21 meeting near the site of Ancient Olympia in Greece - a decisive choice

in picking future host cities. Under the hands-on presidency of Thomas Bach, who reaches his limit of 12 years in office next year, members now simply rubber-stamp a single host candidate that has worked with the IOC administration. Two members of the Bach-chaired IOC executive board, Juan Antonio Samaranch Jr. And Prince Feisal al Hussein, joined Coe in promising to empower members to have a bigger role in the Olympic body. They also promise to raise the retirement age for members from 70 to 75 years. Members must be invited to join the exclusive IOC club and the current 111 include European and Middle East royalty, leaders of international sports bodies,

former and current Olympic athletes, politicians, diplomats, industrialists and an Oscar-winning actress. Only IOC members can be presidential candidates and the other contenders are board member Kirsty Coventry and three more presidents of sports governing bodies: Johan Eliasch from skiing, David Lappartient from cycling, and Morinari Watanabe from gymnastics. The manifesto releases are one of just two set-piece events in a mostly opaque campaign with strict rules to limit self-promotion and engagement with voters. Candidates will present themselves to voters, though not take questions, at a Jan. 30 meeting at IOC headquarters in Lausanne, Switzerland.

The IOC has had no female president and just nine men leading it in a 130-year history. Eight of those presidents were from Europe and one from the United States. Coventry, the 41-year-old sports minister of Zimbabwe, is just the second female candidate ever to run for the IOC leadership and is widely seen as Bach's preferred choice to continue his policies. Coventry and Coe are two-time Olympic champions in swimming and track, respectively. Coe also led organizing the 2012 London Olympics. Coe upset the IOC establishment - including some voters - this year by committing World Athletics to pay \$50,000 prize money to

gold medalists in track and field at the Paris Olympics. The sport also will pay silver and bronze medalists at the 2028 Los Angeles Summer Games. Though not specifying prize money, Prince Feisal called for Olympic athletes to be "properly valued" while Samaranch proposed letting athletes use footage of their performances on social media channels. That would relax strict IOC rules on Olympic athletes' ability to promote themselves. Challenges facing the IOC include picking a host for the 2036 Olympics, with India and Qatar in the mix, and looking at moving the Summer Games from its established July-August place in the modern sports

calendar. The next IOC president also must address the impact of climate change on the global sports calendar, gender issues in sports, when and how to bring Russia back fully into the Olympic Games and signing a new U.S. Broadcast deal. Long-time partner NBC's deal expires after the 2032 Brisbane Olympics and has been a foundation of Olympic revenue, which was \$7.6 billion in the 2021-24 Olympic cycle. The IOC presidency has been limited to 12 years in anti-corruption reforms passed after the Salt Lake City bidding scandal erupted in 1999. The first term is eight years and presidents can seek a second and final term of four years.

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