case

avoid

paying a hefty fine of

more than 198 Million

corrupt practices with an Indian private refinery.

However the name of the

private refinery is not

The Pioneer also reported that another US firm Moog Inc was caught by US Securities

and Exchange Commission (SEC) for bribing in HAL and

Indian Railways in 2020. As

per the eight page order dated October 11 2024, Moog Inc paid more than 5,00,000

Dollars as bribe for getting contracts in HAL and

Railways and paid penalty of 1.68 Million Dollars to US

Treasury to avoid prosecution.

IT giant Oracle also paid

penalty of 23 Million Dollars

in September 2022 when

caught for bribery of 6.8

mentioned in the Order.

Dollars

# **Established 1865**

LUCKNOW, MONDAY DECEMBER 23, 2024; PAGES 12 ₹3

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DELHI I LUCKNOW I BHOPAL I BHUBANESWAR I RANCHI I RAIPUR I CHANDIGARH I DEHRADUN I HYDERABAD I VIJAYWADA

### IOC announces probe after bribery scandal memory

J GOPIKRISHNAN NEW DELHI

fter 'The Pioneer'

expose on US firms paid penalty of more than 300 per cent for bribery abroad including HAL, Indian Oil Corporation and Railways, the Indian Oil Corporation (IOC) in a regulatory filing declared probe.

Albemarle Corporation, a global specialty chemicals supplier that develops and sells catalysts used in the operation of oil refineries was caught by US Department of Justice for bribing officials in IOC and refineries Indonesia and

Albemarle Corporation paid approximately USD 1.14 million in commission to India intermediary company relating to Indian Oil Corporation business and obtained approximately USD 11.14 million in profits on that business between approximately 2009 and 2011," according to a US Department of Justice order dated September 28, 2023. Albemarle was caught for bribery by the US authorities in 2017 and then settled the case in September 2023 by paying a hefty fine of more than USD 198 million to avoid

Vietnam.

prosecution.

In a filing to National and Bombay Stock Exchanges dated December 20, the IOC said it is "neither party to nor is there any allegation against the company in relation to the proceedings" in the US authorities. "However, the company has initiated an internal fact-finding review concerning the incident, and bribing of more than 63.5

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



thoroughly the understand surrounding facts these allegations and to determine the appropriate steps to be taken," IOC said.

The state-owned firm said it has "always upheld and is steadfastly committed to maintaining the highest standards of governance, transparency and regulatory compliance across all jurisdictions of its operations". We assure our stakeholders, partners and employees that we are a law-abiding company, fully compliant with all laws," India's largest oil firm said in the filing.

"The Pioneer on December 16 reported that the US Department of Justice's order dated September 28, 2023 says Corporation Albemarle bagged big contracts in Indian Oil Corporation and companies in Indonesia and Vietnam by corrupt practices

the September 2023 by

prosecution. The 46-page Order imposing fine on Albemarle says the US company also engaged in

supplying refining solutions to more than 700 refineries across the world and dealing with Indian Oil Corporation (IOC) from 2009 to 2017. The 46 page order says Albermale started paying bribes to IOC officials to get it removed from the "Holiday List" in

"Albemarle approximately \$1.14 Million in commission to India intermediary company relating to Indian Oil Corporation business and approximately obtained \$11.14 million in profits on that business between approximately 2009 and 2011," said the Order. Albemarle was caught for bribery by US authorities in which allegedly occurred in million dollars. Albemarle is 2017 for 63.5 Million Dollars Million Dollars in Indian Railways, UAE and Turkey to

bag contract.
The SEC order detailing bribery in HAL says in November 2021, Moog bagged \$ 1,399,328 valued contract for parts and services related to the April 2021 contract tender. Investigation found that 2.5% commission was received as a bribe by "a HAL official." As per the eight page order, Moog Inc paid more than 5,00,000 Dollars as bribe for getting contracts in HAL and Railways.
The September 27, 2022 dated

Order of Securities and Exchange Commission says that the IT giant Oracle Corporation was engaged in corrupt practices and bribery in India, UAE and Turkey. "In 2019, Oracle India sales employees also used an excessive discount scheme in connection with transportation company, a majority of which was owned by the Indian Ministry of

Railways... One of the sales employees involved in the transaction maintained a spreadsheet that indicated \$67,000 was the "buffer" available to potentially make payments to a specific Indian SOE (State Owned Entity) official.

"A total of approximately \$330,000 was funneled to an entity with a reputation for paying SOE officials and another \$62,000 was paid to an entity controlled by the sales employees," states the 10page order of Securities and Exchange Commission Exchange imposing hefty fine of Rs.23 Million Dollars on Oracle, caught for bribery amount of 6.8 Million Dollars.



#### **AAP opens registration** for women, seniors aid

**STAFF REPORTER** ■ NEW DELHI

Stepping up the election fever and in a bid to retain its core voter groups ahead of the high-octane Delhi assembly elections, AAP Convenor Arvind Kejriwal on Sunday announced that the registration for the 'Mukhya Mantri Mahila Samman Yojana', which will provide monthly assistance of Rs 1,000 to women in the city, and 'Sanjeevani Yojana', which will provide seniors over 60 access to free medical treatment at both private and government hospitals, will begin from Monday.
In its 2024-25 budget, the

Delhi government had announced this scheme to provide Rs 1,000 per month to all women aged above 18. However, Kejriwal recently announced that the amount would be raised to Rs 2,100 if his party returns to power in the assembly elections, slated for February next year. Further, countering narrative around not

implementing Center's 'Ayushman Bharat Yojana' in Delhi, the ruling party announced 'Sanjeevani Yojana' as a healthcare initiative aimed

at providing comprehensive medical care to senior citizens. The program will offer free medical treatment at both government and private hospitals to all Delhi residents aged 60 years and above who possess a Delhi voter ID. With no income-based restrictions, the scheme is designed to benefit over 25 lakh senior citizens.

Addressing a press conference, the former Chief Minister stated, "Ever since we have announced this scheme we are getting numerous phone calls regarding the commencement of registration process for this scheme. Today, I am announcing that registration will begin from tomorrow itself."

"You don't need to stand in any queues or waste your time. We will come to your doorstep. Across every area of Delhi, AAP has created thousands of teams. These teams will come to your home and will do registration of all the women of the house and give them a registration card (Kejriwal Kavach Card). For your convenience we are sending our teams door to door," he

Continued on page 8

#### **Over 100** students from **UP** stranded in jungle in dark

PTI ■ BAHRAICH (UP)

Over 100 students and school staff accompanying them were left stranded for hours in the evening in the dense Katarniaghat forests in Uttar Pradesh while returning from an educational tour, officials said on Sunday.

The children, aged 14-18, were forced to endure harsh cold during their stay under the open sky without food, water or appropriate clothing for the chilly temperatures after school authorities defied warnings by locals to halt their journey at a safe place, they said.

There were 155 people in total, 130 of them children, they added. According to the district administration, the group from Gonda district had been on an educational tour organised by the New Standard Institute Training Dhanepur.

According to local social worker Jang Hindustani, the group first attempted to cross the Rupaidiha border to Nepal but was stopped because of border regulations. After being denied entry into Nepal, the managers redirected the buses towards the Katarniaghat Wildlife Sanctuary, known for its dense forests and dangerous wildlife, including leopards, tigers, and elephants.

The buses traversed five forest checkpoints before reaching Amba village, deep inside the sanctuary.

Continued on page 8



Sadhus of 'Panch Dashnam Avahan Akhara' take part in a religious procession called 'Peshwai', to reach the Mahakumbh ahead of Maha Kumbh Mela 2025, in Prayagraj

#### Tirumala eyes Al chatbot for pilgrim services

PTI TIRUPATI (ANDHRA

The Tirumala Tirupati Devasthanams is considering automation and the introduction of an Artificial Intelligence chatbot to "enhance transparency and efficiency in pilgrim services" at the Sri Venkateswara Temple, an official said on

TTD Executive Officer J Syamala Rao stated that the temple administration is "futuristic

Sunday.

technologies" to expedite accommodation, darshan, and other services while improving overall transparency and efficiency. "To accelerate accommodation, darshan, and and efficiency, TTD is

other services for the multitude of visiting pilgrims and to enhance transparency considering automation instead of manual operations. We are also exploring the introduction of an AI chatbot for pilgrim services," Rao said while addressing reporters at Annamaiah Bhavan in

Annamaiah

Tirumala.

According to the EO, TTD's ultimate goal is to "enrich the pilgrim experience while leveraging technology", all the while safeguarding "the spiritual and cultural sanctity" of Tirumala for future generations.

Rao further noted that the automation temple administration is aligning with Chief Minister N Chandrababu Naidu's vision of blending "traditional aesthetics with modern functionality" in Tirumala's development.

Continued on page 8



#### Delhi's Republic Day tableau rejected, AAP slams exclusion

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE NEW DELHI/CHANDIGARH

**T**n a surprise move, the

proposal for Delhi's tableau for the Republic Day parade has been rejected by the expert committee. committee, which is responsible for selecting the tableaux for the parade, found Delhi's proposal lacking in theme, concept, design, and visual impact. According to sources, the

expert committee had shortlisted 15 States and Union Territories for the parade, but Delhi's proposal failed to impress the committee. The other two union territories, Andaman and Nicobar Islands and Lakshadweep, also failed to make the cut.

On the other hand, Punjab and West Bengal, which were absent from last year's parade, have made a comeback this year. The Aam Aadmi Party (AAP) had made a big issue out of Punjab and Delhi's

exclusion from the parade last year, and it remains to be seen how the party will react to Delhi's exclusion this year. The Republic Day parade, which is held every year on Ianuary 26, is a showcase of India's cultural diversity and military might. The parade features tableaux from various states and union territories, which depict their unique culture, history, and

This year, 15 states and union territories will participate in the parade, including Bihar, Chandigarh, Dadra and Nagar Haveli, Goa, Jharkhand, Karnataka, Madhya Pradesh, Andhra Pradesh, Gujarat, Harvana, Uttar Pradesh, and West Bengal.

achievements.

The expert committee, which is headed by a senior defense ministry official, had ministry evaluated the proposals from various states and union territories based on their theme, concept, design, and visual impact.

Continued on page 8

#### Raje's carcade crashes in Rajasthan's Pali

Three policemen sustained ▲ minor injuries when a former chie minister Vasundhara Raje's carcade overturned in an attempt to avoid hitting a motorcycle in Rajasthan's Pali district on Sunday, police said. The accident occurred while Raie was on her way to meet former minister Otaram Dewasi to express her



condolence over his mother's death. "Seven policemen were travelling in the car. Some of them have sustained minor injuries," Pali SP Chuna Ram

Iat said. Raje left for Mundara village of Pali district by road. A police car which was escorting her between Bali and Kot Baliyan overturned while trying to save a bike rider. A BJP leader said that his car was behind the car which overturned thrice. He said he immediately got down and helped in sending the policemen to iniured hospital.



Asia Cup here on Sunday.

Back home in Vadodara in Gujarat, stylish opener Smriti Mandhana extended her purple patch with a classy 91 off 102 balls, propelling India to 314/9 in the first Women's ODI against the West Indies, here Sunday.

guided India to 117 for seven, but Indian spinners cut through the Bangladesh line-up to bundle them out for 76 in 18.3 overs. The biggest partnership in Indian innings, in fact in the match itself, was between Trisha and her skipper Nikki Prasad - a 41-run alliance for the fourth wicket.

India batters struggled against pacer Farjana Easmin, who took four wickets. Despite that, India were restricted to a belowpar total, and Bangladesh seemed well on track for a win once they reached 44 for two in the seventh over. However, Ayushi (3/17), Sonam (2/13) and Parunika (2/12) took over from that point as Bangladesh lost remaining eight wickets for a mere 32 runs.

Brief scores were shared as India's 117/7 in 20 overs (G Trisha 52; Farjana Easmin 4/32) while Bangladesh's 76 all out in 18.3 overs (Juairiya Continued on page 8 | Ferdous 22; Ayushi Shukla

Indian womens' cricket 3/17, Sonam Yadav 2/13 Parunika Sisodia 2/12).

PTI ■ KUALA LUMPUR/ VADODARA

A day to remember for

Opener G Trisha made a doughty fifty before the left-arm troika of Ayushi Shukla, Sonam Yadav and Parunika Sisodia spun web around Bangladesh batters as India scored a 41-run win to emerge champions in the inaugural Women's T20 U19

On a spongy pitch, Trisha's 52 off 47 balls (5x4, 2x6)

Mandhana, who recorded a 50-plus score for the fifth time in as many innings, got the bulk of the runs in her

debutant Pratika Rawal (40 off 69). The launch pad was provided by Mandhana for the middleorder to go big and that is what the likes of Harmanpreet Kaur (34 off 23). Harleen Deol (44 off 50). Richa Ghosh (26 off 12) and

Jemimah Rodrigues (31 off

19) did to take India past

110-run stand alongside

After dropping hard-hitting Shafali Verma, India have tried multiple batters to open alongside Mandhana and on Sunday it was the turn of Delhi cricketer Pratika, who batted at a strike rate of 57.97. The 24-year-old was also dropped at mid-off when she was batting on three in the 10th over. Her four boundaries came on the leg-side as she employed the

Mandhana, at the other end,

sweep multiple times.

entertained the crowd with her trademark shots including a cover drive and pull. India changed gears after the arrival of fit-again skipper Harmanpreet who struck at close to 150 to give the innings a timely move on. The momentum was carried by Richa and Rodrigues who has been in top form of late. For the West Indies, the pick of the bowlers was left-arm spinner Zaida James who took five wickets for 45 runs in eight overs. India could have got a lot more in the death overs but the last three overs only yielded 20 runs with James picking three wickets in the final over.

### Loan scam kingpin Bilal Lone caught in Delhi, targeted CRPF officers

SAUMYA SHUKLA NEW DELHI

 $\mathbf{F}^{\mathrm{or}}$  years, 33 year old Bilal Ahmad Lone spun a web of deception, targeting those used to create fake who dedicate their lives to the documents, Realme phone deception, targeting those nation's security-para-military officers stationed in the sensitive regions of Jammu &

Kashmir. Armed with false promises of easy bank loans, Lone convinced these men to trust him, only to betray them with forged documents and fake deals. However, his endeavor came to an end when Delhi Police's Crime Branch, in a carefully orchestrated operation, tracked him down in the bustling streets of Jama

Masjid on Saturday. The police recovered seven

Reserves Police Force (CRPF) Personals from his possession, along with a Lenovo laptop used for communication, forged stamps, including those purported to be from the J&K Bank and other official agencies and fake documents and cheque books belonging to different banks. A 'Detention Order' was also issued against him by the District Magistrate of Anantnag in Jammu & Kashmir in an order dated December 13 and the same has also been approved by Government of Jammu & Kashmir (Home Department), Civil Debit Cards of ICICI Bank Secretariat, Jammu/Srinagar

issued in name of Central



on December 17. Lone, and two days hard ground hailing from Kupwara, Jammu & Kashmir, through his schemes defrauded many officers, exploiting them to obtain loans in their names before disappearing with the money.

He presented himself as a loan facilitator and preyed on paramilitary personnel who either were looking to buy vehicles or secure personal loans. His fraudulent activities spanned several years, with 14 cases of cheating registered against him in various police stations across Jammu & Kashmir. The Crime Branch received

intelligence from the Anantnag police in Jammu & Kashmir about Lone's possible whereabouts in Delhi. "On the basis of technical surveillance

work by the team, the location of above criminal was found to be in the area of Jama Masjid, Delhi. Accordingly, on December 21, the above team laid a trap at and around Jama Masjid Area and launched an operation to trace out," him Deputy Commissioner of Police (Crime) Vikram Singh said. After an intensive manhunt, the team finally succeeded to locate him and apprehended near Jama Masjid. "Initially, he resisted and tried to create a scene but he was explained about the operation and detention order issued against

him

& Kashmir.

by the District

Magistrate, Anantnag, Jammu

## Thieves sneak into bank, make off with jewellery worth crores

PNS LUCKNOW

Thieves broke into the Indian Overseas Bank's Chinhat branch on Saturday night and then proceeded to break open 30 lockers and stole jewellery worth crores of rupees.

The accused entered the bank by cutting through the wall, damaging the alarm system. They were inside the bank for approximately 1.5 to 2 hours. Four suspects were captured



#### **NOTICE**

In my army service records my Father Ajit Kumar Sinha's (S/o Rajkishor Sinha) date of birth wrongly entered as 08-01-1969, where as his correct date of birth is 08-06-1969.Please correct accordingly in records. Army No.3018071M Rank-SEP Vikram kumar S/o Ajit Kumar Sinha R/o Village Dumra, Post-Dumra, Distt. Sitamarhi, Bihar.

#### **NOTICE**

In my army service records my Mother's name & date of birth wrongly entered as Shila Devi D.O.B. 01-01-1972 W/o Ajit Kumar Sinha, whereas her correct name is Sheela Devi (W/o Ajit Kumr Sinha) D.O.B. 30-06-1969.Please correct in your records. No.3018071M, rank-SEP. Vikram Kumar S/o Ajit Kumar Sinha, Village-Dumra, Post-Dumra, Teh-Besland, Distt-

#### आवश्यकता है

Sitamarhi, State-Bihar

अनुदानित मदरसा तालीमुल कुरान सलाहपुर प्रयागराज में स० अ० फौकानिया तथा स०अ० तहतानिया का एक-एक पद रिक्त है। स०अ० फौकानिया के पद हेतु शैक्षिक योग्यता कामिल अथवा न्यून्तम 50 प्रतिशत अंकों सहित स्नातक तथा आलिम थवा उर्दू सहित इण्टर का प्रमाण पत्र आवश्यक है अथवा न्यून्तम 50 प्रतिशत अंकों सहित संबन्धित विषय में कामिल अथवा स्नातक तथा उर्दू/अरबी/फारसी से मुन्सी/मोलवी से अनिम्न स्तर का प्रमाण पत्र लेवल-7 में वेतनमान 44900-142400 एवं अन्य भत्ते न्यून्तम आयु 20 वर्ष तहतानिया के पद हेतु शैक्षिक योग्यता अलिम अथवा इण्टर उर्द से अथवा हाफिज। लेवल–6 में वेतनमान– पूर्ण आवेदन पत्र अपनी समस्त शैक्षिक प्रमाण-पत्रों की प्रमाणित प्रतियों के साथ विज्ञापन की तिथि से तीन सप्ताह (21) दिन के अन्दर प्रबन्धक के पद नाम से मदरसा के पते पर पंजीकृत डाक के माध से अथवा स्वयं उपस्थित हो कर उपलब्ध करा सकते हैं। साक्षात्कार की तिथि की सूचना बाद पंजीकृत डाक के माध्यम से प्रेषित की जायेगी

मदरसा तालीमुल कुरान सलाहपुर, प्रयागराज

आवश्यकता है

श्री शंकर भगवान लॉ कालेज मऊ-चित्रकूट (उ०प्र०) म्बद्ध-बुन्देलखण्ड विश्वविद्यालय, झांर

स्ववित्तपोषित योजना के अन्तर्गत रनातक स्तर विधि संकाय के अन्तर्गत एल. एल. बी. त्रिवर्षीय पाठ्यक्रम हेतू प्राचार्य / विभागाध्यक्ष ०१ पद एवं सहायक आचार्य विधि संकाय ०९ पद।

योग्यता एवं वेतनमान-यू०जी०सी० /विश्वविद्याल्य/बार कौंसिल ऑफ इण्डिया के मानकानुसार। नोट-इच्छुक अभ्यर्थी 7 दिनों के अन्दर समस्त

शैक्षिक अभिलेखों सहित आवेदन करें।

प्रबन्धक मो. 9455998743

**NOTICE** 

**PUBLIC NOTICE** Home Finance Company Limited Lallan Kumar is the absolute owner of Hous on Plot, Part of Khasra No. 379 Aa & 379 Ba area 167,286 sg.mtr./1800 sg.ft., situate at Village- Ganeshpur Rahmanpür, Pargana Tehsil & District- Lucknow by means of sal deed dated 13/01/2023 executed by Sri Ashish Kumar Bajpai, registered as vide book no. 1, Zild No. 15279 on Pages 63 to 76 at SI. No. 300 duly registered in the office o Sub Registrar II, Lucknow, Whereas in titl chain one transaction dated 06/10/2008 doc. No. Sl. No. 10865 was done by mind through natural guardian. Whereas Si Manil Kumar is intended to avail loan agains the aforesaid property from S.M.F.G. India Home Finance Company Ltd., Lucknow. Anybody having claim or claiming any prio rights or interest in any manner in thi property or has raised lean by depositing th aforesaid sale deed to any person/bank corporation/financial! Institution may submit objections within 7 days in writing from the date of public notice. After the expir of the period of this notice, no claim shall b value in the eves of law, it shall also be nortgaging the aforesaid property with S.M.F.G. India Home Finance Compan

Vivek Srivastava (Advocate Office/Resi-3/40, Vastu Khand, Gomti Nagar Lucknow-226010, Ph; 983948515

on the bank's CCTV footage. In the footage, they are seen holding electric cutters.

The exact value of the stolen goods is still being estimated, but bank sources suggest that the thieves made off with jewellery worth crores, which had been stored in the lockers.

The thieves accessed the locker room by cutting a two-and-a-half-foot wide hole in the wall. As the bank was closed on Sunday, no one initially noticed the break-in.

It wasn't until the afternoon when the owner of a nearby furniture shop went to the vacant plot behind the bank that he discovered the cut wall and alerted the police.

The Chinhat police, along with a dog squad team, are now investigating the scene.

Upon receiving the information, the police arrived at the bank to conduct their investigation. The dog squad, however, could only trace the thieves for about 200 metres from the site, before losing the trail. It is believed that the thieves may have parked a vehicle nearby or

used another means of escape. The police also conducted investigations in the furniture shop, which is located next to the bank. The shop owner confirmed that he discovered the broken wall after cleaning up in the back of his shop. Additionally, there is only one

CCTV camera installed inside the bank, and there were no cameras outside. The footage captured four suspects inside, but it is suspected that 3-4 other individuals were positioned outside, relaying information to the thieves inside. The bank is located just 100 metres from the Chinhat police station, yet the cops were unaware of the theft until the furniture shop owner notified

them at around 1 pm. DCP (East) Shashank Singh confirmed that the police are gathering information from the bank manager and investigating the theft.

He stated that the thieves entered by cutting through the wall in the vacant plot next to the bank and then broke open the lockers.

Forensic teams and the dog squad are on the case, and six teams have been formed to further investigate the incident. Initial investigations revealed that four people entered the bank, which had no security guard or alarm system in place. While the bank had approximately Rs 12 lakh in cash stored in its cupboard, the stolen goods primarily consist-

However, Manager Sandeep insisted that the bank's securi-

ed of jewellery from the lock-

ty is generally safe.
This is not the first time the bank has been targeted. Three months ago, thieves had stolen an outdoor air conditioner from the ATM installed here. The bank manager had filed a complaint, but the police had closed the case after an investigation.

As the news spread, locker holders arrived at the bank. Many were unaware that the bank lacked security guards during the night, raising con-cerns about the safety mea-

#### Fire breaks out in doc couple's house

Lucknow (PNS): A fire broke out in a doctor couple's house in Gomti Nagar around 7:30 am on Sunday. Neighbours noticed smoke emanating from the basement and immediately

informed the couple. Upon learning about the fire, they alerted the police and fire brigade. Two fire engines from Gomti Nagar responded quickly and brought the flames under control within 20 minutes. The office in the basement was completely destroyed, but thanks to the prompt response, the fire did not spread to the upper floors, preventing a potential disaster.

The couple — Dr DS Rai, a pro-

fessor at BBD University, and his wife, were at home at the time of the incident. Upon arrival, firefighters found the fire in the basement.

They wore breathing apparatus sets and immediately began dousing the flames. The fire was controlled within 20 minutes and completely extinguished within an hour.

The office in the basement was severely damaged, but the rest of the house was saved as the fire did not spread. One key safety measure was the

timely removal of a gas cylinder, which could have caused a

lenges due to thick smoke, which required them to wear masks while working. In addition to breaking windows, exhaust fans were used to

remove the smoke. Meanwhile, another fire broke out in the bathroom of a house in Sulabh Awas, Gomti Nagar Extension, around 10 am on

Sunday. The fire was quickly

extinguished by the family with the help of nearby residents. The fire, caused by a short circuit in the geyser, was quickly extinguished by the family with help from neighbours. The fire damaged the geyser and other items in the bathroom, but no major explosion if it had caught fire. Firefighters faced chalone was injured.

#### accused of raping minor girl arrested

Lucknow (PNS): Krishna Nagar police arrested a street vendor accused of raping a Class IV student while holding her hostage overnight.
The accused, identified as

Liaqat, was apprehended during a police encounter on Friday night, during which he sustained a gunshot wound to his left leg.

The victim, an 11-year-old girl, remains deeply traumatised. Her family reports that she now views all strangers with fear, clings to her mother, and shivers at unfamiliar voices.
The accused, who sells

chowmein, reportedly lured the girl with promises of momo and noodles. The girl, who had gone to her coaching class on Wednesday night, was taken by Liaqat to a secluded room. In her statement to the police, the girl recounted: "The uncle offered me chowmein and momo and took me to a room.

He touched me inappropriately. When I cried and said I wanted to go home, he told me it was night and that he would take me back in the morning. He continued to do wrong things even after I lay down. I was scared and couldn't understand what he was doing."
On Thursday morning, he fled the scene, placing her on an e-

rickshaw. The victim's family reported the incident to the police on Saturday afternoon. Her statement was recorded in the presence of a counsellor to support her. The police confirmed that her statement would be officially recorded before a magistrate on Monday. The accused was arrested later that day during an encounter near Sardauna turn. Liagat, who already has a criminal record, including cases of molestation and misbehaviour with women, has now been charged with abduction and

### Street vendor | Ancient stepwell unearthed in Sambhal's Chandausi

A stepwell, approximately 125 to 150 years old and covering an area of 400 square metres, was unearthed during excavation in the Laxman Ganj area of Chandausi here, an official said.

Excavation at the site began on Saturday, said Krishna Kumar Sonkar, the Executive Officer of Chandausi Nagar Palika.

The excavation follows the reopening of the Bhasma Shankar temple in Sambhal on December 13, after being closed for 46 years. Authorities said they discovered the structure during an anti-encroach-ment drive. Two damaged idols were found inside the well of the temple, officials had said. According to local sources, the stepwell was constructed during the reign of the maternal grandfather of the king of Bilari.

Rajender Pensiya said the possibility of a survey by the Archaeological Survey of India (ASI) at the site is being considered, and a request may be submitted to ASI if necessary. Speaking to the media, Pensiya confirmed that the site was previously registered as a pond. The well's upper floor is made of bricks, while the second and third floors are of marble.

Sambhal District Magistrate



Police personnel and other officials during excavation work at a site at Chandausi area, in Sambhal district, on Sunday

The structure also features four rooms and a well, he said. Pensiva added that work is being carried out cautiously to avoid damage to the structure. The excavation, which has so far uncovered 210 square meters of the site, will continue, and encroachments in the area will be removed. Preliminary estimates suggest the stepwell is approximately 125 to 150 years old," said the DM.

The officer also addressed concerns about the Banke Bihari temple, located nearby the stepwell, which has fallen into disrepair. The DM said that the

temple, believed to be about 150 years old, houses two idols that are safely kept in separate temples. He assured that steps will be taken to renovate the temple, and any encroachments around it will be removed. During a public meeting held two days ago, Kaushal Kishore, a Chandausi resident, informed the District Office about the ancient stepwell and highlighted the deteriorating condition of the nearby Banke Bihari temple. Kishore claimed that, in earlier times, the area was inhabited by the Hindu community and that the queen of Bilari used to stay there.

### Now, old temple structure found in Khurja town

Bulandshahr (PTI): An old temple structure has been found in Khurja town of this district, sparking demands from right-wing outfits for its renovation. The development comes over a week after the district administration in Sambhal reopened a temple locked since 1978 following communal riots in the town.

On Sunday, Khurja Sub-divisional Magistrate (SDM) Durgesh Singh said that the temple in Salma Hakan mohalla was constructed by the Jatav community who also performed puja there.

After the Jatav community relocated about over three decades ago, it is said that the idols of the Khurja temple were immersed in a river by a family from the community, Singh clarified that the temple structure is intact and there are

Meanwhile, the Vishva Hindu Parishad (VHP) and Jatav Vikas Manch have urged authorities to renovate the temple to allow for religious activ-

no disputes over the site. The

matter is being looked into, he

ities to resume. According to Sunil Solanki, office bearer of VHP's Meerut unit, the temple had been closed since 1990 when the Hindu families who previously lived in the area migrated. Solanki said that a memorandum has been submitted to the authorities requesting the temple be cleaned and beautified to facilitate smooth worship.

Kailash Bhagmal Gautam, pres-

ident of the Jatav Vikas Manch, said that the temple is approximately 50 years old, originally built by members of the Jatav community. Following the 1990 riots, the community relocated and the temple has remained closed since, Gautam said. The Manch, in coordination with VHP, has formally requested the revival of religious activities in the temple, he said. On December 14, the Sambhal

administration had reopened a temple locked since 1978 following communal riots in the town. The Sambhal temple, a stone's throw from the Shahi Jama Masjid, was opened after authorities "stumbled" on it during an anti-encroachment drive. The Bhasma Shankar temple houses an idol of Lord Hanuman and a Shivling.

#### **Akhilesh calls for PDA unity to secure** political power, protect Constitution Lucknow (PTI): Samajwadi takat" (dominant forces) of the dominant classes of conspiracies to undermine it

Party president Akhilesh Yaday on Sunday underscored the need for unity among backward classes, Dalits, and minorities to secure political power and form a government committed to protecting the

Constitution

He asserted that those disrespecting Dr BR Ambedkar and his ideals must be ousted from power permanently. Amid nationwide protests against Union Home Minister Amit Shah's alleged derogatory remarks about Dr. Ámbedkar, Yadav shared a pamphlet on a post on X, titled 'Discuss Baba Saheb's Dignity, Now PDA's message should reach every house-

repeatedly disrespecting Dr Ambedkar and his legacy.
"The pichre, Dalit and alpashankhak (PDA) com-

munity is determined to end this cycle of humiliation and will unite to gain political strength, form heir own government, and remove those who demean Baba Saheb and reject the Constitution," Yadav said.

He highlighted that Dr Ambedkar's advocacy for equality, emphasising that the Constitution he crafted dismantled exploitative and regressive ideologies.

The dominant classes have never accepted Babasaheb's principles of equality because as it challenged their monop-oly over power and wealth," he In the pamphlet, Yadav oly over power and wealth," he accused "Prabhutvawadi added. The SP leader accused

opposing reservation policies that empowered marginalized communities and gave them a sense of dignity.
"Baba Saheb not only fought

for the oppressed but also provided them with a protective distribution of resources and shield in the form of the Constitution," Yaday said. He further alleged that these labelled forces Constitution as "abhartiva" (un-Indian) and "against civilization" because it challenged

their traditional hegemony

and uplifted the 90 per cent

oppressed population.
Yadav said, "The reservation system united PDA communities by addressing centuries of exploitation and injustice. However, the dominant classes and their allies have consistently opposed it and hatched

under the guise of reviewing the Constitution."

Yadav expressed confidence that the PDA community's unity would pave the way for a fair caste census, equitable an inclusive society.

"This will ensure financial independence for everyone, restore dignity to all, and bring smiles to the faces of those who have long been sub-jected to humiliation and suffering," he said. Yadav urged the PDA communities to come together to defend the Constitution by upholding Dr. Ambedkar's legacy to secure a brighter future. "Let's unite to save the Constitution, protect reservations, and build a new, prosperous tomorrow for all," he appealed.

### Forest officials discuss Repertwahr fest concludes strategy to ensure safe rescue of tiger

Additional Principal Chief Conservator of Forests Renu Singh, along with and DFO (Lucknow) Sitanshu Pandey, conducted an intensive inspection of the potential sites where a stray tiger was reported in Rehmankhera on Sunday. Officials said that a platform for the safe rescue of the tiger has been completed, with all necessary materials, including a transporting cage, arranged to ensure a secure rescue operation.

The tiger's movements are being closely monitored through the platform. To coordinate the rescue, a meeting was held with Renu Singh, Sitanshu Pandey, Dr Brijendra

Date: 23.12.2024

Place: Varanasi

Mani Yadav from Lucknow Zoo, and J Nasir from Kanpur Zoo. During the meeting, a strategy was devised for the safe capture and rescue of the tiger. The possible sites where the tiger may be have been inspected by all the teams, including the Forest department. The forest team is continuously patrolling these areas. Currently, a team of doctors has been deployed at Forest Officer Hari Lal is staying with the team in Rehmankhera to monitor the tiger's activities closely," an official said.

concludes Lucknow (PNS): Season 12 of the Repertwahr festival concluded with a spectacular final day on Sunday, showcasing a vibrant mix of talent across

multiple stages.
On the literature stage, Priya Malik and Raman Negi captivated audiences with thought-provoking discussions on modern relationships and identity.

Meanwhile, on the comedy stage, Ravi Gupta delivered a hilarious set full of witty observations, leaving the crowd in stitches. The theatre stage featured 'The F Word' by Akarsh Khurana, a poignant play that explored themes of love and societal expectations, offering both entertainment and introspection. The music stage brought the festival to a thrilling conclusion with a performance by Agnee Band, whose nostalgic fusion of rock and Indian music had the audience dancing to their hits. Fankaar stage spotlighted local talent by giving emerging artistes the opportunity to perform.

## to death

Lucknow (PNS): A 55-year-

old man was allegedly beaten to death in Mohanlalganj on Saturday night. Police reached the scene after receiving information and sent the body for a postmortem. The incident took place in Jabarauli village, and efforts are underway to apprehend the accused.

According to preliminary investigations, a heated argument between the victim and his wife escalated shortly before the attack. The victim, Ramesh Kumar, a resident of Jabarauli village, had accused his wife of being involved in an illicit relationship. During the argument, Ramesh allegedly began assaulting his

Police reported that a neighbour, identified as Sonu, intervened, striking Ramesh on the head multiple times with an iron rod. The blows caused severe head fractures and injuries to other parts of his body. Family members rushed Ramesh to the hospital, but he succumbed injuries on the way. The deceased's son alleged that Sonu, who lives opposite their house, attacked his father from behind during the altercation. Ramesh's family consists of his wife Roshni, two daughters, and a son. The Mohanlalganj inspector

stated that two teams have

been deployed to locate and

arrest the accused.

### Man beaten LMC to strict measures to tackle wall painting, improve cleanliness

**Lucknow (PNS):** A meeting of the executive committee of Municipal Lucknow Corporation was held on Sunday to discuss the revised budget for the year 2024-25. The meeting was presided over by Mayor Sushma Kharakwal. Several key decisions were

taken in the meeting. In order to stop wall painting in the city, it was decided to take action against those responsible by filing a case against them and imposing a fine of Rs 10,000. It was also decided to issue the phone number of the municipal corporation for complaints related to wall painting.

Directions were given for supervisors to be deployed in each ward to monitor wall painting. If wall painting is found in any ward, action will be taken against the concerned supervisor of that ward.

It was decided to record videos of shopkeepers repairing vehicles on the road in Lalbagh and Kaiserbagh areas and take action against them by issuing challans. It was decided to provide 15 ETF employees to zonal officer-1 to assist in this work.

A decision was taken to provide parking arrangements for small fairs organised in the city

through offers. It was also decided to collect compensation from the car markets set up on the roads in the city and to collect tax from establishments engaged in car washing. In the coming years, it was decided to complete the entire tender process two months before the Katki fair and submit the tenders on time.

A decision was taken to immediately stop the construction work of a temporary tin shed outside the municipal corporation headquarters.
In view of the construction of

the municipal corporation headquarters, the chief engineer was directed to remove the diesel/petrol tanks installed in the RR department within 15 days. It was decided to start the construction work of the new headquarters of the municipal corporation on January 14,

All officers/employees were directed to ensure that calls from councillors and people of the city are answered. In the coming days, the cleaning of all the drains in the city and the work related to sweeping in the wards will be inspected. It was decided that action will be taken against the responsible officer/employee if dirt is

#### 11 students injured after bus overturns

**Gorakhpur (PTI):** A bus carrying students and teachers from a Bihar-based coaching institute overturned in Kushinagar district of Uttar Pradesh on Sunday, injuring 11, officials said.

According to the police, the accident occurred near the Turkpatti police station area on NH-28. Eleven students were injured, including one girl who suffered a leg fracture, they added.

The bus was carrying 43 students and teachers from a private coaching institute in Siwan district of Bihar and they were on their way to the Mahaparinirvana site of Lord Buddha in Kushinagar.

Reports indicate that a speeding truck attempted to overtake the bus, causing it to hit the highway divider and overturn into a roadside ditch, police said. The injured were treated at

the Fazilnagar Community Health Centre while the student with the leg fracture was referred to the district hospital, Dr Amit Rai, stationed at the CHC, said. Kushinagar District Kushinagar District Magistrate Vishal Bhardwaj visited the hospital to check on the injured students and ensured all necessary arrangements for their treatment and

#### the scaffolding site for strict monitoring. Wherever pug-marks are found, plaster of Paris samples are being taken on the spot. Sub-Divisional

#### "Form No. INC -26

[Pursuant to rule 30 of the Companies (Incorporation) Rules, 2014] **Before the Central Government** Regional Director, Northern Region, New Delhi In the matter of sub-section (4) of Section 13 of Companies Act, 2013 and clause (a) of sub-rule (5) of rule 30 of the Companies(Incorporation) Rules,2014

In the matter of

KUSUMVISION INFRA PRIVATE LIMITED, ("the Company"), having its Registered Office at Flat No. 108, Surya Guru Gram, Kanchanpur, Varanasi, Uttar Pradesh-221004

Notice is hereby given to the General Public that the company proposes to make application to the Central Government under section 13 of the Companies Act, 2013 seeking confirmation of alteration of the Memorandum of Association of the Company in terms of the special resolution passed at the Extra ordinary general meeting held on Monday, 16th day of December, 2024 at 01.00 PM to enable the company to change its Registered Office from

'State of Uttar Pradesh" to "National Capital Territory of Delhi (NCT of Delhi)" Any person whose interest is likely to be affected by the proposed change of the registered office of the company may deliver either on the MCA-21portal (www.mca.gov.in) by filing investor complaint form or cause to be delivered or send by registered post of his/her objections supported by an affidavit stating the nature of his/her interest and grounds of opposition to the Regional Director, Northern Region, B-2 Wing, 2nd Floor, Paryavaran Bhawan, CGO Complex, New Delhi – 110003, within fourteen days of the date of publication of this notice with a copy to the applicant company at its registered office at the address mentioned above.

For and on behalf of the KUSUMVISION INFRA PRIVATE LIMITED

> **BHARAT SINGH (Director)** DIN: 06624081

ADDRESS:- 126,BIRPUR BHAWARKOL, GHAZIPUR, UTTAR PRADESH-233231

### **Yogi: Committed to providing** housing for underprivileged

PNS GORAKHPUR

 $D_{\text{Gorakhpur on Sunday}}^{\text{uring his visit to}}$ morning, Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath met around 150 citizens and addressed their concerns during the Janata Darshan held at the Gorakhnath Temple.

He reiterated his commitment to providing housing for the underprivileged through government schemes and offering full financial support for the treatment of individuals with severe ill-

The chief minister emphasised the government's dedication to delivering the benefits of welfare schemes to every eligible individual and resolving issues effectively. He directed officials to respond promptly and sensitively to public grievances. Chief Minister Yogi

Adityanath reached out to individuals seated outside the Mahant Digvijaynath Smriti Bhawan, listened to their concerns, collected their applications, and instructed the relevant administrative and police officers to ensure fair, timely, and satisfactory resolutions.

Some women raised the issue of not having pucca houses, to which the chief minister assured them of assistance through the Pradhan Mantri Awas Yojana or the Mukhyamantri Awas Yojana. He reiterated the government's commitment to pro-viding every individual with a durable house.



Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath listening to people's grievances at the Janta Darshan in Gorakhpur on Sunday

As in previous Janata Darshan sessions, several attendees sought financial help for medical treatment. The chief minister assured them that no one's treatment would be hindered for lack of funds.

He instructed officials to promptly prepare estimates for high-level treatments and submit them for immediate government approval and

The chief minister also emphasised the effective use of Avushman Bharat cards, instructing officials to ensure

that beneficiaries face no difficulties during treatment.
Additionally, he directed them to facilitate Ayushman card issuance for eligible individuals who have been left out. When a woman from Kushinagar sought support for the treatment of a serious illness, the chief minister assured her that even if costs exceeded Avushman coverage, the government would provide financial assistance to ensure her treatment proceeded without interruption. Addressing crime and land-

grabbing complaints, CM

Yogi instructed the police to take stringent action against criminals and land mafia.

He emphasised that anyonea strongman or mafia—illegally occupying another's land must face strict consequences. He stated that no leniency should be shown towards those who displace or exploit the poor. During the Janata Darshan, the chief minister also interacted with children accompanying their families. He blessed them, encouraged them to focus on their studies, and presented them with chocolates.

#### 'Law & order has improved, says Yogi; SP claims 'jungle raj' in state

Lucknow (PNS): Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath on Sunday said the law and order situation in Uttar Pradesh has improved and as a result, the state government has received investment propos-als worth Rs 40 lakh crore. The opposition Samajwadi Party, however, countered Adityanath and claimed there is an atmosphere of "jungle raj" in the state with loot, hooliganism and anarchy everywhere.

In a post on X, the Chief Minister's Office shared a video in which Adityanath is heard saying that there is a better security environment in the state and people have faith in law and order.

"It is the result of this that Uttar Pradesh has received investment proposals of Rs 40 lakh

crore," he said. Within two hours of this post, the Samajwadi Party's Media Cell shared on X clippings of news reports about a murder and a dacoity in Varanasi and

Chitrakoot respectively.
"This is CM Yogi's shameful and ruined law and order which he boasts about from packed stages," read the post which was also shared by SP chief Akhilesh

Questioning the chief minister's claims of improved law and order in the state, the SP said, "In Yogiraj, there is an atmosphere of jungle raj with loot, hooliganism, anarchy, and murder and kidnapping everywhere."

# BJP, Congress two sides of same coin: Mayawati

 $T^{
m he\ political\ battle\ over\ the\ statement\ made\ by\ Union}$ Home Minister Amit Shah on Dr Bhimrao Ambedkar in the Rajya Sabha continued on Sunday when Bahujan Samaj Party (BSP) president Mayawati targeted both the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) and Congress.

The former chief minister of Uttar Pradesh said that Congress and BJP are two sides of the same coin when it comes to doing selfish politics by exploiting the votes of his followers in the name of Babasaheb Ambedkar.

BSP chief Mayawati stated on Sunday that people across the country are angry over the disrespect shown by Home Minister Amit Shah in Parliament.

However, Congress's impatience over this is nothing but pure deception and selfish politics, she added.

Mayawati made several posts one after the other on the social media platform X. She wrote, "There is a lot of

anger among the people of the country over the disrespect shown to the most revered Baba Saheb Dr Bhimrao Ambedkar by Amit Shah in Parliament. But the haste of the Congress party, which has always neglected and hurt his legacy and his struggle in the interest of the country, regarding this is pure deception and politics of selfishness."

In another posts the BSP supremo wrote, "Congress and BJP, etc are two sides of the same coin when it comes to doing selfish politics with the votes of



his followers in the name of Baba Saheb. All the parties are engaged in a conspiracy to hurt the BSP and stop the caravan of self-respect of Baba Saheb from moving forward."

In her final post, Mayawati tar-geted the Samajwadi Party (SP) and said, "In reality, great saints, gurus, and great men born in the Bahujan Samaj, including Baba Saheb, got full respect and honour only in the BSP government, which these casteist parties cannot digest. Especially the SP, out of malice, even changed the names of new districts, new institutions, and public welfare schemes, etc." Meanwhile, the BSP has already announced a nationwide protest on December 24 against the remarks made by Shah on Dr Ambedkar. Mayawati has called Shah's

statement against the sentiments of the people and demanded its withdrawal. BSP Lucknow district president Shailendra said that a one-day dharna demonstration will be organised from 9 am to 5 pm on December 24.

This demonstration will be held at the BSP office located at Mall Avenue and

the President on behalf of the party will be submitted to the DM office.

Mayawati said that Dr Ambedkar was the creator of a humanitarian and welfare Constitution to protect the rights and dignity of Dalits, deprived, and other backward classes.

Insulting him hurts the sentiments of the people.

Mayawati further said that Dalits and Bahujans had to struggle hard to stand on their feet and live with self-respect, and for this, Dr Ambedkar secured reservation and many legal rights.

"In the absence of Baba Saheb. the welfare and well-being of his followers is his true tribute, and the BSP is dedicated to this work," she said.

She said that if parties like Congress and BJP cannot respect Dr Ambedkar from their heart, at least they should not disrespect him. "It is because of Baba Saheb's struggle that the SC, ST, and OBC classes got rights in the Constitution, and this is equal to attaining heaven for seven lifetimes for them," she added.

### CM Yogi takes stock of preps for Khichdi Mela

**PNS** ■ GORAKHPUR

Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath reviewed the arrangements for Khichdi Mela with officials in the assembly hall of the Gorakhnath Temple

on Sunday evening. Yogi emphasised that the upcoming Khichdi Mela, which will run from Makar Sankranti to Mahashivratri, presents a significant opportunity to high-light Gorakhpur's progress. During the meeting, the chief minister was briefed on the officials to ensure that the efforts being made by various departments for a successful fela. He directed the administration to ensure that every devotee attending the fair leaves with a memorable and positive impression of the city.

The chief minister instructed all departments responsible for the safety, comfort, and convenience of visitors to finalise their preparations by December 25 without fail.

Stressing the cultural and religious significance of the event, he said, "The Khichdi Mela is a beacon of faith not only for devotees in eastern Úttar Pradesh but also for those in Bihar, Nepal, and across the

Accordingly, he directed officials to ensure top-notch facilities for all attendees. Yogi

underscored that the positive transformation of Gorakhpur liness maintained at parking zones, Yogi stated. should be reflected in the Khichdi Mela. He called for meticulous attention to security and the seamless provision of essential services. This includes robust traffic management, well-maintained roads, adequate sanitation facilities, bonfires, community kitchens (langars), and sufficient public

amenities such as toilets. Highlighting the need for sus-Khichdi Mela is plastic-free. He also recommended setting up multiple stations for shoe and slipper storage across the fairgrounds.

Furthermore, he directed that no devotee should have to spend the night in the open. Arrangements must be made to respectfully accommodate visitors in nearby night shelters, which should be equipped with clean bedding, blankets, and adequate facilities. To ensure the safety of the event, he called for timely inspections of all amusement rides and swings being set up at the fair.

Police were advised to remain vigilant and prioritise security. For a smoother visitor experience, vehicle parking must be

He emphasised the need for seamless transportation facilities for devotees attending the Khichdi Mela. He directed the Transport department to ensure sufficient roadway buses are available, covering routes from villages to the fair.

The railway administration was instructed to operate special trains from various stations. He also called for the deployment of electric buses. litionally he advised that information about these transport arrangements be widely disseminated in advance.

The chief minister also called for heightened vigilance from the Health department, instructing the officials to set up health camps within the fairgrounds to address medical needs promptly.

CM Yogi also evaluated ongoing development projects in Gorakhpur and explored potential initiatives to enhance the city's transformation into a smart city. He suggested considering the introduction of double-decker buses to improve urban transport. To address city's parking challenges, he instructed the GDA, municipal corporation, adminorganised in designated areas, with proper lighting and clean-

#### Over 27 lakh people screened under drive to eliminate TB

Lucknow (PNS): The Uttar Pradesh government has screened over 27 lakh citizens under a comprehensive campaign aimed at eliminating tuberculosis (TB) from the state by 2025, an official statement issued here said. This statewide initiative seeks to

rapidly identify, treat, and rehabilitate TB patients, with the campaign running until March 24. 2025, it said. Focusing on public participation

paign underscores the government's commitment to fostering a healthier and more prosperous Uttar Pradesh, it added. Special efforts are underway in

15 districts with a high prevalence of TB, including Ayodhya, Sitapur, Barabanki, Deoria, Etawah, Amethi, Basti, Farrukhabad, Hathras, Pilibhit, Pratapgarh, Rae Bareli, Rampur, Siddharthnagar, Sultanpur, the statement said. The campaign prioritises detecting undiagnosed TB cases, reducing mortality through timely treatment, and integrating patients back into society through widespread awareness and care. Between December 7 and December 19, under the campaign 27,00,377 individuals have been screened, resulting in the identification of 2,20,520 TB patients.

#### Postal worker interrogated by CBI in fraud case ends life

PNS LUCKNOW

A postal worker interrogated by the Central Bureau of Investigation (CBI) in connection with a fraud case allegedly ended his life in Bulandshahr. The sub-postmaster, suspend-The sub-postmaster, suspended for a month over allegations of embezzling Rs 2.5 crore, reportedly jumped in front of a train on Sunday morning.

The deceased, identified as 28-

vear-old Rahul Kumar, had been questioned by the CBI for six hours on Saturday. Before his death. Kumar left a suicide note, which he also shared via WhatsApp status, declaring his innocence and accusing a senior officer, Rajesh, of harassment. In the note, Kumar claimed that Rajesh, a senior officer in the divisional office, was angry with him for allegedly knowing about the officer's personal relationships. Kumar further alleged that Rajesh used casteist slurs and abused him. He wrote: "I was suspended by the divisional office team on the divisional office team of November 26. Out of 5,599 registries, 3,600 were pending till November 23, while 1,766 reg istries had been dispatched. All the envelopes were stamped with postage stamps by Rajesh, but the blame was placed on me. The account of the postage stamps purchased by Rajesh was suspicious, but it was ignored during the investigation." Kumar also pointed to discrimination, alleging that while no FIRs or suspensions were made in a previous case involving fake postage stamps in Dibai, he was deliberately tar-

geted. He accused the officers of castebased harassment, writing: "I belong to the Jatav community. The senior officer used casteist slurs against me. I worked with honesty and dedication for 14 years, but I was investigated on caste grounds. I forgive those responsible for my death." According to Kumar's family, he appeared distressed after returning from the CBI interrogation. On Sunday morning, he left home ostensibly to buy milk. After leaving the milk container at the milkman's house, he went to the Girdhari Nagar railway crossing, where he allegedly committed suicide. A railway worker informed the police about the incident. The CBI had detained Kumar

from Bulandshahr on Saturday, taken him to Ghaziabad for questioning, and then brought him to the Lakhawati post office, where he was posted. He was interrogated for six hours and subsequently released. Kumar's death marks the sec-

ond suicide in connection with this investigation. Earlier, on July 21, Superintendent of Bulandshahr Head Post Office

TP Singh also ended his life a day after the CBI raided the post office on corruption charges

Singh had shot himself at his home in Aligarh, leaving a suicide note addressed to the SSP,

Aligarh. In the note, Singh alleged harassment by several individuals, including sub-postmasters and former mail overseers. He wrote: "Since taking over as superintendent on December 16, 2021, I have been harassed by these individuals."

The first FIR in the case was lodged in July, naming TP Singh, Rahul Kumar, a clerk named Gopal, and a fourth-class employee as accused. The CBI's Anti-Corruption Unit raided the Bulandshahr main post office on July 20, scrutinising documents for 10 hours. The investigation revealed fraud involving fake postage stamps worth over Rs 2.5 crore, used for booking registered mail, speed posts, and parcels. In November, a youth

from Delhi reportedly attempted to use 3,833 fake stamps at the Lakhawati post office. The stamps were sent to the Indian Security Minting Institute in Nashik, where they were confirmed to be counterfeit. Following this, Kumar and two others were suspended on November 26. Further investigation is ongoing.

#### **UP CM Office** reaches 6 mn followers on X Lucknow (PNS): The number

of followers of the official handle of the Uttar Pradesh Chief Minister's Office on microblogging platform X reached 6 million on Sunday. This milestone was made possible by Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath's "proactive approach in addressing public concerns and providing solu-tions", an official statement issued here said.

Besides his effective communication with the masses, the chief minister remains highly active on social media platforms it said

The official X handle of the Uttar Pradesh Chief Minister's Office (CM Office, GoUP) has reached the impressive milestone of 6 million (60 lakh) followers, the statement said.

Aditvanath has a massive following on social media — 30.9 million (3.09 crore) followers on his personal X account, 13.1 million (1.31 crore) followers on Instagram and more than 3.5 million (35.36 lakh) followers on his WhatsApp channel. The chief minister is known for his direct communication with the public. He engages with children at public events, listens to people's problems during Janata Darshan' and ensures that officials address these issues, the

statement said.

### Arrangements in place for insect-free Maha Kumbh 2025

PNS MAHAKUMBH NAGAR

 $T^{\text{he Uttar Pradesh Health}}_{\text{department has made spe-}}$ cial arrangements to provide an insect-free experience during the Maha Kumbh.

Officials on Sunday said an innovative system had been introduced that would deploy automatic mist blowers in the Maha Kumbh area. These blowers are capable of

eradicating mosquitoes and flies within 30 minutes of receiving a call. The system ensures a swift response and a hygienic environment for all attendees, they said.

Significant efforts are being made to maintain a clean and insect-free environment in the akharas and the expansive tent city, they added.

A total of 110 state-of-the-art mist blowers and 107 mini foggers are being deployed across the site.

These devices are expected to enhance the devotees' overall experience and ensure a healthy environment throughout the grand gathering, the officials said.



People take boat rides across the Sangam, the confluence of the Ganga, Yamuna and Saraswati rivers, ahead of Maha Kumbh Mela 2025, in Prayagraj on Sunday

nodal joint director (vector control) for the Maha Kumbh, venue to ensure hygiene.

carried out across the entire

According to Dr VP Singh, insecticide spraying would be To further enhance convenience, 62 pulse foggers have been procured, he said.

In addition, 78 special officers will be deployed to ensure the safety and wellbeing of the

seers and the pilgrims.

Malaria inspectors will be stationed throughout the fairground to address any concern. These inspectors will visit each akhara, interact with the seers and promptly resolve issues related to mosquitoes and flies. Dr Anand Kumar Singh, assistant nodal officer for vector control, said 78 special officers were being deployed as part of these efforts.

To ensure a smooth experience for the pilgrims, 45 malaria inspectors are planned for deployment, along with 28 assistant malaria inspectors who will look after the wellbeing of both the seers and the devotees.

Additionally, five district malaria officers will be stationed separately to address any challenge and maintain uninterrupted services.

The Maha Kumbh will commence on January 13 on the occasion of Paush Purnima and conclude on February 26 on Mahashivratri.

### Advanced equipment for clean environment

Mahakumbh Nagar (PNS): The Prayagraj Mela Authority is making extensive prepara-tions to ensure a clean and green environment for devotees, tourists, and bathers from India and abroad who will be visiting Maha Kumbh 2025. Advanced equipment will be deployed before the fair begins, with an estimated expenditure of Rs 45-50 lakh for their purchase. The equipment include 10 manual walkbehind sweeping machines and two battery-operated vacuum-type litter pickers.
This initiative aims to not

only maintain cleanliness at the Maha Kumbh but also provide a clean and green environment for all attendees. On the occasion of Maha Kumbh 2025, a compact manual sweeping machine will be deployed to clean the paved

ghats, footpaths, roads, and This garbage collection various public places within machine is a battery-operated, the fair area, enhancing the convenience and experience for devotees, tourists, and bathers from India and abroad. This eco-friendly equipment operates without fuel or electricity, which helps in reducing its environmental impact. Being manually operated, it cleans effectively without raising dust, and its ergonomic design ensures comfort during use. The machine's efficiency in cleaning roads makes it easy to operate and maintain, allowing sanitation workers to perform their tasks more effectively while contributing to a cleaner, greener environment. In addition, a battery-operated vacuum-type litter picker will be deployed in the fair area for efficient cleaning.

ride-on and walk-along power-suction vacuum designed to pick up litter and debris. Its compact size allows for easy operation in any part of the fair, ensuring thorough cleaning of various surfaces. Attached to a vehicle, this advanced, environmentally friendly equipment offers excellent mobility and eliminates the need for manual labour. Its powerful vacuum functionality ensures quick and effective waste collection, while its durable battery reduces environmental impact and carbon emissions. The purchase of this cleaning equipment for the fair area is expected to cost around Rs 45-

50 lakh, a cost that will be

borne by the Prayagraj Mela

Authority.

### Minister's appeal to convey our golden past to new generation

Uttar Pradesh Minister of State (Independent charge) for Stamp and Court Fee, Registration Ravindra Jaiswal strongly condemned the efforts to suppress the contribution of brave sons in Indian history. 'We should work to convey our golden past to the new generation", he appealed. The Minister was addressing a seminar organised under the joint auspices of district and city units of Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) at party's Gulab Bagh office here on Sunday on the martyrdom of Sahibzadas Zorawar Singh and Fateh Singh of the tenth Guru of Sikhism, Guru Gobind Singh, as Veer Bal Diwas.

While saluting the bravery of Sahibzadas, the minister said that the four sons of Guru Gobind Singh — Jujhar Singh, Ajit Singh, Zorawar Singh and Fateh Singh sacrificed everything for the protection of the country and religion. "They showed fearlessness and determination while facing the atrocities of the Mughal rulers", he said. Jaiswal praised Prime



UP Minister Ravindra Jaiswal addressing a seminar at BJP's Gulab Bagh Office in Varanasi on Sunday.

Minister Narendra Modi for declaring December 26 as 'Veer Bal Diwas' to honour the martyrdom of Sahibzaades. He said, "Veer Bal Diwas gives the message that courage and valour are beyond age'

Cantt MLÁ Saurabh Srivastava as a special guest said that we should tell the golden and glo-rious history of our country to today's young generation and make them realise their duties towards the country. He said that the martyrdom of Sahibzaades inspires us to perform our duties and dedication

towards the country. While presiding over the programme, MLC and district president Hansrai . Vishwakarma said that this Veer Bal Diwas programme has been organised on Sunday at the city and district level. This programme will continue till December 26 at the mandal level. The programme was conducted by city vice-president Ashok Kumar Jatav and the vote of thanks were given by district general secretary Sanjay Sonkar. The programme was also attended by regional

secretary Sudama Patel, Rakesh Sharma, Naveen Kapoor, Ashok Patel, regional media incharge Navratan Rathi, Arvind Singh, Abhishek Mishra, Madhukar Chitransh, Shailendra Mishra, Mahendra Singh Gautam, Kusum Patel, Rachna Agarwal, Geeta Shastri, Maheshwari, Mohnika Anupam Gupta, Ratan Maurya, Kamlesh Sonkar, Siddhnath Sharma, Jagannath Ojha, Ajav Pratap Singh, Abhishek Verma etc. The mandal presidents and corporators, including Monica Pandey, were also present.

#### Assailants open fire at trader. son, loot bag with jewellery

PTI VARANASI

ar-borne unidentified assailants shot at a bullion trader and his son and looted a bag full of jewellery from them in the Kamchha area here in the early hours of Sunday, police said. Both the victims have been hospitalised and are out of danger, they said. Around 3:30 am, bullion trader Deepak Soni (46) of Gurudham Colony here, returned to Varanasi from Mumbai with the bag containing jewellery. He was returning home from Varanasi railway station on a scooter with his son when a car overtook them and its occupants opened fire at the Soni and his son, said Deputy Commissioner of Police, Kashi Zone, Gaurav Bansal. Both Soni and his son were injured in the firing while the assailants fled with the bag containing the jewellery. The victims were rushed to the BHU Trauma Centre and their condition is stated to be stable, the officer said. Police said an investigation has been launched into the matter and efforts are being made to identify and arrest the culprits.

### PCS (Pre) exam held amid tight security

A midst tight security arrangements, thousands of candidates appeared in the Uttar Pradesh Public Service Commission (UPPSC) PCS Prelims Examination-2024 at 49 centres of the district here on Sunday. The examination was conducted in two shifts. The first paper in PCS was General Studies which was conducted from 9.30 am while the second paper of CSAT (Civil Service Aptitude Test) from 2.30 pm. According to information, many candidates reached their centres for first

uled time while many others missed their examination as they got late due to distance. There was a strict police vigil outside all the 49 examination centres of Varanasi. Many senior district adminis-

trative and police officers also

reached different centres,

including UP College, Jagatpur College etc to take the stock of situation. The examination centres in Varanasi were also made for candidates of nearby districts,

including Jaunpur and Prayagraj with many of them reaching here by buses, private cars and trains

as early as 5 am itself. The examinations were conducted at different centres under the supervision of static and sector magistrates. Photocopy shops remained closed within a radius of 200 metres of the examination centres. District Magistrate S Rajalingam had given strict instructions to the officers concerned, including all sector and static magistrates / centre administrators a day ago to ensure the peaceful conduct of the examination. The representative sent by the UPPSC and ADM (City) Alok Kumar Verma also visited different centres.

#### Concern over increasing use of chemicals in agriculture

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ VARANASI

A one-day seminar was organised in Bhandha Kala village here on Sunday to discuss the strategy required to make agricultural products toxin-free and to promote the technology adopted for it. In the seminar on 'Toxin-free farming requirements, possibilities and challenges' organised in the premises of social organ-

isation Asha Trust, concern was expressed over the increasing use of chemicals in agriculture and the need to adopt toxinfree and natural methods was emphasised. Progressive farmers from many districts of Purvanchal (eastern UP) and representatives and scientists of Lok Bharati put forward their suggestions. The state coordinator of Lok Bharati organisation, Dr RR Singh said that for

bringing a respectable increase in agricultural income and prosperity of farmers, various new methods will have to be adopted by abandoning the attachment to traditional farming. The seminar was chaired by Vijay Bahadur Singh during which Krishna Chaudhary, AK Singh, Shailendra Raghuvanshi, Ram Badan Dubey, Ranvijay, Surya Mani Mishra and others expressed their views.

### **NER** touches new heights



NER GM Saumya Mathur receiving a shield from Railway Minister Ashwini Vaishnaw in New Delhi on Saturday.

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE VARANASI

 $T^{\text{he North Eastern Railway}}_{\text{(NER) touched new heights}}$ with its excellent performance and received three prestigious awards at the 69th Ati Vishisht Rail Seva Awards ceremony of Indian Railways. In this ceremony held at Bharat and effective resolution of pas-Mandapam in New Delhi, Railway Minister Ashwini Vaishnaw honoured NER General Manager (GM) Saumya Mathur with 'Govind Vallabh Pant Shield', 'Saraksha Shield' and 'Rail Madad Shield'. These awards not only certified the efficiency of NER but also appreciated the leadership of GM as she led the zone towards of Gorakhpur, Balram, impleexcellence in every field with her visionary leadership and

strong management. The 'Govind Vallabh Pant Shield' was given for overall performance in all areas, while 'Saraksha Shield' was awarded for maintaining the highest standards in the field of safety. The 'Rail Madad Shield' was also given to NER for prompt

senger complaints. Senior Commercial Manager (SCM) of Varanasi division of NER SS Rehman achieved remarkable accomplishments by earning sundry income of ₹13.82 crore, advertising income of ₹1.52 crore and catering income of ₹5.5 crore Senior Coaching Depot Officer mented technical improvements in the Coaching Depot

mance in compliance v entire NER family.

and reduced coach wheel shelling by 30 per cent and spring breakage by 40 per cent. Apart from this, technician Mithun Kumar of Gyanpur Road station demonstrated his efficiency with 100 per cent maintenance of field gear, while rail track maintainer Prince Kumar Kannaujiya of Hardatpur railway station showed exemplary perforty rules. Railway minister praised these achievements and said that this performance of NER is an inspiration for other divisions of Indian Railways. GM Saumya Mathur, while receiving the award, called it the result of hard work and dedication of the

### Dehat). He was coming

Kanpur (PNS): Two friends were killed when a speeding DCM hit their bike on Etawah-Kanpur national highway in Kanpur Dehat late on Saturday night. Police sent both the injured to the district hospital where they succumbed to their injuries during treatment after some time. Reports said Satish Rathaur (33) of Ballabhgarh Mandwara Miyanpur, Roop Nagar district (Punjab) was employed in a company as a service engineer. On Saturday he had arrived here to instal machine in a factory in Rania (Kanpur

towards Rania on bike with Ankush Verma (18) of Sultanpur under Moosanagar police station at night. Around 2 am the speeding DCM hit the bike near Rania police station and dragged it up to around 20 metres on the street. The DCM driver escaped by leaving the vehicle on the spot after the incident. Police sent both the injured to the district hospital where they succumbed to their injuries during treatment. Station House Officer (SHO) Mukesh Solanki said

kin of the deceased had been informed. On receipt of complaint, a first information report (FIR) would be lodged and action would taken against the guilty DCM driver, he said.

In another incident a woman was killed after an under construction temporary culvert suddenly caved in under Rampura police station area of Jaluan district late Saturday night. She was identified as Pratibha, wife of Neeraj Chaudhary, a resident of Jharhala (Jalaun Khurd) under Kuthaund police station.

#### Xmas Mela from Dec 25

Varanasi (PNS): Preparations are in full swing at St Mary's Cathedral in Cantonment area where threeday famous Christmas Mela will be organised from December 25 to 27 under the auspices of the Diocese of Varanasi. This fair is popular among the locals, especially children and women. Meanwhile, preparations are also being held at Lal Girjaghar, churches at Girjaghar, Sigra, Teliya Bagh etc for the Christmas. Earlier, talking to reporters, Bishop of Diocese of Varanasi Eugene Joseph said the prayer and holy mass will be held on December 24 at 10.30 pm at St Mary's Cathedral to commemorate the birth of Jesus and the three-day exhibition will be held from

December 25 to 27 on the occasion of Christmas. He said the stalls of food and other items will be set up outside St Mary's Cathedral while those related to entertainment activities in its premises. The cultural programmes will also be held in the premises of the church during these three days, he added. Besides, a celebration with the specially-abled people from Purvanchal (eastern UP) will be held on January 2 at St John's School, BLW, from 9 am and specially-abled meritorious poor children will be provided cash scholarship, the Bishop said. The principals of the schools run by the Diocese of Varanasi were also present on the occasion.

#### Shankaracharya's two-day visit to Varanasi begins tomorrow

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ VARANASI

After completing the Chardham Shit (Winter) Yatra in Uttarakhand, Jyotishpeethadhiswar Shankaracharya Swami Avimukteshwaranand Saraswati is coming to the city on December 24 for a two-day stay. On the arrival of Shankaracharya in Kashi, saints and devotees will welcome and greet him with flower showers and cheers.

Giving this information, Shankaracharya's media incharge Sanjay Pandey said that even after the doors of

Badrinath, Kedarnath Dham are closed in winter, the worship of Lord Badrivishal, Lord Kedarnath does not stop, only the place changes and in winter, Chardham Yatra gives more merit.

He said that to tell this to all the Sanatanis, the Shankaracharya has started the winter yatra from last year. On the arrival of Shankaracharya, his 'Charan Paduka' will also be worshipped amidst Vedic chanting in Srividya Math here.

Various religious and auspicious rituals will be performed during the stay Shankaracharya, Pandey added.



Maha Kumbh ahead of Maha Kumbh Mela 2025 in Prayagraj.

#### Stress on life-course approach to managing endometriosis

Varanasi (PNS): The first international conference on Advancing Knowledge and menopause. It explored diagnostic challenges, imaging techniques, and management Advancing Knowledge and Care for Endometriosis and Adenomyosis (Endometricon-2024) concluded here on Sunday. The valedictory session of this three-day event organised by Institute of Medical Sciences, Banaras Hindu University (IMS-BHU) with the collaboration of Endometriosis Society of India (ESI) and some international medical organisations, underscored the critical need for a multidisciplinary approach to managing endometriosis and adenomyosis, aiming to improve patient outcomes and quality of life. The event brought together over 500 gynecologists, surgeons, researchers, and healthcare professionals from across the globe. The conference provided a comprehensive platform for the exchange of knowledge, showcasing advancements in diagnostic techniques, surgical interventions, and medical therapies. The pre-conference workshops held on first day provided hands-on training in pelvic anatomy and surgical techniques. Renowned experts such as Dr Shailesh Puntambekar and Dr Arunava Roy led sessions on lateral pelvic wall dissection, ureterolysis, butterfly peritonectomy and rectal shaving. These workshops allowed participants to refine their surgical skills, fostering innovation in treatment methods. The conference featured a series of scientific ses-

strategies for adolescent endometriosis, presented by experts like Dr Basab Mukherjee and Dr Apurva Veer Sharma. Renowned speakers, including Dr Milind Shah, discussed the role of genetics and genomics in endometriosis, while Dr Rama Joshi highlighted the potential for benign endometriosis to progress into gynecological cancers. Sessions led by Dr Mala Sibbal and Dr TLN Parveen emphasised advances in imaging modalities like MRI and ultrasound, enhancing diagnostic precision. The use of robotic-assisted surgery was a highlight, with live demonstrations showcasing its role in improving outcomes for patients with deep infiltrating endometriosis and other complex conditions. Speakers like Dr Rooma Sinha and Dr Rupasree Dasgupta illustrated how robotics enhances precision in excising endometriotic cysts and fertility-preserving surgeries. The conference dedicated extensive discussions to addressing infertility associated with endometriosis and adenomyosis. Sessions moderated by leading fertility specialists, including Dr Rita Baxi and Dr Usha Yadav, covered strategies for ovarian stimulation, surgical techniques, and the role of ART. Besides, prominent international experts shared their insights. Dr Gayathri Delanerole (UK) emphasised a sions addressing every stage of life-course approach to managing endometriosis. life, from adolescence to

### **Emphasis on use of technology in**

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE KANPUR

Promoting innovation will Provide new opportunities to students for a better future. Innovation and ranking based academic infrastructure is being firmly established in universities outside India. If we want to get our students recognised on the world stage, then we have to create a global education environment for them. This is the responsibility of all of us. This was stated by the AIU President and Chhatrapati Shahu Ji Maharaj University (CSJMU) Vice-Chancellor Prof Vinay Kumar Pathak while addressing the session as a special guest at the West Zone Vice Chancellor Meet organised by AIU at DY Patel University in Maharashtra on Saturday. Academicians, academicians and technical experts from across the country were participating in this event on Leadership and Governance in Higher Education. On the occasion, Prof Pathak said that

through leadership and good governance, the art of leader-ship can be enhanced among the students in higher education facilitating their mental development. He emphasised on the use of technology in innovation. This two-day meet was inaugurated by the Governor of Rajasthan, Haribhau Kisanrao Bagde. The programme was attended by officials of AICTE, South Asia of QS Ranking, officials of the Ministry of Education, Government of India, including vice-chancellors and academic experts from across the country.

Prof Pathak said in the last few years our universities are performing better in grading and ranking. A change can be seen in educational institutions with the grading of NAAC. NIRF and QS Asia Ranking have raised hopes of them doing even better. He believed that right now there are maximum opportunities for Indian educational institutions on the

global stage and in such a situation, we have to establish ourselves among the institu-tions around the world through better academic infrastructure. CULTURAL PROGRAMME: The Spastics Centre, Kanpur, organised a cultural programme on the occasion of World Disability Day and to commemorate its 35 years service to the society at The Sportz Hub auditorium on Saturday. A large number of spastic children and their family members took part in the event with enthusiasm. The cultural programme presented by the children left the audi-ence spellbound. The programme began with lighting the ceremonial lamp and welcome address. Thereafter, children presented a dance skit based on the theme of Panch Tatva - Chhiti, Jal, Pawak, Gagan, Samira reflecting the importance of fundamentals of life and their role in human body. Their colourful dress, emotional expressions set to

tune of music garnered loud applause. Chief guest Piyush Agarwal praised the talent and self-confidence of children and said the event was a step towards building an empowered nation. With the special presentation, they proved that disability was merely a physical condition and not a limit of their capacity. Rehabilitation and training programmes con-ducted by the Spastics Centre to bring a change in children's life were also highlighted. Success stories shared by the rehabilitation team inspired the audience who praised the efforts of the centre. The programme ended with a patriotic song presented by Shivanshu Chaudhary. Director Suchitra Singh extended gratitude to the chief guest Piyush Agarwal and congratulated all the volun-teers, children and their family members for the successful conduct of the programme. The event gave a message that special children can excel in all

## Aradhya brings laurels to Kashi

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ VARANASI

radhya Pandey, daughter of Chandan A Pandey and Anita Pandey, working as Chief Personnel and Welfare Inspector in the Personnel department of Banaras Locomotive Works (BLW) has brought laurels to Kashi by showcasing her talent at the state level. Aradhya Pandey (9), a student of class III, secured the third position in the 'Children Category' (age 8 to 14 years) of the Uttar Pradesh Sangeet Natak Academy's state level Kathak dance competition held at Valmiki Rangshala,



Lucknow recently where renowned Kathak dancers, Padma Shri Nalini-Kamalini were the judges. Participants from various districts of Uttar Pradesh took part in it. Aradhya also secured first position in Varanasi district and then displayed her talent by securing third position in the state level competition held in Lucknow. This achievement is not only the result of Aradhya's hard work and dedication, but it is also a proud moment for Varanasi. The BLW family has sent its best wishes on this success and wished her a bright future.

#### Books distributed



PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ KANPUR

he Rotary Club of New **I** Kanpur (RCNK) under the aegis and help of Rotary International distributed books to 19 primary schools in Kanpur city and villages to upgrade their libraries. The programme was held at Jaspat Rai Saraswati Shishu Vidya Mandir, Lajpatnagar, Kanpur. Rotary's primary objective is to simplify life and make it hurdle-free while imparting quality. To achieve this, Rotary focuses on education, health and providing facilities to the masses. One step towards this goal is setting up libraries. Books are a treasure trove of knowledge and stu-dents can access them for free. People can read books in the library that they cannot afford.

The Rashtriya Shikshak Mahasangh actively supported this programme. The club launched a campaign called 'Rotary Creates Libraries'. As part of this campaign, 19 schools were selected and each school received around 200 books. The programme was made possible due to the

efforts of Club President Sangeeta Gupta, Education Committee Chair Professor Naveen Mohini, and other members, including Kamna Omprakash, Pramod Gupta, Kirti Omprakash, and Kaustubh Gupta, Aditya Gupta, Prakhar Omprakash, Palak, Kushagra and Ishani. District president of the National Educational Federation, Chandradeep Singh Yadav, provided valuable support in selecting schools. The Rotaract Club of Kanpur Grand cosponsored the event. The other attendees included Club Secretary Shikha Gupta, Charter President Vinod Rishi, Pankaj Gupta, Mona Omprakash, Jyoti and others. **FUTSAL CHAMPIONSHIP:** The North West Sports Academy, Khalasi Lines, clinched the glittering trophy by emerging champions in the Shanti Devi Shukla Memorial U-14 Interschool Futsal Championship concluded on Saturday. They defeated Allen House Panki, 3-0, in the final and won the title. Mayor

Pramila Pandey awarded tro-

phy and individual prizes to winner and runner-up players.

### Misleading advertisements: CCPA imposes ₹ 2 lakh penalty on Shubhra Ranjan IAS Study

PNS NEW DELHI

The Central Consumer Protection Authority (CCPA) has imposed a penalty of Rs 2 lakh for misleading advertisements on Shubhra Ranjan IAS Study. The decision was taken to protect and promote the rights of consumers as a class and ensure that no false or misleading advertisement is made of any goods or services which contravenes the provisions of the Consumer Protection Act,

In view of the violation of the Consumer Protection Act, 2019, the CCPA, headed by Chief Commissioner, Nidhi Khare, and Commissioner Anupam Mishra has issued an Order against Shubhra Ranjan IAS Study for misleading advertisement regarding UPSC Civil Service Exam

Coaching Institutes and

online edtech platforms use pictures and names of successful candidates to influence prospective aspirants (consumers), without disclosing the courses opted by such candidates or the fees paid by them & length of the course so attended.

The institute's ads claimed "13 students in the top 100", "28 students in the top 200", and 39 students in the top 300" in the UPSC CSE 2023, and prominently displayed successful candidates' names and photos, an official statement

The CCPA found that Shubhra Ranjan IAS Study Institute concealed important information about the courses taken by students it claimed had cleared the prestigious Indian Civil Services Exam (CSE) in its advertise-Shubhra Ranjan IAS Study



cessful candidate's names & pictures and simultaneously advertised various types of courses provided by them on

the information with respect to the course opted by the said successful candidates in UPSC Civil Service exam

abovementioned advertise-

The institute used terms like "Shubhra Ranjan IAS" and and letterheads, creating a deceptive impression that Shubra Ranjan is/was an IAS officer, it added.

'Institute used terms such as

"Shubhra Ranjan IAS" and 'Students of Shubhra Ranjan IAS" in its advertisements and letterheads, creating a deceptive impression that Mrs. Shubhra Ranjan is/was an IAS officer. This constitutes a misrepresentation and tutes a misrepresentation and unfair trade practice under Consumer Protection Act 2019, thereby misleading the public and potential students into believing that the services or guidance provided by them are directly associated with the credibility of an IAS officer. The Institute submitted cer. The Institute submitted that it was a clerical mistake. which is not tenable as the term Shubhra Ranjan IAS or @shubhraranjanias has been frequently used on its letterheads and in its advertise-

deceptive practices to create a perception of exceptional quality and success. An advertisement should be truthful & honest representation of facts by making disclosures in such a manner that they are clear, prominent and extremely hard to miss for viewers to notice," the CCPA said.

The consumer regulator said the advertisements violated provisions of the Consumer Protection Act of 2019 related to misleading advertisements by "deliberately concealing important informa-

The lack of proper disclosure about successful students' course details deprived consumers of making an informed choice while selecting coaching institutes, the CCPA said, asking Shubhra Ranjan IAS Study to discontinue the misleading ads.

on Vajirao & Reddy Institute for misleading advertisements regarding the results of the UPSC CSE 2022. Vajirao & Reddy Institute in its advertisement claimed "617 selections out of 933 in UPSC CSE 2022" and "We are ranked at 1st position among the list of top UPSC Coaching Institutes in India". CCPA has so far issued 45 notices to various coaching institutes for misleading ads and imposed a penalty of Rs 63.60 lakh on 20 coaching institutes, directing them to discontinue the misleading advertisements.

Department Consumer Affairs, through the National Consumer Helpline, has successfully intervened at a pre-litigation stage to ensure justice for students and aspirants who enrolled for the UPSC Civil Services, IIT and other entrance examinations.

### Dhankhar calls for accountability of lawmakers

PNS NEW DELHI

Against the backdrop of Parliament witnessing poor productivity due to disruptions, Vice-President Jagdeep Dhankhar on Sunday called for accountability of lawmakers and said people would force them to think why they were sent to Parliament. He also said that for any democracy to succeed, expression and dialogue must go hand in hand with great responsibility on both sides. Dhankhar is the Rajya Sabha's ex-officio chairman.

Calling for accountability among parliamentarians, he said, "... Make no mistake, I am referring to parliamentarians. People have learned to take disorder as order. There is no sense of revulsion." Hopefully, people will write and their thoughts will move, the vice-president said, according to an official statement. "People will force you



to think, why did you go there (Parliament)?" he said. Addressing awardees of the Chaudhary Charan Singh Awards - 2024, the vice-president said agriculture was the spine of rural development. "Unless agriculture develops, the rural landscape cannot be

changed. And unless the rural landscape changes, we cannot aspire to have a developed nation," he said.

For India to be a developed nation by 2047, people's income must increase eightfold that, he said, was a Dhankhar also laid stress on the need for strengthening the village economy.

"The greatest market we have is agricultural produce, yet farming communities are hardly involved with it. The farming sector must be prioritised by governments for it

to become an engine of economic development," he added. The Chaudhary Charan Singh Awards - 2024 were presented for contribu-tions to agriculture, rural development and journalism. A statement by the Kisan Trust said the awards were presented on Saturday and the event was attended by Union ministers Dharmendra Prradhan and Jayant Chaudhary. Inaugurating the event on Saturday, Pradhan lauded Charan Singh's langurating the Charan Singh's legacy that, he said, continued to inspire those working tirelessly for the uplift of India's farmers and rural communities.

Union minister Chaudhary said the current policies of the Narendra Modi government reflected the vision of Charan Singh. His vision on procurement prices, debt relief for farmers, land reforms and the uplift of landless people is still relevant, he said, according to the Kisan Trust.

#### Will SC conduct further inquiry, asks Surjewala after Pegasus spyware case verdict in US

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE NEW DELHI

Congress general secretary Randeep Surjewala on Sunday claimed that the Pegasus spyware case verdict in the US proved how 300 WhatsApp numbers of Indians wriatsApp numbers of Indians were targeted and asked if the Supreme Court would now conduct a further inquiry in view of the judgment.

Surjewala shared a media report which said that, for the first time, a court in the US had held Israel's NSO Group liable for its intrusive spyware Pegasus. "The Pegasus spyware case verdict proves how 300 WhatsApp numbers of Indians were targeted in the illegal spyware racket," Surjewala said in a social media post.

He said it was time for the Narendra Modi government to answer who the 300 names targeted were. "Who are the

the three opposition leaders? Who is the constitutional authority? Who are the journalists? Who are the business persons? What information was retrieved by the BJP government and agencies? How was it used - misused and to what consequence?" the Congress leader asked.

He also questioned if appropriate criminal cases would now be lodged against the political executive or officers in the present government and the company owning NSO. "Will the Supreme Court take note of the judgment of the US court in Meta v/s NSO? Will the Supreme Court proceed to make public the report of the Committee of Technical Experts on Pegasus Spyware, submitted to it in 2021-22?" Surjewala said.

Questioning if the Supreme Court would now conduct a further inquiry in view of the judgment affirming the targeting of 1,400 WhatsApp numbers, including 300 from India, he asked, "Will the Supreme Court now ask Meta to submit to itself the 300 names to meet the ends of justice in the Pegasus case?' "Shouldn't Facebook (now

Meta) now have responsibility to release the names of 300 Indians targeted by Pegasus, considering WhatsApp and Facebook have the biggest subscriber base in India and they have 'duty of care and disclosure' to its clients in India?"

#### Communal Muslim alliance behind Rahul, Priyanka's win in Wayanad, says CPI(M) leader

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE THIRUVANANTHAPURAM

controversial remarks regarding the Lok Sabha victories of Rahul Gandhi and Priyanka Gandhi Vadra from the Wayanad constituency have drawn sharp criticism from Congress and Indian Union Muslim League (IUML) leaders on Sunday. Congress leaders accused the

senior CPI (M) leader of making the comments to "please" the Sangh Parivar, while their United Democratic Front (UDF) ally, the IUML, alleged that he was attempting to provoke majority communalism in society. During a party event in Wayanad on Saturday, Vijayaraghavan reportedly claimed that Rahul Gandhi secured victory in the highrange segment twice with the support of communal forces and that extremist elements were present at Priyanka Gandhi's campaign

rallies. AICC General Secretary K C Venugopal strongly criticised Vijayaraghavan, accusing him of using "communal" language that even the Sangh Parivar might hesitate to employ against Rahul Gandhi. Venugopal also ques-



shared the same opinion. "How can someone holding the position of a Politburo member of the CPI (M) speak in such a communal manner?" Venugopal asked. "This is part of a deal to please the BJP.

This is not just a CPI (M) statement—it is a BJP quotation aimed at crucifying Rahul Gandhi," he alleged. Leader of Opposition V D Satheesan echoed similar sentiments, charging the CPI (M) with pushing the same communal agenda propagated by the Sangh Parivar. "Post-Parliamentary elections, the CPI (M) is engaged in majority appeasement. This is an effort to gain favour with the Sangh Parivar tioned whether the CPI (M) and escape scrutiny from

central agencies," Satheesan told reporters in Kochi.

He further alleged that only Vijayaraghavan would claim Priyanka Gandhi won the Wayanad Lok Sabha seat by over four lakh votes with the support of terrorists. IUML leaders P K Kunhalikutty and K M Shaji also condemned Vijayaraghavan's statements, describing them as "cruel" and "baseless".

"Claiming that Rahul Gandhi and Priyanka Gandhi's victories were due to minority communalism is an attempt to stoke majority communalism," Kunhalikutty said, adding, "This mirrors the BJP's political tactics across India. The CPI (M) is experimenting with the same approach in Kerala."

#### Gurugram Police cyber crime team arrests Malaysian national for fraud of Rs 2.81 crore

STAFF REPORTER ■

A cyber crime team of the arrested a Malaysian national for allegedly duping a man of Rs 2.81 crore in the name of investing stock market, police said.

Police said on Sunday that they received a complaint regarding cheating of about Rs 2.81 crore for investing in the stock market. On the complaint, a case was registered under the relevant sections in Police Station Cyber West, Gurugram.

During the investigation, a cyber crime police team led by Priyanshu Diwan, ACP (cybercrime) nabbed the accused from Tamil Nadu on Friday.

The accused was identified as Mohammad Jameel bin Mohammad Iqbal a resident of Malaysia.

"During the probe, the investigation team found that the mother of the accused is from Tamil Nadu and he is also married in Tamil Nadu, due to which he knew the Tamil language.

The above accused had come to India with another Malaysian partner, and he had taken the Indian SIM card used in committing the fraud from another accused, Devkaran. Some other SIM cards provided by the accused have also been used in the fraud cases," Priyanshu Diwan, ACP (cybercrime), said.

Police then circulated a lookout notice against the accused, and the accused had come to Tamil Nadu to attend a wedding ceremony, after which the accused was arrested by Gurugram Police. 04 accused have already been arrested in this case, he said.

The investigation team has recovered a Malaysia passport, an international driving license, a Malaysia identity card, a health card, a debit card, a Malaysia driving license, a mobile phone, a SIM card, a ring and foreign and Indian currency from the possession of the accused.

Further action will be taken in the case as per the rules. The case is under investigation, he added. Diwan said the Gurugram police cyber crime teams are

constantly taking necessary action against cyber crimi-It may be noted that the

Gurugram police have recovered Rs 83.41 crores from 1,658 Cyber Fraudsters, including 22 bank officials from different banks, in just 11 months from January 2024 to 30 November 2024.

He said that the Gurugram police is closely working with other agencies and organisations to counter these frauds.

#### NDA to contest 2025 Bihar Assembly polls under leadership of Nitish, Modi: Deputy CM



PIONEER NEWS SERVICE NEW DELHI

Bihar Deputy Chief Minister and BJP leader Samrat Choudhary said on Sunday said NDA will contest the assembly polls in Bihar next year under the leadership of Chief Minister Nitish Kumar and Prime Minister Narendra Modi,

"There is no confusion," he said during a Press conference at the BJP headquarters in the national Capital when asked to comment on speculation that the National Democratic Alliance (NDA) could do a rethink on projecting Kumar as its leader in the polls.

He was responding to Union Home Minister Amit Shah's recent interview to a news channel in which he was asked if the NDA could go to the polls in Bihar without declaring a chief ministerial candidate, like it recently did with great success in Maharashtra.

Shah, a former BJP president who is still regarded as the party's principal strategist, had replied after a pause, "We will sit together and decide. We will let you know after we have made a decision." The cryptic response had led to furious speculation that the BJP could insist on not projecting Kumar in the 2025 polls.

Dismissing the speculation, Choudhary said, "The NDA is working under the leadership of Nitish Kumar and Prime Minister Narendra Modi in Bihar and we will continue to contest elections under the leadership of both leaders."

## Modi Government's 'calibrated erosion' of EC's integrity: Kharge on election rule

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

Congress president Mallikarjun Kharge on Sunday hit out at the government for tweaking an election rule to prevent public inspection of certain electronic documents, alleging it is part of the Modi government's "systematic conspiracy" to destroy the institutional integrity of the Election Commission. Kharge also said the Modi government's "calibrated erosion" of the ECI's integrity is a frontal attack on the Constitution and democracy.

public inspection of certain electronic documents such as CCTV camera and webcasting footage as well as video recordings of candidates to prevent their misuse. Based on the recommendation of the Election Commission of India (ECI), the Union law ministry on Friday amended Rule 93(2)(a) of the Conduct of Election Rules, 1961, to restrict the type of "papers" or documents open to public inspec-

While Congress general secretary in-charge communica-The government has tweaked tions Jairam Ramesh indi-

an election rule to prevent cated the grand old party would legally challenge the amendment, Lok Sabha MP and Congress general secretary (organisation) KC Venugopal said the poll panel had chosen opacity and a pro-government attitude in its dealings thus far.

Reacting to the develop-ment, Kharge said Modi government's audacious amendment in the Conduct of Election Rules is another assault in its systematic conspiracy to destroy the institutional integrity of the Election Commission of India. "Earlier, they had removed the Chief Justice of



India from the Selection body, is not behaving indepanel which appoints Election Commissioners, and now they have resorted to stonewall electoral information, even after a High Court order," he said in a statement.

Everytime the Congress party wrote to the ECI, regarding specific poll irregularities such as voter deletions and lack of transparency in EVMs, the ECI has responded in a condescending tone and cho-sen not to even acknowledge certain serious complaints, Kharge said. "This again proves that the ECI, even though it is a quasi-judicial

pendently," he said.
"The Modi government's cal-

ibrated erosion of ECI's integrity is a frontal attack on the Constitution and Democracy and we will take every step to safeguard them," Kharge said.

According to Rule 93, all "papers" related to elections shall be open to public inspection. The amendment inserts "as specified in these rules" after papers. Law ministry and ECI officials separately explained that a court case was the "trigger" behind the amendment.

While documents such as

nomination forms, appoint ment of election agents, results and election account statements are mentioned in the Conduct of Election Rules, electronic documents such as CCTV camera footage, webcasting footage and video recording of candidates during the Model Code of Conduct period are not covered. "CCTV coverage, webcasting

of polling stations are not carried out under Conduct of Election Rules but are the result of steps taken by the ECI to ensure a level playing field," a former ECI official

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-PAPER WITH PASSION-

#### **Outreach to Kuwait**

With a focus on economic cooperation and cultural exchange, PM Modi's Kuwait visit strengthens the ties between the two nations

rime Minister Narendra Modi's recent visit to Kuwait marked a historic moment, as he became the first Indian Prime Minister to visit the Gulf nation in over four decades. The visit, at the invitation of Kuwaiti Emir Sheikh Meshal Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah, underscores a renewed commitment to strengthening the ties between India and Kuwait. With a focus on economic collaboration, cultural exchange, and mutual prosperity, the visit paves the way for a deepened strategic partnership. India and Kuwait share a relationship that dates back centuries, built on the foundations of trade and cultural exchanges. Over time, this bond has evolved into a robust partnership, encompassing energy, trade and people-to-people connections. Today, Kuwait is a significant energy supplier for India, while Indian expertise and manpower have become indispensable for Kuwait's development. Prime Minister Modi highlighted the enduring solidarity between the two nations, citing instances of mutual



support during times of distress. With over one million Indian expatriates residing in Kuwait, the Indian diaspora has played a crucial role in Kuwait's growth, contributing to various sectors including healthcare, engineering and education.

Addressing the expatriate community, Modi praised their efforts, stating, "Their energy, love, and unwavering connection to India are truly inspiring. Proud of their role in strengthening ties between our nations." The economic relationship between India and Kuwait is ripe for expansion. Kuwait, as a key energy supplier, holds strategic importance for India's energy security. Simultaneously, India, with its bur-

geoning market and investment opportunities, offers Kuwait an attractive destination for its sovereign wealth fund. During his discussions, PM Modi noted the shared aspirations of both nations: building a prosperous 'New Kuwait' and transforming India into a developed nation by 2047. By aligning these goals, the two countries can establish a partnership that drives mutual growth. Modi's visit was not limited to economic discussions; it also celebrated the cultural ties that bind the two nations. The Prime Minister met with individuals who have contributed to fostering Indo-Kuwaiti relations, including Abdullah Al-Baroun, a translator who brought Indian epics like the 'Ramayana' and 'Mahabharata' to Arabic-speaking audiences. As India and Kuwait look to the future, the visit has set the stage for a relationship that goes beyond traditional energy ties. The integration of India's technological expertise with Kuwait's developmental ambitions holds the promise of transformative progress. Furthermore, the strong presence of the Indian diaspora serves as a bridge, fostering deeper connections and mutual understanding. By strengthening this partnership, India and Kuwait are not only enriching their bilateral relationship but also contributing to stability and development in the region.



A woman plucks aster flowers at an orchard, in Nadia

# Guardians of nature: Saving the planet



As the world grapples with the escalating impacts of climate change, the wisdom of indigenous communities shines as a vital resource for environmental preservation

he Role of Indigenous Knowledge in Combating Climate Change: A Legacy of Hope The discourse on climate change dominated discussions at COP 2024, the United Nations Climate Change Conference, held in Baku, Azerbaijan, from November 11 to 22, 2024. Rising global temperatures, depleting natural resources, and rampant environmental degradation have emphasised the urgency of adopting sustainable practices and advancing conservation efforts. Amid this pressing crisis, the role of indigenous communities in preserving the environment emerges as a beacon

Often referred to as the "guardians of nature," these communities have safeguarded ecosystems for centuries through their traditional knowledge, sustainable practices, and deep connection to the land. One exemplary figure embodying this harmonious relationship with nature was Padma Shri Tulsi Gowda. Known as the "Encyclopedia of the Forest" and affectionately called the "tree goddess" by her Halakki Vokkaliga tribe in Karnataka, Tulsi Gowda's life and work illustrate the profound impact of indigenous wisdom on environmental preservation. With an unwavering commitment to nature, she planted 30,000 saplings during her lifetime, nurturing them with meticulous

Tulsi Gowda passed away on December 16, 2024, at the age of 86, leaving behind an inspiring legacy of environmental stewardship.Growing up in poverty, Tulsi Gowda's love for plants and forests remained unparalleled. From an early age, she worked in plant nurseries, demonstrating extraordinary skill in nurturing saplings. Her unique ability to identify the "mother tree" of any species exemplified her deep ecological understanding.

Tulsi Gowda hers 'It's not important how many plants you have planted; what matters is how much care you've taken of those saplings." The contribution of indigenous communities to environmental conservation extends far beyond



management. For instance, the Kayapo tribe in Brazil has successfully defended the Amazon rainforest from logging, mining, and industrial agriculture, preserving a vital carbon sink. Brazilian environmentalist and politician Dr. Marina Silva emphasised, "The Kayapo teach us that protecting forests is not just about climate, but about life itself."

edge, passed down through

generations, serves as a crucial

tool for sustainable resource

Similarly, the Sámi people of Scandinavia maintain ecological balance in Arctic regions through sustainable reindeer herding practices. In New Zealand, the Maori concept of kaitiakitanga (guardianship) promotes a cultural commitment to environmental stewardship, influencing national policies

The Ogiek of Kenya, through sustainable honey harvesting, continue to conserve the Mau Forest, a critical water catchment area. This echoes Wangari Maathai's belief that "The future of our forests lies in the hands of those who understand them best indigenous communities."



THE CHIPKO MOVEMENT OF THE 1970S, WHERE VILLAGERS IN UTTARAKHAND HUGGED TREES TO **PREVENT** DEFORESTATION,

DREW INSPIRATION FROM THE BISHNOI'S SACRIFICE. IN 2021, A SIMILAR INITIATIVE SAVED OVER 500 SACRED OAK TREES IN JAAKHNI VILLAGE, UTTARAKHAND, **NEAR FORESTS** DEDICATED TO THE

LOCAL GODDESS OF

JUSTICE

of indigenous environmental stewardship. The Bishnoi community of Rajasthan, one of the earliest champions of conservation, exemplifies this ethos. Their sacrifice during the 1730 Khejarli Massacre, where 363 Bishnois gave their lives to protect sacred Khejri trees, remains a cornerstone of ecological movements. Similarly, the Dongria Kondh tribe of Odisha has valiantly defended the Niyamgiri Hills from destructive mining activities, preserving their sacred land and biodiversity.

India, too, has a rich tradition

The Apatani tribe of Arunachal Pradesh showcases innovative sustainability through wet-rice cultivation and fish farming, while the Soliga tribe of Karnataka safeguards the Biligiriranga Hills using indigenous forest management techniques. Such efforts have inspired broader environmental movements. The Chipko Movement of the 1970s, where villagers in Uttarakhand hugged trees to prevent deforestation, drew inspiration from the Bishnoi's sacrifice. In 2021, a similar initiative saved over 500 sacred oak trees in Jaakhni village. Uttarakhand, near forests dedicated to the local Goddess of

From the hills of Uttarakhand to the sacred groves of Meghalaya, these movements highlight India's enduring environmental heritage. Despite their invaluable contributions, indigenous communities face significant challenges, including marginalisation, land dispossession, and exploitation. Empowering indigenous communities to take leadership roles in environmental management has already shown promising results. For example, joint forest management initiatives have demonstrated effective resource management and biodiversity conservation. Combining indigenous knowledge with modern scientific approaches can create innovative strategies for addressing environmental challenges. Practices like the Zuni tribe's waffle gardens in New Mexico, which conserve water in arid regions, exemplify the sophistication of indigenous ecological wisdom.

In an era of environmental crises, humanity must embrace the profound knowledge of indigenous communities to forge a sustainable future. Their traditions, deeply rooted in respect for nature, hold the key to restoring ecological balance. By integrating their wisdom into global conservation strategies, we can create a world that honors the delicate harmony between humanity

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

and the natural world.

### Challenges in CSR accounting: Pathways to meaningful impact



Implementing CSR initiatives effectively presents significant challenges, ranging from a lack of clear objectives to complexities in measuring their impact

orporate Responsibility (CSR) ∕is a fundamental aspect of modern business strategy, reflecting a company's commitment to social equity, environmental sustainability and ethical practices.

In India, CSR became a legal requirement in 2013, and companies are now expected to integrate these principles into their operations. However, while CSR initiatives are vital for societal and environmental progress, accounting for them presents unique challenges that businesses must address to achieve compliance and maximise impact.

Challenges in CSR Accounting:

1. Lack of Clear Objectives Many companies undertake CSR without clearly defined goals, resulting in misaligned initiatives that fail to resonate with stakeholders or address critical social issues. 2. Insufficient Stakeholder **Engagement:** CSR initiatives often overlook the input of key stakeholders such as employees, customers, and community members. For instance, a clothing brand may launch a sustainable

fashion line without consult-

ing suppliers or customers,

leading to low adoption and minimal impact. 3. Limited Resources

Smaller businesses face budget constraints and lack expertise to implement effective CSR programmes. A local coffee shop, for example, might abandon a recycling initiative due to insufficient funds for bins or awareness campaigns, missing the

chance to enhance its brand. 4. Fund Utilisation Issues Companies often face compliance challenges regarding the disbursal of funds to implementing agencies. Under Section 135(5), mere fund transfer does not qualify as CSR spending unless the implementing agency utilises the funds appropriately. Companies must plan and monitor fund utilisation effec-

5. Difficulty in Measuring **Impact:** Assessing the outcomplex, as many lack standardised metrics to measure their social and environmental impact. For example, a manufacturing firm may struggle to quantify carbon emission reductions from a green energy project, making it harder to demonstrate suc-

6. Reputation Risks

Greenwashing or poorly executed initiatives can damage a company's credibility. For instance, a beverage company that markets itself as environmentally friendly while engaging in unsustainable practices risks losing consumer trust and suffering long-term reputational harm. Strategies to Overcome CSR Challenges

1. Define Clear Objectives Companies should set (Specific, SMART Measurable, Achievable, Relevant, Time-bound) goals for their CSR initiatives.

2. Engage Stakeholders Early Regular engagement with stakeholders ensures CSR initiatives address their needs and receive their support. 3. Start Small and Scale Up Small businesses can begin with low-cost, high-impact

comes of CSR initiatives is projects and expand as they gain experience. A local restaurant might start with a composting programme and later adopt a broader sustainability plan, including local sourcing and reduced waste. 4. Utilise Metrics and Reporting: Establishing clear metrics allows companies to measure and report their CSR progress effectively. For instance, a tech firm could publish an annual report detailing energy savings, employee participation, and community engagement out-5. Communicate

Transparently: Openness about successes and challenges builds stakeholder

Conclusion: Proactively addressing these issues helps businesses enhance their reputation, strengthen stakeholder relationships, and make meaningful societal contributions. Successful CSR initiatives ultimately benefit both companies and communities, driving sustainable

(The writer is partner Audit and Corporate Tax, Bhuta Shah and Co.; views *are personal)* 

**SC CONDEMNS WITCHCRAFT PRACTICES** 

Madam —Recently the Supreme Court reprimanded the Patna High Court for staying proceedings in a case involving the abuse of women accused of witchcraft, highlighting the issue as a violation of Constitutional values. The Court condemned the practice of witchcraft as rooted in superstition and patriarchal control, urging for protective measures and social change to combat such discrimination against vulnerable women. The Supreme Court took a strong stance against the victimisation of vulnerable women under the guise of witchcraft, calling it a "blot" on the constitutional spirit.

SC has rightly said that the incident that took place in the 21st century was shocking and underlined the failure of legislative, executive and judicial measures to protect vulnerable sections of society. In India, witchcraft allegations are often directed at women who are either widows or elderly. The Court has also observed that the incidents against women accused of witchcraft go against the spirit of the Constitution because they undermine dignity. SC has expressed shock at cases where women have been physically abused and directed in public over witchcraft allegations. The number of witchcraft-related cases reported to the NCRB has been increasing in recent years. The Prevention of Witch Practices Act in Jharkhand criminalises accusations of women as witches. Criminalisation and punishment of those involved in witch hunting is the most appropriate way to end superstition and harmful practices and provide redress to

P Victor Selvaraj | Tirunelveli

#### **DELHI NEEDS DEVELOPMENT**

Madam—Apropos of the news 'BJP shortlists candidates for Delhi as manifesto campaign gains momentum' (Dec 21), it is a welcome sign and heartening that BJP prioritises and takes the lead to frame Sankalp Patra, as they call it a political manifesto, with public opinion. BJP has got over

#### **Dhaka takes anti-India stance**

THE EDITO

ndia's relations with Bangladesh are passing through a difficult phase after the Sheikh Hasina government succumbed before violent protests led by students in the first week of August. All development after her fall is quite worrisome for New Delhi. No doubt it was a foregone conclusion that Dhaka will no longer follow a pro-India policy. But Bangladesh is hell-bent upon destroying the cordial and bilateral relations that New Delhi crafted with the Sheikh Hasina regime. The ouster of the liberal Sheikh Hasina regime has embold-

association with its manifesto. BJP has a large number of MLA aspirants, so the delay in the declaration of candidates is directly proportional to the number of candidates. The manifesto should target the new generation and focus on implementations of the New Education Policy 2000, which echoes in the Lt. Governor's initiative in Samvad@Rajnivas.

DDA, MCD and NDMC may be associated in setting up government libraries across Delhi for students and teachers. Traffic jam is the perennial issue for Delhiites, and it is easy to spot the trouble areas. Delhi needs more flyovers across Dwarka and East Delhi. The pollution in Delhi is also a serious concern, and antifogging machines need to be installed on major roads. The waste and garbage dumps, particularly in Gazipur Chowk and Janakpuri, deface and stink Delhi. Delhi Government needs to implement the plans. The beggar problem at road crossings is a nuisance. Illegal colonies and Bangladeshi and Rohingya immigrants are a big bane for Delhi. Delhi is not a poor 40,000 suggestions, which shows public state, and per capita income is much high-

ened Jamat-e-Islami-led Islamic extremists who are now targeting not only religious minorities but also Sufi shrines and the press. Unfortunately, the Muhammad Yunus government is only interested in flaring up anti-India sentiments in the country instead of containing sectarian violence. The arrest of Hindumonk Chinmoy Krishna Das on sedition charges shows its true colours.

Internationally too, Dhaka is interested in joining hands with anti-India forces, particularly China and Pakistan, and Yunus's second meeting with Shahbaz Sharif in the last four months. The anti-India approach of the Yunus government can be measured by a post of Yunus' close aide, Mahfuz Alam, in which he threatened to "annex" parts of India. Before Dhaka intends to go to Islamabad's way, it must not forget that New Delhi holds significant leverage over it in terms of both economy and geopolitics.

Manoj Parashar | Ghaziabad

free rations and electricity are not required, and the funds should be allocated to building the infrastructure of flyovers, schools, and hospitals.

er than in other states, so the freebies like

Vinod Johri | Delhi

#### **FOCUS ON CONSTRUCTIVE DEBATES**

Madam — The parliamentarian should understand that they need to be more productive, constructive, and prolific during the start of the session of the houses. As the winter session of the 18th Lok Sabha ended with the least possible outcomes that Parliamentarians could deliver, causing a scuffle between the members themselves. It should be the moral and fundamental duty to abide by the constitution to uphold the dignity of the Parliament houses and meant it for possible constructive discussion on each and every issue rather than politicising them on personal and party grounds.

Dimple Wadhawan | Kanpur Nagar

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#### **FIRST COLUMN**

#### **MAKE A DIRECT CONNECT WITH GOD**

Our approach to the Divine has been shackled by rituals, often muddling the true essence of spiritual connection



RAVI VALLURI

s a monolithic organisation, railway bureaucracy was once fossilised and adopted an ostrich-like approach while dealing with its internal and external customers and also with rivals till it adopted technology in attracting passenger and freight segments.

This cardinal principle of competitive advantage and adaptability also applies in our relationship with religion, spirituality and almighty God. Humans have been prisoners to an outdated pedagogy while approaching God. The transaction between the Divine and the bhakta has been constrained as the transmission of knowledge and blessings have been clogged in drain pipes, as the seeker and the devout feels impotent and weak.

Can we recall two path-breaking movies from a few years back, OMG - Oh My God! and PK, wherein the relationship of humans and God was explored?

In OMG a petty trader, Kanji challenges the orthodoxy of the religious establishment by suing the Creator for the ruination of his business, much to the chagrin of the priestly and spiritual class. Similarly, PK- an alien who is marooned on planet Earth, as his spaceship leaves without him - questions various religious and spiritual institutions with his childlike curiosity, only to attract disapprobation.

If it was Lord Krishna's flute and discus in the case of Kanji, it became the symbolic wrong number in the case of PK to dispute the indurate thought processes of a shambolic order. A distraught PK was unable to connect with the Divine forms of various religious denominations and all his trials ended in a sandbox of wrong numbers. So, what is the right number? It is a Wi-Fi to God.



Let us for a split second assume that human beings and all the other manifestations of this grand design are like computers, smartphones or other electronic devices. Almighty God can be likened to the World Wide Web possessing the repository of knowledge, of course with the faculty of creation and destruction.

In the wired world all gizmos are connected to the internet through a Wi-Fi. Aberrations or disruptions in the communication do take place, when the battery power is low, or due to software glitches (this can be attributed to low prana levels). The intermediaries, in the form of the priestly class, astutely blame these muddles faced by the gizmos, either in the hands of God or lack of tapas by the seeker. For centuries across the world, as humans evolved from the inception as mere nature worshippers, to established religions, the febrile human mind has always been inquisitive about the acceptable and bizarre theories of existence. Almighty God in all his manifestations and myriad forms is approachable to bestow benedictions. However, tragically it is the gizmo (humans) and the channel (Wi-Fi) that have transfigured and remodeled since perhaps, the Big Bang!

The Wi-Fi is symbolic of a direct connection with the Divine. A true bhakta does he require an emergency quota to board the heavenly train. There is no need to perform rituals, consult tarot card readers, visit places of worship out of fear, beseeching for mercy or boons. A chip is embedded in the DNA to ensure the divine communion which needs to be activated. The regular practice of yogic postures is essentially Hatha Yoga and a tonic for the physical body. The meditation that humans practice is to fortify and safeguard the comfort of our minds, but it is our true inner self, which pines for nourishment. The ordinary mortal today too can be in this state of spiritual reverie through the power of breath. This brings us closest to our inner self. This is the unalloyed Wi-Fi to con-

(The writer is the CEO of Chhattisgarh East Railway Ltd. and Chhattisgarh East West Railway Ltd. He is a faculty of the Art of Living; views are personal)

# Slowdown in growth: Is it a temporary blip?



This temporary slowdown, attributed to reduced government spending, raises broader concerns about the structural challenges underpinning India's growth story



he GDP (gross domestic product) growth during the second quarter of the current financial year (FY) ending September 30, 2024, decelerated to 5.4 per cent down from 8.1 per cent achieved during the corresponding period of FY 2023-24. It was the lowest in seven quarters and well below the Reserve Bank of India's (RBI) forecast of 7 per cent. It was even lower than the 6.7 per cent recorded during the first quarter of the current FY ending June 30, 2024.

Union Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman observed that deceleration was not a "systemic slowdown"; that it was a temporary blip caused by a reduction in government expenditure (courtesy, elections ended in the June quarter when many projects came to a standstill due to the model code of conduct). She exuded confidence that expansion during the third quarter would make up for the lost momentum. The Ministry of Finance (MoF) expects full-year GDP growth to be 6.5 – 7 per cent. Coming on top of growth of 8 per cent plus achieved during the previous three consecutive years, 6.5 – 7 per cent during the current FY is indeed impressive. Even at this lower level, the Indian economy continues to be the fastest-growing in the world. Then, why should it worry us?

Nearly 70 per cent of India's GDP is driven by domestic consumption; the remaining 30 per cent is driven by investment and export. Domestic consumption includes government consumption and private consumption. Likewise, investment consists of capital spent by the government and private investment. During the last five vears, the Central Government has done the heavy lifting especially when it comes to investment. An idea of this can be gauged from its budget outlay 2020-21: Rs 30.42 lakh crore; 2021-22: Ŕs 34.83 lakh crore; 2022-23: Rs 39.45 lakh crore; 2023-24: Rs 45.03 lakh crore; 2024-25: Rs 48.20

The Centre's capital spend during these years was 2020-21: Rs 4.39 lakh crore; 2021-22: Rs 5.54 lakh crore; 2022-23: Rs 7.50 lakh crore; 2023-24: Rs 10.01 lakh crore; 2024-25: Rs 11.11 lakh crore. The Central government has also been helping the states



UNION FINANCE MINISTER NIRMALA **SITHARAMAN** 

OBSERVED THAT DECELERATION WAS NOT A SLOWDOWN' THAT IT WAS A TEMPORARY BLIP CAUSED BY A REDUCTION IN GOVERNMENT EXPENDITURE

to boost their capital spend. During 2022-23, it provided them with 50-year Rs 100,000 crore interest-free loans.

During 2023-24, such transfers were Rs 130,000 crore. For the current FY, the transfers are kept at Rs 150,000 crore. It has also given incentives to promote investment in the private sector. The mother of all incentives was a reduction in the corporate tax rate to 15 per cent for new manufacturing enter-prises and 22 per cent for existing enterprises. In this year's budget, the corporate tax rate on foreign firms was reduced from 40 per cent to 35 per cent.

The Centre has also done its bit to give a boost to private consumption. In the budget for 2024-25, Sitharaman has given relief in personal income tax (PIT) of around Rs 17,500/- annually by changing the tax slabs under the New Income Tax regime and ncreasing in standard deduction by Rs 25,000/-. Less tax means higher disposable income in the hands of the people hence the scope for more spending. But, initiatives by the government alone can't ensure high growth on a sustainable basis. To achieve high sustainable growth, it is necessary to give a boost to private consumption. The dip to 5.4 per cent during the second quarter of the current FY when the decline in urban demand took a toll even as heavy lifting by the Centre was not available (due to elections) should serve as a warning signal. This brings us to a systemic problem that has hampered growth for

This has to do with inequalities in the distribution of income and wealth. According to an Oxfam report, 'Inequality Kills', the collective wealth of India's 100 richest people in 2021 hit a record high of US\$ 775 billion or over 25 per cent of India's GDP. In conversation with ET Now at the recently held

decades.

Times Network India Economic Conclave, Arvind Panagariya, Chairman, of the 16th Finance Commission said: "The inequality in the sense of the top 1 per cent as a proportion of the bottom 5 percent, yes, that inequality has gone up". Thomas Piketty, a professor at the Paris School of Economics (he is known for his groundbreaking research on economic inequality, wealth distribu-tion, and the dynamics of capital-ism) says "the share of India's top 10 percent population is currently at 55-60 per cent". According to him, this should be 30-40 per cent. Whichever source one looks at, we can't wish away the fact that India is home to glaring inequalities in

income distribution. This, in turn, has to do with the manner in which fruits of development are shared amongst the people. Unambiguously, the sharing is unequal. According to an analysis of the financials of India's The SMEs be largest companies - those comprising the BSE 500 index - over five years, the profits of corporations included in this index more than doubled from Rs 480,000 crore during 2017-18 Rs 1000,000 crore during 2021-22, whereas their revenue growth was only 47 per cent.

This means that payments to factors of production other than the owners of capital such as to employees/workers, etc., have been kept under a tight leash, resulting in a disproportionate boost to profits. A big slice of these profits has gone to the pockets of the shareholders of these firms.

Thus, the aggregate dividend paid by them increased from Rs 176,000 crore during 2017-18 to Rs 302,000 crore during 2021-22, which is an increase of 72 per cent. In those five years, cumulatively, they paid 34 per cent of aggregate net profit as dividends. This is an unusually high payout ratio - even higher than 30 per cent paid by the

world's largest companies in America's S&P 500. Whether profits to the firms or high dividends to shareholders, it has been paid for or come at the cost of millions of others. Rs 1,000,000 crore profits of firms in the BSE 500 index during FY 2021-22 came at the cost of undermining the purchasing power of millions of consumers.

Likewise, the mammoth dividend fills the coffers of a few - the money that merely adds to their idle cash balances or is spent on a few luxury items - denying millions of workers decent income. The tendency to appropriate a disproportionate share of the proceeds of wealth generation by a few persons at the top can be seen even amongst the owners of small and medium enterprises (SMEs) who ape large enterprises when it comes to making payments to

The SMEs being employment intensive, a general belief is that giving a boost to them would help in creating more jobs hence, lead to a more equitable income distribution. But, their owners' paying less to workers militates against this objective.

Even the millions of small and marginal farmers who by nature of their occupation play the role of owner as well as worker don't get to earn a good income as a handful of traders buy their crops at throwaway prices even as the minimum support price (MSP) notified by the government remains mostly on paper. When, the enterprise-owning class no matter which occupation it is in and the scale of its operation is intrinsically prone to sharing less with those who are at the receiving end, inequalities are inevitable. In such a scenario, how can we expect a big push to the demand needed for sustained growth?

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

### The allure and impact of Reels: A double-edged sword

In an age where digital connectivity reigns supreme, short-form content like reels has taken centre stage, captivating millions with its addictive allure

n today's digital era, people from all walks of life are increasingly drawn to the virtual world, spending countless hours glued to their screens rather than engaging in real-world activities. Social media platforms, online gaming, and streaming services have created an engaging yet addictive digital ecosystem. Among these, reels have emerged as a dominant form of entertainment, captivating users with short, visually stimulating content that ranges from dance challenges and comedy skits to educational snippets and senseless videos. While initially sought as a break from daily routines, reels often trap users in an endless cycle of mindless scrolling that detracts from productivity and long-term goals.



Reels are crafted with algorithms and driven by artificial intelligence to provide instant gratification. However, this seemingly harmless indulgence is contributing to a concerning decline in social and emotional wellbeing. The short bursts of content, typically lasting a few seconds to a minute, are often paired with catchy music, effects, and fil-

ters to maximise engagement. These features captivate both creators and viewers, fostering an obsession that has surpassed earlier trends like the

The statistics are staggering. In 2023, India had approximately 24 crore Instagram users, accounting for nearly 17 per cent of its population—the highest globally. Children as young as five years old are consuming reels, while parents take pride in showcasing their kids' talents online. Although reels highlight creativity and talent, they come with significant risks. Overexposure to adult themes, unsolicited criticism, and the pressure to perform for likes and shares can severely impact a child's self-esteem and emotional

health. For parents, the drive

for online validation often overshadows the responsibility to provide age-appropriate environments for their chil-

The dopamine rush triggered by watching reels creates a cycle of instant gratification, making it difficult for users to focus on meaningful achievements that require sustained effort. The infinite scroll feature exacerbates this issue, leading to binge-watching that consumes valuable time and energy. For youth, who are particularly vulnerable, this translates to lost opportunities for personal growth, skill development, and building genuine relationships.

Reels and Social Dynamics The cultural impact of reels extends beyond individual habits, influencing societal



norms and behaviors. Content creators often sensationalise material to attract more viewers, blurring the lines between private and public domains. This trend has led to the normalisation of inappropriate content, including vulgarity, obscenity, and indecent practices, which are being readily adopted by impressionable

audiences. The effects are troubling. Incidents of cyberbullying, harassment, and social media-

driven disputes are on the rise. The dopamine-induced focus on short-term gratification undermines hard work and perseverance, fostering a culture of mediocrity. Youth, in particular, are losing precious productive years to the reel marathon, trading real-life interactions for virtual valida-

#### Physical and Cognitive Consequences

The overconsumption of reels is not only detrimental to mental health but also poses physical and cognitive risks. Prolonged screen time leads to issues such as poor concentration, memory deficits, sleep disturbances, and decreased academic or professional performance. Lifestyle disorders like obesity, diabetes, and hypertension are becoming

more prevalent, exacerbated by sedentary habits encouraged by excessive reel consumption. **Breaking the Cycle** 

Addressing the negative impact of reels requires a collective effort. At an individual level, self-discipline is crucial. Setting clear limits on screen time and prioritising meaningful activities can help break the cycle. Families play a pivotal role, as parents must lead by example, fostering environments that encourage "family time" and shared activities. Introducing hobbies and alternative forms of entertainment can also reduce reliance on

digital distractions. From a societal perspective, stringent regulations are necessary to monitor and control the type of content being created and shared. Governments

and tech companies should collaborate to design features that promote responsible plat-

#### form usage. The Way Forward

They must be used responsibly to avoid their harmful consequences. Striking a balance between virtual and realworld experiences is essential for leading a fulfilling life. Individuals need meaningful relationships, emotional support, and real-life achievements to thrive.

By fostering awareness and adopting healthier digital habits, we can harness the benefits of technology without compromising our wellbeing. (The writer has an experience of 17 years of teaching the under graduate students of Sri Guru Gobind Singh Čollege of Commerce; views are personal)

#### ISRO's to test Space seeds, debris capture and green propulsion

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE

Demonstration of seed germination in outer space, a robotic arm to catch a tethered debris there, and testing of green propulsion systems are some of the experiments planned on the POEM-4 -- the fourth stage of ISRO's PSLV rocket that remains in orbit after launching a satellite. The PSLV-C60 mission, slated for an yearend launch, is scheduled to place the twin satellites 'Chaser and Target' to demonstrate the space docking technologies that are crucial for building India's

space station.
The PSLV Orbital Experiment Module (POEM) will carry 24 experiments -- 14 from various ISRO labs and 10 from private universities and start-ups -- to demonstrate various technologies

ISRO plans to grow eight cowpea seeds from seed germination and plant sustenance until the two-leaf stage in a closed-box environment with active thermal control as part of the Compact Research Module for Orbital Plant Studies (CROPS) developed by the Vikram Sarabhai

oped by the Vikram Sarabhai Space Centre.
The Amity Plant Experimental Module in Space (APEMS), developed by Amity University, Mumbai, plans to study the growth of spinach in a microgravity environment. Two parallel experiments will be carried out simultaneously. simultaneously -- one on POEM-4 in space and one on the ground at the university. The experi-ment's outcome will provide insights into how higher plants sense the direction of gravity and

light.
The Debris Capture Robotic
Manipulator, developed by VSSC,
will demonstrate the capturing of tethered debris by a robotic manipulator using visual servoing and object motion prediction in the space environment. The robotic manipulator will be capable of capturing free-floating debris in future POEM mis-

### **PM Narendra Modi receives Kuwait's highest honour**



**PTI** KUWAIT CITY

 $K^{uwait\,on\,Sunday\,conferred}_{its\,\,highest\,\,honour\,\,-\,\,'The}_{Order\,\,of\,\,Mubarak\,\,Al-Kabeer'}$ on Prime Minister Narendra Modi for his role in strengthening the good relations between the two countries.

Prime Minister Modi received the honour from Kuwait's Amir Sheikh Meshal Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al Sabah at the Bayan Palace here.

"I am honoured to be conferred the Mubarak Al-Kabeer Order by His Highness the Amir of Kuwait, Sheikh Meshal Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al Sabah. I dedicate this honour to the people of India and to the strong friendship between India and Kuwait," Modi said in a post on

The 'Order of Mubarak Al-Kabeer' is a knighthood order of Kuwait.

External Affairs Minister S Jaishankar said that the conferment of the Mubarak Al-Kabeer Order on Prime Minister Modi is a proud moment for all Indians.

The honour recognises Prime Minister's steadfast commitment and leadership in strengthening linkages with the Gulf region. Also showcases the depth of India-Kuwait historic ties and people to people relations," he said in a post on X. In a release, the Ministry of External Affairs said the Prime Minister dedicated the award to the long-standing friendship between India and Kuwait, to the Indian community in Kuwait and to the 1.4 billion people of India.

The conferment of the award on this historic visit of a Prime Minister of India to Kuwait after 43 years added a special meaning to the occasion," it

In a post on X, Ministry of External Affairs Spokesperson Randhir Jaiswal described it as "a testament to the long-standing India-Kuwait friendship". The award was given to Prime Minister Modi for strengthening the good relations between the two nations, Kuwait's staterun news agency KUNA reported.

This is the 20th international honour given to PM Modi by a country, officials said.

The award was instituted in 1974 and has since been conferred on select global leaders. It has been previously awarded to foreign leaders like Bill Clinton, Prince Charles and George Bush.

Modi reached Kuwait on Saturday for a two-day visit. His visit is the first by an Indian Prime Minister to the Gulf nation in 43 years.

He received a ceremonial welcome and Guard of Honour at the Bayan Palace.

Modi had earlier received honours from Gulf countries such as Saudi Arabia, the UAE and Bahrain.

In November, Guyana and Dominica conferred their top awards on Prime Minister Modi for his contributions during the COVID-19 pandemic and his exceptional contributions to the global community and efforts in strengthening bilateral ties with the two Caribbean

nations. In the same month, Nigeria conferred its national award the Grand Commander of the Order of the Niger - on Prime Minister Modi for his statesmanship and stellar contribution to fostering bilateral ties, making him the second foreign dignitary to receive the distinc-

### CPI(M) slams rule change blocking access to election footage

**PIONEER NEWS SERVICE** ■

The CPI(M) on Sunday demanded the immediate withdrawal of an election rule amendment preventing pub-lic inspection of certain electronic documents such as CCTV camera and webcasting footage. In a statement, the CPI(M) Politburo expressed its strong objection

amendment, restricting the amendment, restricting the access of political parties and candidates to electronic records, including video and

records, including video and other digital trails.

The Government tweaked the election rule to prevent public inspection of certain electronic documents such as CCTV camera and webcasting footage as well as video recordings of candidates to check their misuse. check their misuse. Based on the recommenda-

tion of the Election Commission (EC), the Union

law ministry on Friday amended Rule 93(2)(a) of the Conduct of Election Rules, 1961, to restrict the type of 'papers" or documents open to public inspection.

The CPI(M) said these steps were initially introduced by the EC in consultation with political parties to ensure greater transparency, and described as "retrograde" the move to amend the rule. Proper consultations were not

carried out with political parties on the issue, it alleged. "Media reports suggest that the government held consultations with the Election Commission of India while drafting the new rules. However, the Election Commission's reported concurrence was not preceded by any consultation with political parties,

contrary to the established precedents over the years," the CPI(M) said.

"The government's argument,

which questions the locus standi of the petitioner on the conduct of the electoral process, is specious. This approach completely excludes political parties' involvement in the procedures to be folon the procedures to be for-lowed," the Left party said. The CPI(M) said its experi-ence, particularly during the

Lok Sabha elections in Tripura, showed that charges of rigging led to the examina-tion of videographic records within polling booths, ulti-mately resulting in repolls being announced in almost half the polling booths across both constituencies.

"In this era, where technology is an integral part of the electoral process, the government's move represents a

retrograde step," it said.
"The Politburo of the CPI(M), therefore, demands the immediate withdrawal of the proposed amendments to the Conduct of Election Rules," it

### Alleged J and K terrorist caught in West Bengal

SAUGAR SENGUPTA NEW

A joint team of West Bengal and Jammu and Kashmir Police on Sunday picked up an alleged terrorist linked to Tehreek e Mujahideen and Laskhar e Toiba.

His arrest comes three days after two others were nabbed from Murshidabad district. The police arrested Javed Munshi an Improvised Explosive Device expert and a weapons handler hailing from Jammu and Kashmir (J and K). He was living with his relatives in Canning town in South 24 Parganas and was planning to move to Bangladesh via the

Sunderbans, police sources said adding several incriminating documents and other electronic devices were recovered from him.

He had earlier been charged of a murder in the J and K, sources said. Munshi reportedly confessed to having visited Bangladesh, Nepal, and Pakistan on several occasions with fake Pakistan passports, police said.

Earlier, in a joint operation, the Assam STF and the West Bengal STF on Thursday arrested two suspected militants - Abbas Sheikh and Minarul Sheikh - in Murshidabad's Hariharpara, who were linked to another foreign national and 'handler'

Muhammad Shaad Radi who was allegedly living in India for the past 10 years --- reg-ularly slipping in and out to Bangladesh.

They were reportedly working towards recruiting moles in North Bengal beyond Malda with their eyes on the Chicken's neck area that connects the North East to the rest of the country.
"The terror modules were

planning to create communal tension in this part of the border by inciting people and had been appointing recruits," a senior recruits," a senior police officer said adding they were looking for other terror moles involved in the

#### Delhi's Republic | Over 100 Day Tableau Rejected, AAP Slams Exclusion

From page 1

"The committee had a tough task of selecting the best tableaux from among the many proposals received," said a defense ministry spokesperson. "The selected tableaux will showcase the rich cultural diversity and

heritage of our country." The rejection of Delhi's proposal is seen as a setback for the city, which has a rich cultural heritage and a long history of participating in the Republic Day parade.
"I want to ask them — why is

Delhi's tableau being excluded once again this year? Why are the people of Delhi being prevented from participating in the Republic Day celebrations," Kejriwal asked

at a press conference.
Claiming that Delhi's tableau
has been missing the cut for several years now, Kejriwal said, "What kind of politics is this? Why is there so much hatred towards Delhi and its people? If these leaders hold such animosity, why should the people of Delhi vote for them?"

# students from...

Despite warnings from locals and authorities, the school staff insisted on continuing the journey, he said. Around 5 pm, the buses attempted to head towards Nepal again, but they were stopped from

proceeding once more. The managers then decided to have the children sit in the open at Bichhiya railway station, located in the heart of the dense forest. With temperatures dropping, the children huddled together to shield themselves from the cold.

After receiving information about the stranded students, District Magistrate Monika Rani ordered action. Sub-Divisional Magistrate (SDM) Sanjay Kumar, police and forest department officials, arrived at the site to provide food, set up bonfires, and ensure the safety of the children and staff, he said.

SDM Sanjay Kumar confirmed that food was arranged for everyone, and strict instructions were issued to prevent such incidents in the future. The children and staff were safely escorted back to Gonda around midnight, bringing an end to their ordeal.

#### Woman found dead in Delhi

**STAFF REPORTER** ■ NEW DELHI

↑ 22-year-old woman, who Awas missing from her residence a few days ago, was found dead in a hotel in Delhi's Paschim Vihar area. According to the police on Sunday, the woman went missing on December 14 and her family members filed a missing person report on December 16 at Raj Park Police Station. The cause of the woman's death remains

#### Tirumala eyes Al chatbot for pilgrim services

From page 1

He added that TTD aims to position the world's richest Hindu temple as a model "Vision 2047", in alignment with the state government's Swarna Ändhra-2047 initiative.

The vision emphasises planned development, environmental management, and heritage conservation in Tirumala, Rao said.

#### NDMC chairman awards winners at All India Winter Rose Show



New Delhi Municipal Council (NDMC), Chairman Keshav Chandra gave away the prizes to the best judged entries of All India Winter Rose Show held at India - Africa Friendship Rose Garden in Chanakyapuri.
Chandra distributed the prizes to the winners of the

Rose Show in different 22 categories in the presence of the President of The Rose Society of India, Kuldeep Saddy. The Rose Show displayed 92 Varieties of Roses in 198

Sections & 22 classes with 1400 exhibits by more than

Before giving the prizes, Chandra welcomed all the participants of the Rose Show and congratulated all

show in the heart of the capital city of India.

200 participants.

individuals and organizations for organizing such a beautiful show where people can come and witness around 92 varieties of roses in different categories divided on the basis of their nature. He appreciated the work of all experts who were the architects of this wonderful

# Massive fire engulfs ectronics manufacturing unit in Noida, no casualties

STAFF REPORTER ■ NEW DELHI

A massive fire broke out in the basement of an electronic equipment manufacturing company in Sector 65 on Sunday.

According to the police, no

casualties were reported in the incident, although goods worth crores of rupees were destroyed by the fire. "Information about the massive fire at the company located at A-113 in Sector 65 was received at 8 am, following which the fire department dispatched 17 vehicles to the spot," Deputy Commissioner of Police

(Zone II) Shakti Mohan Awasthi said.

The fire erupted in the basement of Shyam SDS Electronics Pvt. Ltd., situated in A Block, and quickly spread, engulfing the area in flames. "Upon receiving the information, seven fire tenders initially arrived at the scene. However, due to the intensity of the blaze, more fire tenders were called in," a senior police officer said.

The blaze was contained after five hours due to the efforts of around 100 firefighters, he said, adding that the total damage is still being assessed. Chief Fire Officer Pradeep

Kumar Choubey said the fire is suspected to have started due to sparks from the electrical equipment and the battery stored in the basement. "The batteries stored there were bursting intermittently due to the fire, which made extinguishing it more difficult," he added. Kumar noted that, as it was

Sunday and no employees were present in the company, there were no casualties. "The cause of the fire is still unknown, but fortunately, there have been no reports of casualties. However, property worth crores has been reduced to ashes," he said.

### AAP opens registration for women, seniors aid

From page 1

The beneficiaries will need to show their voter identity cards, and all eligible women voters in Delhi will receive the benefits, he added.

Kejriwal also announced that registration for the Sanjeevani Yojana will start tomorrow, and elderly people will be registered at their homes by AAP volunteers. He said, "Today, we are officially inaugurating these schemes. Tomorrow, we will begin visiting some areas and starting the registration process. Myself, Atishi Ji, and Manish Ji will personally go to some locations and help people register. After this, registration for these schemes will be opened across all of

Sharing a few snippets from the announcement, AAP National Convenor Arvind Kejriwal posted on his 'X' handle (erstwhile Twitter), stating: "We recently announced 2 big schemes for the people of Delhi. 'Mahila Samman Yojana' and 'Sanjeevani Yojana'. From tomorrow our team will go door to door to register for these two schemes. To register for this, it is very important to have your Delhi voter card." Expressing her delight, Chief Minister Atishi shared on her 'X' handle, stating: "I believe that around 35 to 40 lakh women may benefit from the 'Mahila Samman Yojana'. Similarly, I estimate that around 10 to 15 lakh senior

citizens could benefit from the 'Sanjeevani Yojana'. This is a big step, and I encourage everyone to take full advantage of these schemes." "The elderly people of Delhi will get the protection of Sanjeevani from their son Arvind Kejriwal. The registration of 'Sanjeevani Yojana' is starting in Delhi from tomorrow. Be it a private or a government hospital, the elderly above 60 years of age will no longer have to worry about the cost of their treatment because their son Arvind Kejriwal is with them," she stated...

In the run for the upcoming Delhi elections, AAP is vying for a third consecutive term. having won 62 out of 70 seats in the last election.

# Loan scam kingpin Bilal Lone caught in Delhi, targeted CRPF officers

Then, he admitted that he was Then, he admitted that he was already aware about the proceedings being initiated by the J&K authority and therefore, he was absconding and hiding himself knowingly," the DCP added. Accordingly, he above accused was arrested under the provision of Section the provision of Section 35(1)(b)(ii)(j) of the Bharatiya Nagarik Suraksha Sanhita (BNSS), 2023. Bilal Ahmad Lone is no ordinary conman. The police said that Bilal is no ordinary conman and has cheated a large number of people in Jammu & Kashmir by inducing them on pretext of getting them loan for purchasing of vehicles. "He

used to target the para-military personals posted in Jammu and nearby area. Most of the victims in the cases registered against him, are para-military officials posted in J&K. Either he used to obtain loan on the name of para-military officers or used to sell the vehicles to them which were taken by him on loan from bank by preparing forged No Objection Certificate (NOC) purported to be issued by the Bank," a senior police officer said. "Information of his arrest has

been given to the concerned police station of Anantnag district, J&K. and teams of J&K Police are on the way to take the custody of accused person," the DCP said.

### 2 US Navy pilots shot down over Red Sea in apparent 'friendly fire' incident

wo US Navy pilots were shot down Sunday over the Red Sea in an apparent "friendly fire" incident, the US military said, marking the most serious incident to threaten troops in over a year of America targeting Yemen's Houthi rebels.

Both pilots were recovered alive after ejecting from their stricken aircraft, with one suffering minor injuries. But the shootdown underlines just how dangerous the Red Sea corridor has become over the ongoing attacks on shipping by the Iranian-backed Houthis despite US and European military coalitions patrolling the

The US military had conducted airstrikes targeting Yemen's Houthi rebels at the time, though the US military's Central Command did not elaborate on what their mission was and did not immediately respond to questions from The Associated Press. The F/A-18 shot down had just flown off the deck of the USS Harry S. Truman aircraft car-

rier, Central Command said.

On December 15, Central

Command acknowledged the Truman had entered the Mideast, but hadn't specified US has stepped up its airstrikes targeting the Houthis and their missile fire into the Red Sea Mideast, but hadn't specified that the carrier and its battle group was in the Red Sea.

"The guided missile cruiser USS Gettysburg, which is part of the USS Harry S. Truman Carrier Strike Group, mistak-enly fired on and hit the F/A-18," Central Command said in a statement.

From the military's description, the aircraft shot down was a two-seat F/A-18 Super Hornet fighter jet assigned to the "Red Rippers" of Strike Fighter Squadron 11 out of Naval Air Station Oceana, Virginia. It wasn't immediately clear

how the Gettysburg could mis-take an F/A-18 for an enemy aircraft or missile, particular-ly as ships in a battle group remain linked by both radar and radio communication. However, Central Command said that warships and aircraft earlier shot down multiple Houthi drones and an anti-ship cruise missile launched by the

rebels. Incoming hostile fire from the Houthis has given sailors just seconds to make decisions in the past. Since the Truman's arrival, the

and the surrounding area.

However, the presence of an American warship group may spark renewed attacks from the rebels, like what the USS Dwight D. Eisenhower saw earlier this year. That deployment marked what the Navy described as its most intense combat since World War II. On Saturday night and early

Sunday, US warplanes conducted airstrikes that shook Sanaa, the capital of Yemen that the Houthis have held since 2014. Central central Command described the strikes as targeting a "missile storage facility" and a "command-and-control facility," without elaborating.

Houthi-controlled media

reported strikes in both Sanaa and around the port city of Hodeida, without offering any casualty or damage information. In Sanaa, strikes appeared particularly targeted at a mountainside known to be home to military installations. The Houthis later acknowledged the aircraft being shot down in the Red Sea.

The Houthis have targeted

about 100 merchant vessels with missiles and drones since the Israel-Hamas war in the Gaza Strip started in October 2023 after Hamas' surprise attack on Israel that killed 1,200 people and saw 250 oth-

1,200 people and saw 250 others taken hostage.
Israel's grinding offensive in Gaza has killed more than 45,000 Palestinians, local health officials say. The tally doesn't distinguish between combatants and civilians. The Houthis have seized one

vessel and sunk two in a cam-

paign that has also killed four sailors. Other missiles and drones have either been intercepted by separate US- and European-led coalitions in the Red Sea or failed to reach their targets, which have also included Western military vessels. The rebels maintain that they target ships linked to Israel, the US or the United Kingdom to force an end to Israel's campaign against Hamas in Gaza. However, many of the ships attacked have little or no connection to the conflict, including some bound for Iran.

The Houthis also have increasingly targeted Israel itself with drones and missiles, resulting in retaliatory Israeli airstrikes.

### Israeli strikes across Gaza kill at least 20

▼ sraeli strikes across the Gaza Strip overnight and into Sunday killed at least 20 people, including five children, Palestinian medical officials

Israeli authorities meanwhile allowed Cardinal Pierbattista Pizzaballa, the leader of the Catholic Church in the Holy Land, to enter Gaza and cele-

Al-Aqsa Martyrs Hospital, which received the bodies. A man and his wife were killed in a strike in the southern city of Khan Younis on Sunday, just after midnight, according to the nearby Nasser Hospital. A strike on a car in Gaza City killed two people, according to the Health Ministry.

There was no immediate comment from the military on

where the light is. This is one of the places where the light is," Pizzaballa said.

The buzz of Israeli drones circling overhead, a sound that has grown ubiquitous across Gaza during the war, could be heard throughout the Mass.
The rare visit to Gaza by the Latin Patriarch came a day after Pope Francis had again criticized Israel's actions in Gaza.

Holocaust, adamantly rejects such allegations. It says it has made great efforts to spare civilians and is only at war with Hamas, which it accuses of genocidal violence in the attack that ignited the war.

War grinds on as winter sets Hamas-led militants stormed into southern Israel in a surprise attack on Oct. 7, 2023, killing some 1,200 peo-



Palestinians look at home destroyed by an Israeli strike late Saturday in Deir al-Balah

### 38 dead, over 100 missing in Congo after ferry capsizes in Busira river

Thirty-eight people are confirmed dead, and over 100 remain missing in Congo after an overloaded ferry — full of people returning home for Christmas — capsized in the river Busira late on Friday night, according to local officials and evewitnesses. The boat sank less than four days after another one in the northeast of the country capsized, killing 25.

Twenty people are confirmed to have been rescued so far.

At least 78 p

The boat was travelling in the northeast of the Congo as part of a convoy of other vessels, and the passengers were primarily merchants returning home for Christmas, said Joseph Joseph Kangolingoli, the mayor of Ingende, the last town before the site of the accident.

of Ingende, the ferry contained "more than town of Mbandaka, the capital of the 400 people because it made two ports, Equateur province where the ferry sank, 400 people because it made two ports, Ingende and Loolo, on the way to Boende, so there is reason to believe that there were more deaths".

Congolese officials have often warned against overloading and vowed to punish those violating safety measures for water transportation. However, in remote areas where most passengers come from, many cannot afford public transport for the few

At least 78 people drowned in October when an overloaded boat sank in the country's east while 80 lost their lives in a similar accident near Kinshasa in June.

The latest accident prompted anger at the government for not equipping the con-

said he condemned the authorities for not properly handling the recent capsizings.

"How can a ship navigate at night under the watchful eye of river service agents? And now we are recording over a hundred deaths," lamented Mr Bonina.

The capsizing of overloaded boats is also becoming increasingly frequent in this central African nation as more people are giving up the few available roads in favour of wooden vessels crumbling under the weight of passengers and their goods for security reasons.

The roads are often caught up in the deadly clashes between Congolese security forces and rebels that sometimes block ngolingoli, the mayor of Ingende, the town before the site of the accident.

According to Ndolo Kaddy, a resident

brate a pre-Christmas Mass with members of the territory's

small Christian community. A strike on a school housing displaced people in Gaza City displaced people in Gaza City killed at least eight people, including three children, according to Gaza's Health Ministry. The Civil Defense, first responders affiliated with the Hamas-run government, had earlier said four children were among those killed.

The Israeli military said it carried out a precise strike on Hamas militants sheltering

A strike on a home in the central city of Deir al-Balah late Saturday killed at least eight people, including three women and two children, according to those strikes.

Israel has continued to carry out daily strikes in Gaza more than 14 months into the war with Hamas. It says it only targets militants, accusing them of hiding among civilians, but the bombings frequently kill women and children.

Vatican envoy celebrates Mass with Gaza's Christians: Dozens of worshippers gathered in the Holy Family Church in Gaza City as Pizzaballa and other clergy celebrated Mass. A Christmas tree was decorated with golden ornaments and twinkling white lights, and altar boys wearing red and white robes held candles.

"For Christmas, we celebrate the light and we are wondering

Francis said Saturday that his envoy had been unable to enter the territory because of Israeli

bombing. "Yesterday children have been bombed. This is cruelty, this is not war," Francis said during his annual Christmas greetings at the Vatican. The pope recently called for an

investigation to determine if Israel's actions in Gaza constitute genocide, a conclusion later reached by Amnesty International and Human Rights Watch. Rights Watch. The International Court of Justice is investigating genocide allegations brought against Israel

by South Africa. Israel, which was founded as a refuge for Jews after the Nazi

ple, mostly civilians, and abducting around 250. Around 100 hostages are still in Gaza, at least a third of whom are believed to be dead.

Israel's subsequent bombardment and ground invasion have killed over 45,000 people in Gaza, more than half of them women and children, according to the Gaza Health Ministry, which does not distinguish between fighters and civilians in its count.

The offensive has caused widespread destruction and displaced some 90% of Gaza's 2.3 million people, often multiple times. Hundreds of thousands are packed into squalid tent camps along the coast as the cold, wet winter sets in.

### Lara Trump drops out of race to be Florida senator

Lara Trump, the daughter-in-law of President-elect Donald Trump, said on Saturday that she is removing herself from consideration to be a Florida senator — ending speculation that she could replace Republican Senator
Marco Rubio, who has been was a key player in the GOP retaking the White House and tapped to be the incoming administration's secretary of state. "After an incredible amount of thought, contemplation, and encouragement from so many, I have decided to remove my name from consideration for the United States Senate," Lara Trump posted on X. Instead, she promised a "big announcement to share in

The announcement comes weeks after Trump announced that she was stepping down as co-chair of the Republican National Committee, a move which raised questions about president.

whether she might be vying for a Senate seat. If Rubio is confirmed, his replacement — who would be chosen by Republican Florida Governor Ron DeSantis — would serve for two years until the next regularly scheduled election in 2026. Elected as RNC co-chair in March, Trump control of the Senate, while maintaining a narrow House majority. What she does next could shape Republican politics, given her elevated political pro-file and her ties to the incom-

ing president. The idea of placing a Trump family member in the Senate had been backed by some Republicans, including Maye Musk, mother of Tesla and SpaceX CEO Elon Musk, who Trump has named co-head of a group tasked with reducing federal spending and regulations during his second term as

### Donald Trump taps 'Apprentice' producer Mark Burnett as special envov to UK

**AP** ■ WEST PALM BEACH (US)

Mark Burnett, the power producer who helped reintroduce Donald Trump to a national television audience with "The Apprentice", is being tapped by the president-elect as special envoy to the United Kingdom in his upcoming

administration. 'With a distinguished career in television production and business, Mark brings a unique blend of diplomatic acumen and international recognition to this important role," Trump

announced on Saturday.
Burnett, who was born in
London, helped produce hits
like "Survivor" and "The Voice", but is perhaps best known for teaming up with Trump for "The Apprentice", which first

aired on NBC in 2004. Trump had been well-known in real estate and pop culture circles for decades. But the show helped again make him a household name — though

Trump severed ties with NBC in 2015, the same year he launched his first White House

The selection of Burnett continues Trump's trend of filling out his incoming administra-tion with people who have high-profile backgrounds in television or politics, or both — including his choice to be defence secretary, Pete Hegseth, a former co-host of "Fox and Friends Weekend", and ex-television doctor and unsuccessful candidate in Senate

Pennsylvania, Mehmet Oz. Trumps first campaign in 2016 was rocked by allegations about his conduct on "The Apprentice" and other appearances during his association with NBC, notably in footage in which he said he could sexually assault women and get away with it because he was a "star".

Almost a decade after he left his reality TV role, Trump's television career remains central to

his biography and political rise. The show presented Trump Tower to tens of millions of people as a symbol of power and success before Trump launched his first campaign from the building's lobby.
"Mark is known for creating." and producing some of the biggest shows in Television History," Trump wrote in his statement on Burnett, listing many of his biggest hits before adding, "most notably, 'The Apprentice" and noting that Burnett "has won 13 Emmy

Awards!" Special envoys are usually picked by presidents for the world's traditional hotspots, including the Middle East where Trump has already said he would like Steven Witkoff to fill the role. The United Kingdom, which has long enjoyed a "special relation-ship" with the US that makes it one of Washington's strongest global allies, is not typically a candidate for such posts.

But Trump has announced a series of special envoy positions to several top loyalists ahead of Inauguration Day on January 20, including his former ambassador to Germany Richard Grenell who he chose as envoy for special missions. That announcement joined previous ones including Adam Boehler as special presidential envoy for hostage affairs, and Keith Kellogg to serve as special envoy for Ukraine and Russia. Trump also announced on December 2 that he was picking billionaire investment banker Warren Stephens for the more standard role of US ambassador to Britain. That might raise questions about how a special UK envoy could overlap duties, but the president-elect said in his statement that Burnett "will work to enhance diplomatic relations, focusing on areas of mutual interest, including trade, investment opportunities, and cultur-

### Pickup truck driver killed by cops in Texas

A pickup truck driver fleeing police careened through the doors of a JCPenney store in Texas and continued through a busy mall, injuring five people before he was fatally shot by officers, authorities said.

The truck crashed into the department store in Killeen, about 68 miles (109 kilometres) north of the state capital Austin, around 5.30 pm Saturday and continued into the building, striking people as it went, Sgt. Bryan Washko of the Texas Department of Public Safety said in an evening news brief-

Emergency medical services transported four victims from the mall to area hospitals and another travelled to a hospital separately. They ranged in age from 6 to 75 years old and their conditions were not immediately known, he said.

The chase began around 5 pm on Interstate 14 in Belton, about 20 miles (30 kilometres) from Killeen, after authorities received calls about an erratic driver in a black pickup, Ofelia Miramontez of the Killeen Police Department said. The driver then pulled off the road and drove into the parking lot of the mall.

"The suspect drove through the doors and continued to drive through the JCPenney store, striking multiple people, Washko said.

"The trooper and the Killeen police officer continued on foot after this vehicle, which was driving through the store, actively running people over. He travelled several hundred

Officers from the state public safety department, Killeen and three other law enforcement agencies "engaged in gunfire to eliminate this threat," Washko

### Sunak exits Downing Street, successor Starmer revives hope for FTA with India

PTI LONDON

 $T^{\text{he year earmarked for general elections in both India}}$ and the UK was destined to throw up many new scenarios on the political front. Among them was a decision to relaunch a "mutually beneficial" Free Trade Agreement (FTA) between the two coun-

Just as India's mammoth democratic exercise edged towards its phased conclusion in 2024, Britain's first Indian-origin prime minister Rishi Sunak surprised many within his own Conservative Party by calling an earlier-than-expected election on July 4 – exactly a month on from a third term win for Prime Minister Narendra Modi's National Democratic Alliance.

This meant the FTA talks, having entered their 14th round of intense negotiations, slipped

until the new Labour Party-led government committed itself to deepening our bilateral ties". "We agreed to raise the ambition of our UK-India comprehensive strategic partnership... Crucially, this work will start with trade and investment, and I am pleased to say that we agreed to relaunch Free Trade Agreement negotiations early in the new year," said newly-elected British Prime Minister Keir Starmer after his first meeting with Modi on the

into a more uncertain phase

sidelines of the G20 Summit in Brazil last month. It mapped out a clearly defined landscape for the future of the India-UK trade ties, which official UK government statis-tics clock at GBP 42 billion a year in the 12 months to June

Sunak may not have succeeded in getting the FTA over the line, but, as he admitted in his resignation speech at the doorstep of 10 Downing Street, British voters had given a "clear signal" in favour of change. The 44-year-old leaves behind quite the legacy despite presiding over the Conservatives' worst electoral performance in history. His words that "one of the most remarkable things" about modern Britain is just how "unremarkable" his

migrant roots were to the top

job will resonate with many, not

least a 1.8-million-strong

Indian diaspora. Having resigned after the bruising election defeat, Sunak served as interim Opposition leader before handing over the reins to Kemi Badenoch as the new Tory leader.

A fellow British Indian leadership hopeful, Priti Patel, soon returned to the frontbenches of Parliament as shadow foreign secretary in a House of Commons with a record of Indian heritage – including Lisa Nandy as Culture Secretary and Seema Malhotra as immigration minister. Under Malhotra, the UK intro-

nearly 30 parliamentarians of hiked minimum salary cut-offs. A simmering anti-immigration sentiment was behind a flurry of riots triggered by misinformation around the Welsh-born suspect behind a

#### **UNITED KINGDOM**

duced measures to curb rising migration, including giving an independent body more power to reduce reliance on foreign labour and expedite the return of illegal immigrants. She has a tough task ahead of digitising the entire UK visas

and immigration system, the deadline for which has been extended until March 2025. Indian students and professionals are among those impacted, even as their numbers began registering a steady decline this year with the previous government's clamp down on accompanying spouses and fatal stabbing of three schoolgirls in Southport, north-west England, at the end of July. While anti-racism activists turned out for large counterprotests, the issue of migration will continue to dominate the news agenda in the new year even as businesses struggle to meet skills requirements across

different sectors. It was against this backdrop that the BT Group, back in August, welcomed Bharti Global's acquisition of a significant stake in the British telecom major as a "great vote of confidence". Chairman Sunil Bharti Mittal

described the investment in an "iconic" British company as a "significant milestone" for Bharti Enterprises. Another Indian multinational,

Tata Steel, also hit a major milestone as it shut down its furnaces at the UK's largest steelworks in Port Talbot, Wales, to transition towards greener steel-

It came just before Tata Group icon Ratan Tata, behind setting the course for several cross-sector India-UK tie-ups, breathed his last in Mumbai on October 9. Business and Trade Secretary Jonathan Reynolds led the tributes in the ÚK to "truly a titan of the business world and someone who played a huge role in shaping British industry".

The two-way flows were reflective across different areas beyond business and trade, especially over Diwali - celebrated widely across UK government corridors.

Starmer followed in the footsteps of his Hindu predecessor to light diyas on the doorstep of Downing Street but courted controversy when meat and controversy when meat and alcohol were served during the festivity. "We understand the strength of feeling on this issue and so would apologise to the community and assure them it will not happen again," his spokesperson said.

The apology came just before Starmer met with Modi, who also raised the issue of longpending extradition requests including fugitive diamond merchant Nirav Modi, who remains behind bars at Thameside, south-east London, after another failed bail attempt in May this year.

Sanjay Bhandari, a consultant in the defence sector wanted in India on alleged tax evasion and money laundering charges, won a High Court appeal against his extradition order which is to Also expected in 2025 is King Charles III's return to Bengaluru for a wellness retreat where the 76-year-old monarch and wife Camilla made a private stopover in October on their way back from the Commonwealth Heads of Government Meeting (CHOGM) in Samoa. It came at the close of a tough

conclude in the new year

year for the royals with Charles and his daughter-in-law, Kate Middleton, revealing their cancer diagnosis earlier. However, they are both back on official duties following their treatment and looking ahead to a packed schedule in the new year. As 2024 comes to a close with both nations reaffirming their commitment to deepening trade, business, and cultural ties, 2025 holds promise for a stronger partnership and new opportunities on the global

# **Govt to infuse ₹500 Crore in IFCI** to improve its financial health

 $T^{\text{he government has decided to}}_{\text{infuse Rs 500 crore capital in}}$ state-owned IFCI to improve its financial health ahead of the company's proposed restructuring and consolidation into a group.

With the infusion, the government of India's holding in the company is expected to further increase from existing 71.72 per cent as on September 2024.

The capital infusion plan for IFCI was approved through the passage of the first Supplementary Demand for Grants for 2024-25 in Lok Sabha last

The Supplementary Demand for Grants for 2024-25 made an allocation for an additional amount of Rs 499.99 crore for 'Subscription to the Share Capital of Industrial Finance Corporation of India (IFCI). "Taking into account savings of Rs 50.07 crore available in the same section of the grant, the remaining amount of Rs 449.92 crore will be met from surrender of savings available in the capital section of Demand No.30-DEA and it will not entail any additional cash outgo," the Supplementary Demand for Grants

Earlier this year, IFCI had raised Rs 500 crore capital through the



issuance of equity shares to the government.

The Industrial Finance Corporation of India was set up by the government on July 1, 1948 as the first Development Financial Development Institution in the country.

In the second quarter ended September 2024, IFCI had booked a loss of Rs 22 crore and in the first half of FY24, a loss to the tune of Rs 170 crore.

As part of the revival and restructuring, the Department of Financial Services (DFS), Ministry of Finance, last month in-principle approved 'Consolidation of IFCI which entails of IFCI Group' merger/amalgamation StockHolding and

Corporation of India Limited and

other group companies. As per the proposal, StockHolding Corporation of India Ltd, IFCI Factors Ltd, IFCI Infrastructure Development Ltd and IIDL Realtors Ltd will merge with IFCI Ltd. Further, StockHolding Services Ltd,

IFCI Financial Services Ltd, IFIN Commodities Ltd and IFIN Credit Ltd will be merged into a single entity, which will be a direct subsidiary of the consolidated listed

Additionally, StockHolding Document Management Services Ltd, StockHolding Securities IFSC Ltd, IFIN Securities Finance Ltd, IFCI Venture Capital Funds Ltd and MPCON Ltd shall be direct subsidiaries of the consolidated listed entity that is IFCI.

Established in 1948 as a statutory corporation, IFCI currently has many subsidiaries and joint ventures and associates under its fold.

By the early 1990s, it was recognised that there was a need for greater flexibility to respond to the changing financial system. It was also felt that IFCI should directly access the capital markets for its funding needs. It is with this objective that the constitution of IFCI was changed in 1993 from a statutory corporation to a company under the Indian Companies Act, 1956.

Subsequently, the name of the company was also changed to 'IFCI Ltd' with effect from October 1999. However in 2015, the government again raised its stake in the firm to over 51 per cent, making it a public

### FPIs pull out equities worth ₹976 Crore this week amid rising dollar

After two weeks of buying, FPIs turned net sellers in Indian equities this week, with a net withdrawal of Rs 976 crore amid a strengthening US dollar and steady rise in US 10-year bond yields, impacting investor sentiment. Foreign Portfolio Investors (FPIs) began the week on a positive note, investing Rs 3,126 crore in equities during the first two trading sessions (December 16-20).

However, the trend reversed in the latter half of the week, with FPIs offloading equities worth over Rs 4,102 crore in the subsequent three sessions. This resulted in an overall net outflow of Rs 976 crore during the week, data from National Securities Depository Limited showed.

this short-term Despite reversal, the broader December trend remains positive. FPIs have infused Rs 21,789 crore into Indian equities so far this month, reflecting continued confidence in India's economic growth potential and its resilient markets.

FPIs adopted a cautious approach due to the US Fed meeting and uncertainty about

its outcome and future policy direction, said Himanshu Srivastava, Associate Director, Manager Research.

Investment

Research India. While the Fed cut interest rates by 25 bps for the third time this year, it signalled fewer rate cuts in the future, dampening investor sentiment and triggering global market sell-offs, he added.

Morningstar

Additionally, factors like high valuations, weak corporate earnings for the September quarter, expectations of subdued results for December, rising inflation, slower GDP growth, and a depreciating rupee have further weighed on investor confidence, he noted. "Rising US dollar (dollar index

above 108) and steady increase in the US 10-year bond yields to 4.5 per cent contributed to

the FPIs selling.
"India-specific issues like slowing growth concerns and flat corporate earnings in Q2 also contributed to the FPIs selling. The strength of the US economy, good corporate earnings growth, and strong dollar are factors favouring the US," VK Vijayakumar, Chief Investment Strategist, Geojit

Financial Services, said. FPI selling has brought down the prices of certain large-cap segments, such as banking, making valuations more attractive. Investors can take advantage of this market downturn to invest in quality large caps.

#### Leather exports likely to grow by over 12 per cent to USD 5.3 bn this fiscal: CLE

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

The country's leather and footwear exports are expected to grow by over 12 per cent to USD 5.3 billion in the current final tolerance of the current final tolerance. account of healthy demand in key global markets, CLE Chairman Rajendra Kumar Jalan has said.

He also said several global companies, including from the US, are showing keen interest in setting up manufacturing bases in India.

"Our exports were USD 4.69 billion in 2023-24, and this fiscal, we are expecting it to increase to USD 5.3 billion. Order books are good for the coming months," Jalan said, adding that "huge demand is coming from the US and

Indian exploring Africa as

well, he added.

He informed that the industry is labour intensive, providing employment to about 42 lakh people. The sector has a total turnover of council has urged the is a need to brand In about USD 19 billion, which includes exports of USD 5 removing export duty on wet billion.

"The sector has the potential



production of USD 25 billion and export turnover of USD 13.7 billion," Jalan said.

business extended to the sector as it rates. will help achieve the USD 47

> removing export duty on wet blue and crust from 20 per cent at present.

to reach a total turnover of "We have also requested to USD 47 billion by 2030, remove import duty on "We have also requested to

which includes the domestic finished leather," Jalan said. Talking about the sector, Kanpur-based Growmore International He also requested the government that the Yadvendra Singh Sachan said that for Indian exports, the Production-Linked US and EU markets are exporters are Incentive Scheme (PLI) be recording healthy growth

increasing scale as it will help further boost Sachan suggested that there is a need to brand Indian

leather goods in the global and domestic markets. On challenges, he said the industry has to work on adequate skilled labour and design development.

#### Front-running case: Sebi bans nine entities from market, impounds illegal gains of over ₹21 Crore

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

Markets regulator Sebi has uncovered a frontrunning scheme involving PNB MetLife India Insurance Company equity dealer Sachin Bakul Dagli and eight other entities, who generated illegal gains of Rs 21.16 crore. The front-running by these entities continued for more than three years.

Sebi, through an interim order, prohibited Sachin Bakul Dagli and eight other entities from the securities market and impounded the unlawful gains made by them. In a statement on Sunday, PNB MetLife stated that it has fully cooperated with Sebi in the investigation and taken disciplinary action against the individual involved.

"In line with our internal processes, we have taken disciplinary action. PNB MetLife is committed to upholding highest of corporate standards governance, transparency, and integrity," the statement noted.

Sebi had conducted an examination into the suspected front running of the trades undertaken by the Big Client, PNB Metlife India Insurance, by certain entities. The focus of the investigation



front-run the trades of Big Client in connivance with other entities, including dealers and/or fund and/or managers, if any, and thereby violated the provisions of the SEBI's PFUTP (Prohibition of Fraudulent and Unfair Trade Practices) rules and SEBI Act. The investigation period has been taken from January 1. 2021, to July 19, 2024. In its investigation, Ssbi found that most of the trading decisions in PNB Metlife were delegated to Sachin Dagli for execution.

The regulator, in interim passed on Friday, noted that Sachin Bakul Dagli (equity dealer, PNB MetLife) and his brother Tejas Dagli (equity sales trader, Investec)

impending trade orders of PNB MetLife and Investec's institutional clients.

They used this information to make trading decisions and shared it with Sandeep Shambharkar, who executed front-running trades through the accounts of Dhanmata Realty Pvt. (DRPL), Worthy Distributors Pvt. (WDPL)

and Pragnesh Sanghvi.
Directors of DRPL and WDPL, including Arpan Kirtikumar Shah, Kabita Saha, and Jignesh Nikulbhai Dabhi, were also involved in facilitating this scheme.

This group colluded to create and execute a fraudulent front-running scheme, violating the SEBI Act and Prohibition of Fraudulent and

Unfair Trade Practices (PFUTP) Regulations, resulting in unlawful profits. Trades were executed using non-public information shared via chat platforms. A Buy-Buy-Sell or Sell-Sell-Buy trading pattern was used to from market profit movements caused by large client trades. "Altogether, 6,766 instances of

such front-running trades were observed in the account of DRPL, WDPL and Pragnesh Sanghyi and Pragnesh Sanghvi and resultantly, unlawful gains of Rs 21,15,78,005 were made by these entities," Sebi noted. The front-running activities through the accounts of suspected entities DRPL, WDPL and Pragnesh Sanghvi have continued for a significantly long period of more than three years, it added. Accordingly, Sebi has buying selling or dealing in securities, either directly or indirectly, in any manner whatsoever until further

Additionally, "an amount of Rs 21,15,78,005 being the total unlawful gains earned from the alleged front running activities, is impounded, jointly and severally" from the nine entities, the regulator said.

#### Akasa Air expects to add few more planes this fiscal

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

kasa Air is in continuous Akasa Air is in continuous discussions with Boeing on aircraft deliveries and expects to add a few more planes to its fleet in the current fiscal ending March 2025, the airline's chief Vinay Dube has said.

The carrier, which started flying in August 2022, currently has a fleet of 26 Boeing 737 MAX planes and 200 aircraft are on order. In a recent interview to PTI,

Dube said that 2024 has been a good year for the airline and will continue to build on it in 2025. "On the service excellence we

have provided, I think consumers look at Akasa as being a kind and gentler airline, little empathetic. We will continue restrained these entities "from | to treat our travellers in a kind, gentle manner," he said and added that the airline also continues to make sure its employees feel loved and respected.

Earlier this month, some pilots flagged concerns about alleged training and safety issues, and the airline had rejected them as baseless and untrue. This year, the carrier has inducted 4 planes into its

### valued firms slumps ₹4.95 lakh Crore



PTI ■ NEW DELHI

The combined market valuation of all the top-10 most valued firms plunged Rs 4,95,061 crore last week, in line with a bearish trend in equities, equities, where Tata Consultancy Services and Reliance Industries faced the where sharpest erosion. Last week, the BSE benchmark

tanked 4,091.53 points or 4.98 per cent.

"The Indian equity market recorded its steepest weekly decline since June 2022, with the Nifty losing 4.77 per cent. The week began with the US Federal Reserve's announcement, which significantly altered market

sentiment. "Led by Chair Jerome Powell,

the Federal Reserve revised its outlook to only two rate cuts in 2025 instead of the previously anticipated four. This shift in policy dampened market confidence," Pravesh Gour, Senior Technical Analyst, Swastika Investmart Ltd, said.

The market capitalisation (mcap) of Tata Consultancy Services (TCS) slumped Rs 1,10,550.66 crore to Rs 15,08,036.97 crore. The valuation of Reliance

Industries tumbled 91,140.53 crore to 16,32,004.17 crore. HDFC Bank's

valuation eroded by 76,448.71 crore 13,54,709.35 crore and that of Bharti Airtel tanked Rs 59,055.42 crore to 59,055.42 crore to Rs 8,98,786.98 crore.
The mcap of State Bank of India plunged Rs 43,909.13 crore to Rs 7,25,125.38 crore and that of ICICI Bank diminished by Rs 41,857.33 crore to Rs 9,07,449.04 crore.

The valuation of Infosys plummeted Rs 32,300.2 crore to Rs 7,98,086.90 crore and that of Life Insurance Corporation of India (LIC) fell by Rs 20,050.25 crore to Rs 5,69,819.04 crore. Hindustan Unilever's mcap declined by Rs 12,805.27 crore to Rs 5,48,617.81 crore and that of ITC went lower by Rs 6,943.5 crore to Rs 5,81,252.32 crore. In the ranking of the top-10 firms, Reliance Industries retained the most valued firm title followed by TCS, HDFC Bank, ICICI Bank, Bharti

Airtel, Infosys, State Bank of

India, ITC, LIC and Hindustan

### Mcap of top-10 most India has potential to be key sustainable CII seeks reforms in aviation fuel producer, says IATA official

PTI GENEVA/NEW DELHI

India has the potential to be La key producer of sustainable aviation fuel by utilising its ethanol supplies and availability of lipids feedstocks like non-edible industrial oils, according to a senior official at the global airlines' grouping IATA.
With decarbonisation in

focus, efforts are being made to reduce emissions and over the years, Indian carriers have operated some flights with a blend of Sustainable Aviation Fuel (SAF) and traditional Aviation Turbine Fuel (ATF). Hemant Mistry, Director of Net Zero Transition at the International Air Transport Association (IATA), said the ecosystem for SAF has developed but there is more

work to be done. "There are some very good opportunities for India right now. One is in terms of SAF feedstocks like agricultural waste... There is a growing understanding on what to do for SAF production. We are talking to a number of companies to understand how we can collaborate... Oil companies," Mistry told PTI in a recent interview in

Geneva. International Transport Association (IATA) represents around 340 airlines, including Indian carriers, that account for more



than 80 per cent of the global air traffic

"India, the third largest producer ethanol consumer today, has the potential to emerge as a key SAF producer utilising its existing and advanced ethanol supplies.

"At IATA, we see sustainable, low-carbon-intensity ethanol as a promising feedstock to propel India's aviation sector growth," Mistry said.

This year, global SAF production is estimated at 1

million tonnes (1.3 billion litres), lower than the earlier projection of 1.5 million tonnes (1.9 billion litres) but higher than the volume of 0.5 million tonnes (600 million litres) recorded in 2023, according to IATA.

As the aviation sector pursues efforts ambitious decarbonisation, IATA has

said SAF production growth is disappointingly slow.
While noting that India is

poised to emerge as the world's third largest aviation market, Mistry said there is also the opportunity for the country to emerge as a SAF hub in the region.

"The position can be further strengthened by the early adoption of innovative global accounting practices where India's SAF supplies can cater to the global priction provides." to the global aviation market, a true mark of act local, think global," he noted.

India is one of the world' fastest growing civil aviation markets and airlines are expanding their fleets as well as networks to cater to the rising traffic demand.

On mandating use of SAF, Mistry pointed out that the

mandate is a work for scale

but that can only come later.

"You can't have a mandate without technology maturity. That is a big risk."
In 2025, IATA expects SAF

production to touch 2.1 million tonnes (2.7 billion

India has the availability of lipids feedstocks like nonedible industrial oils, animal fats and tallows where the supply chains are not well developed with limited supply for biodiesel production, Mistry said.

The country's surplus annual biomass availability estimated to be more than 200

With multiple options available for road fleets, lipidsbased feedstock must be used for India's SAF value chains. These oily feedstocks can be utilised at existing refineries by ASTM-qualified HEFA coprocessing pathways, Mistry said. Consultancy Deloitte, in a report in October this year, said India has the potential to produce 8-10 million tonnes of Sustainable Aviation Fuel (SAF) by 2040, and investments worth USD 70-85 billion will be required to achieve the projected production.

On the priorities under the SAF umbrella, Mistry said it is a question about more support to get the technologies to maturity and enable some sort of market development.

### India's priority sector lending framework

PTI NEW DELHI

Industry body CII has prioposed reforms in India's Priority Sector Lending (PSL) framework, suggesting framework, suggesting inclusion of emerging sectors and high-impact sectors like digital infrastructure, green initiatives, healthcare, and innovative manufacturing.

Arguing that current
Development Finance
Institutions (DFIs) like SIDBI
and NaBFID (National Bank for Financing Infrastructure and Development) have their roles cut out as they have earmarked sectors to finance, the chamber also suggested setting up of a high level committee to look at the revision of PSL norms and explore the need for any new DFIs to cater to some of the new and emerging sectors. Priority Sector Lending is a

policy tool aimed at ensuring that key sectors crucial to the nation's development receive adequate financial support. Mandated by the Reserve Bank of India (RBI), PSL obligates banks to allocate a specified proportion of their loans to sectors such as agriculture, education, and housing, small

industries. The framework ensures equitable credit distribution,

contributing to the sociogrowth economic underserved areas.

Despite its massive success, the PSL framework requires regular recalibration to remain relevant. This recalibration is essential to ensure that the financial resources are optimally distributed, in harmony with our vision of Viksit Bharat 2047, CII stated.

For instance, agriculture contributes 14 per cent of the GDP today, its PSL allocation remains at 18 per cent, unchanged from when its GDP share exceeded 30

per cent. Similarly, sectors like infrastructure and innovative manufacturing lack adequate PSL focus despite their potential to drive economic growth, the chamber pointed

Chandrajit Banerjee "Sectors like remarked. agriculture have reduced contribution to GDP from 30 per cent in 1990s to about 14 per cent now.

Hence, it is time that Priority Sector Lending (PSL) framework be reviewed every 3-4 years to align based on emerging priorities and PSL allocations should be in line with GDP contributions and sectoral growth potential.

# the pioneer

Mindful snacking can keep you satisfied, nourish your body, and help you avoid unhealthy choices if you embrace nutritious options like pecans to indulge wisely and guilt-free, writes KAVITA DEVGAN

SMART SNACKING FOR THE CHILLS

inter is here, and so is the temptation to indulge in comforting treats! With the chilly weather encouraging cosy evenings and festive gatherings, snacking often takes center stage. But mindless munching, especially on unhealthy snacks, can derail your health and lead to unwanted weight gain. Instead of avoiding snacks altogether, the key is to snack smart and make choices that nourish your body while satisfying your cravings.

#### WHY SMART SNACKING MATTERS

Snacking isn't inherently bad—it's what and how you snack that matters. Smart snacking can fill nutritional gaps, keep hunger in check, and even prevent overeating during main meals. On the other hand, poor choices, like fried or sugary snacks, can add empty

other hand, poor choices, like fried or sugary snacks, can add empty calories, lead to guilt, and make staying healthy during the season difficult.



PLAN YOUR SNACKS:
Snacks aren't extras—they should be part of your daily meal plan. Choose nutrient-rich options that complement your meals. A great addition to your winter snack list is American pecans. Packed with over 19 vitamins and minerals, they're now easily available in India and are a nutritious, satisfying option.

MIND PORTION SIZES:

MIND PORTION SIZES: Snacking isn't feasting. A proper snack should be small but fulfilling. For instance, 30 grams of pecans (about 19 halves) offer 200 calories, 3 grams of protein, and fibre to keep you

SATISFY YOUR CRAVINGS THOUGHTFULLY: Identify what you're craving—crunchy, salty, or



sweet—and choose a healthier alternative. If you love crunchy snacks, roasted pecans are an excellent choice. They retain their nutritional profile and are rich in antioxidants, even after roasting.

SNACK TO CURB HUNGER, NOT BOREDOM: Snack mindfully when you're hungry, not out of habit or boredom. Avoid overindulging and balance high-calorie snacks with



lighter choices during other meals. A handful of pecans paired with fresh fruits can be a delicious and balanced winter snack.

BE PREPARED: Keep healthy snacks handy—store nuts in your bag, desk drawer, or even your car. Pecans are a fantastic non-perishable option for when hunger strikes unexpectedly. This way, you'll avoid grabbing unhealthy, convenient options.

#### SNACKING IN STYLE DURING FESTIVITIES

☐ Roasted pecans can be your go-to snack for cosy evenings. They're also perfect for hosting guests during winter celebrations.

□ Looking for gifting ideas? Ditch traditional sweets and consider gifting American pecans. They're healthy, innovative, and sure to be appreciated by health-conscious friends and family.

#### SIMPLE WAYS TO ROAST

PECANS BASIC ROAST

☐ Spread pecans evenly on a baking sheet.

□ Bake at 180°C for 7–10 minutes, stirring occasionally for even roasting. SPICED ROAST

☐ Toss pecans with a mix of olive oil, paprika, and a pinch of salt.☐ Roast at 180°C for 10 minutes for a

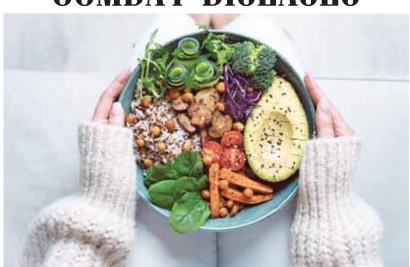
Roast at 180°C for 10 minutes for a flavourful twist.
This winter, embrace mindful snacking

by making smart choices like pecans.

— The author is a nutritionist and has taken inputs from American Pecan



# HOLISTIC APPROACH TO COMBAT DISEASES



#### By **DR Shifalika Goenka**

hronic diseases like diabetes, high blood pressure, heart attacks, strokes, and obesity are rapidly rising in India. The good news is that more than half of these conditions are preventable through actions taken through multi-sectoral policy action, simplified generic drug policies, community action, and empowered individuals.

The most potent ammunition to protect from chronic diseases is a healthy lifestyle. A healthy lifestyle consists of a diet rich in locally available and inexpensive fruits and vegetables, whole grains, pulses, nuts, and seeds, with extreme moderation in salt and sugar, refined foods, and sugar-sweetened beverages. Additional steps include avoiding tobacco and alcohol. Exercise produces endorphins and is addictive. Leisure and physical activity should be part of everyone's life. All these require an empowered community, an enlightened individual, and an energetic polity.





### ASPECTS OF THE ECOSYSTEMS THAT NEED TO BE PART OF THE GRID

Social norms and policies must achieve the following for a health-promoting eco-system.

Healthy Eating: Healthy foods such as fruits and vegetables in their raw forms (and cooked), cheap, nuts, seeds, pulses, whole grains, and healthy oils must be made safer, cheaper, and more readily available, accessible, and affordable across access points such as public transport, at the workplace, and in educational institutes.

Controlling portion sizes is critical. Large portions of unhealthy foods and beverages, especially at discounts, have been proven to push people to eat more. Large servings, large plates, supersized meals, and bottomless drinks must be de-incentivised, and smaller portions must be incentivised. Children must be protected from unhealthy foods and beverage advertising onslaught. Also, targeting children by extolling children to persuade them into unhealthy behaviours, food, and beverages should not be allowed.

Eliminating trans fats and tobacco and decreasing artificial sugar and refined foods are universal goals from a scientific perspective.

The unorganised sector dominates the Indian food market and is price-sensitive. Lower taxes on healthy oils, higher taxes on unhealthy oils, and cheaper fresh fruits and vegetables will boost healthy food production and consumption.

Health Promoting Town Planning Critical to Healthier Communities

Scientific research shows that providing wide sidewalks, large parks, and green forests within a 0.5 km radius of every household improves health in many ways, including preventing more than 50 chronic diseases and improving mental health for the residents and families staying in the vicinity. Trees also act as natural filters, reducing air pollution and creating a healthier environment.

A study published in JACC Advances has shown that living in high-traffic, congested localities alongside highways increases the local population's blood pressure and chronic diseases. High air pollution is a public health crisis. Preventing air pollution should be a top priority across all ministries, as well as housing and development. High air pollution can shorten life- spans by 1.7 years and increase chronic diseases like diabetes, high blood pressure, lung diseases, and asthma, among those exposed to high levels of air pollution.

The holistic way to address the challenge of chronic diseases is to create a grid environment conducive to healthy eating and healthy living through multiple sectors. This leads to a healthy country, systems, societies, and happy people.

sectors. This leads to a healthy country, systems, societies, and happy people.

— The author is the Deputy Director & Head, Health Promotion, Physical Activity & Obesity Prevention, Centre for

Chronic Disease Control (CCDC)

### SOLUTION TO POLLUTION



#### By **Arun Duggal**

elhi once again finds itself enveloped in a thick blanket of smog with AQI touching an AQI of 349 or 'very poor' category and hapless Delhites are turning to humorous memes for solace. One popular tweet went like this: "Time to give Delhi new namesi: Pollutyens Delhi, Haze Khas, Dhua Kuan and Chandni Choke."

Apart from the stress busting mirth, citizens of the Capital are hostage to an annualised feature when air pollution swerves between 'very poor to severe' levels as the winter sets in, leading to permanent health issues. Delhi has the unfortunate distinction of being the world's worst polluted capital city. The air is unbreathable, thanks to fully dispersed harmful pollutants – around 40% which comes from vehicular emissions. One survey pegs the financial losses to the Delhi NCR at a very conservative Rs 100 crore/day due to poor air quality.

#### BEEN THERE, DONE THAT

To be fair, the state government has tried its best. In 2001, it moved public transport to CNG as fuel, levied charges on commercial ICE vehicles, banned 10-year-old diesel and 15-year-old petrol vehicles and introduced the oddeven car numbers initiative The Delhi EV Policy was framed to encourage greater use of public transport and a viable supply-chain ecosystem through a combination of fiscal and non-fiscal incentives.

Initiatives like "Switch Delhi," unveiled in early 2021 to create mass awareness and the ongoing 'Red Light On, Gaadi Off' campaign are well intended. Yet, Delhiites continue to bear the brunt of pollution emanating from within and from nearby states.

#### DELHI STRUGGLES TO MEET EV TARGETS

Despite a target of 25% EVs in new vehicle registrations by 2023-24, Delhi could manage around 12% in the fiscal. While higher than other states, it's a poor record given the pollution levels. Even after compulsory scrapping of old diesel and petrol vehicles in 2021, the city still has 472 vehicles per 1,000 people. Between 2012- 2024, the share of personal vehicles registered was around 92%, but EV 4-wheelers, with just 3% share, have struggled to take off.

Regulatory action and financial incentives are inducing some growth in commercial EV segments, but this has to be accompanied by a parallel or superlative growth in personal EVs, to address the pollution crisis.

#### LOOK EAST, LOOK WEST New Delhi can take a few cues from

Norway and Nepal - countries that have notched up amazing results in pollution reduction and long-term environmental benefits with their commitments to EV adoption. Norway, a country with a population of 5.5 million and an oil and gas producer, has achieved a 35% reduction in C02 emissions since 2012, improving both air quality and public health. Oslo has the highest per capita number of EVs in the world due to a strict adoption target, generous tax rebates and strategic incentivisation of EV users. With EVs accounting for over 90% of its new car registrations, the world will have to scale up the EV adoption roughly as fast as Norway, if it must meet any net zero targets.

Closer home, EVs account for 50% of Nepal's overall vehicle sales (as of FY24) thanks to sustained incentives and low taxes amid a nationwide urgency to cut down energy imports. With nearly all its energy coming from renewable river-fed

hydroelectricity, Nepal is focusing on infrastructure development to support EV ownership.

#### REAL SOLUTION TO POLLUTION KEPT AT BAY

With the fast-growing economy creating higher disposable income for its huge middle-class, each passing year, the desire for personal mobility will always be on the rise. One perpetual casualty will be air quality. A Central Pollution Control Board (CPCB) study in Delhi, Kanpur, Bengaluru, Pune, Chennai, and Mumbai categorically concludes that the transport sector will continue to emit most of the Nox, and around 50% of PM2.5 emissions in these cities, if we keep away from greener transportation.

Studies show that subsidies are not a magic bullet unless the switch to EV is made too good to ignore for a customer. Starting with attractive subsidies, customers can be lured by parking benefits, besides manufacturer-offered incentives for upgrades. Most importantly, a modern EV policy with a strong commitment to achieving targets from all authorities would comfort buyers in areas like charging infrastructure. Since many are not fully aware of the need to switch to EVs, regular campaigns must be undertaken. Big cities may pollute more, but smaller and emerging ones are not far behind; every year new towns in Tier 2 and Tier 3 India are making to the WHO's mostpolluted cities list. Unless there's collective will to fast-track EV adoption, Delhi's air pollution will always get tossed around in inter-state bickering and internal political rivalries with fewer

 The author is the founder of Centre of Excellence for Research in Climate Change and Air Pollution, IIT Delhi

### Rohit should change his tactics, be more attacking batting at No. 6: Shastri

**PTI** MELBOURNE

7ith skipper Rohit Sharma struggling to decipher a way to score runs in the Border-Gavaskar Trophy, former India coach Ravi Shastri says the stylish batter should go in with a clear mindset, change his tactics, and attack the bowlers.

Rohit missed the opening Test Down Under to be with his family for the birth of his second child. He was expected to reclaim the opener's spot but KL Rahul's impressive 77 in India's win at Perth prompted a rejig of the batting order with Rohit moving down to No.6.

The change though has not been fruitful for Rohit as he has managed 10, 3 and 6 runs in the last three innings, while Rahul has encashed on the opportunity by notching up a fine 84 in the first innings at Brisbane in the third

"I would like to see Rohit Sharma, his tactics change a bit because he can still be extremely dangerous at that number (six)," Shastri opined on ICC Review.

"I think he's got to be very clear in his mindset to go out there and take the attack to the opposition and not worry about anything else," the cricketer-turned-commentator added.

Shastri felt Rohit should shun the defensive mindset.

"The last thing you want is him to be in two minds whether to defend or attack. In his case, it should be attack. He picks up length quickly, he should take the opposition on at that number.

"Because if he gets away in the first 10-15 minutes, in any way, he's not got past that 15-20 minutes, half an hour. So why don't you play a natural game, go and take the attack to the opposition and take it from there?"

Shastri felt it's the best way for



Rohit to get back into form and win games for India, adding that the best No.6 batters in the world are those who have the ability to counter-attack.

"I think that is his best way of not just coming back into form, winning a game for India as well. Because that number is a crucial number."

"The best No.6s in the world are the guys who know how to have the ability to counter-attack. They read the situation well. Yes, if a lot of wickets have fallen, maybe for a little while. You might have to be circumspect, but the intent has to be far sooner than later.

"Especially when you have that kind of ability and especially when you open the batting for India and you have all the shots for Australian conditions."

Rohit had made his Test debut in 2013 at No. 6 position, marking the occasion with a century. Shastri backed Rahul to retain the

opener's slot in the fourth Test following his two half-centuries so far in the five-Test series.

"I would have asked him (Rohit) to open in the last Test match (Brisbane) but then the way Rahul has batted, he was a joy to watch and the way he's batting, I believe he struck a purple patch," Shastri said.

"It could be a position he might just want to keep and enhance the way he's playing because his technique was faultless," said Shastri.

The former India captain said Rahul was currently at the top of his game and his confidence level too was very high.
"The way he left the ball, the way

he allowed the ball to come onto the bat, some of his cover drives were as good as any played by anyone in world cricket at the moment. And so I think when there's that much confidence there, you know, let it be."



#### Wasn't looking to save the follow-on that day in Brisbane: Akash Deep

**PTI** ■ MELBOURNE

blushes during the Brisbane Test with a resolute 10th wicket partnership but the rookie pacer on Sunday said his focus was on wholesome contribution to the team teams." rather than looking to "merely save the follow-on." With the Indian batters, barring KL Rahul and Ravindra Jadeja, failing once again, the obstinate 47-run partnership between Bumrah and Akash took between India past the follow-on mark during the Gabba Test, which ended in a draw.

We come to bat lower the order, so contributions of foreign soil for the first time, 20-25-30 runs are very valuable. My mindset is just to contribute. I wasn't looking to save the follow-on in Australia. Jassi bhai keeps that day; I was just looking on telling us things about not to get out. My mindset how we can go about our job; was this, God willing, we it makes our job easy." were able to save the followon," Akash told reporters here.

smashed Akash Cummins for a four to avoid the follow-on as the Indian dressing room broke into celebrations on day four.

When you save the match from such a situation, the entire team gets the confidence and our dressing room reflected just that. Everyone was having fun

and enjoying."
Salvaging a draw after being on the brink of losing in Brisbane, the Indian team is now filled with confidence,

"If you look at it, it's 50-50, even though we were behind Akash Deep and Jasprit in the last match. But the confidence we built on the last day, we still have that confidence. So, I can say it's 50-50, and this Test match (Melbourne) is very important for both the

> Akash did not feature in the playing XI for the first two Tests against Australia but made his way into the team for the third Test.

> The 28-year-old gave a good account himself, and was unlucky to miss out on the wicket of veteran batter Steve Smith, whom he troubled no end.

> The p revealed tips from Bumrah helped him. This is my first time playing

"He told me one thing,

'Don't get too excited. Just focus on your discipline. How you go about your job in Indian conditions, repeat that here.' He told me just this."

Short-pitched balls against Head: Akash

Travis Head continues to be a thorn in India's flesh. After being dismissed for 11 in his first innings of the series, he has gone on to score 89, 140 and 152 in his next three outings.

Obviously, he did not detail the plans, but hinted at a bouncer strategy against the

### Joe Root returns to England's ODI squad for India tour, Champions Trophy

PTI ■ LONDON

Veteran batter Joe Root's return to 50-over format after more than a year headlined England's squad announcement for the ODI tour to India and the ICC Champions Trophy. Root's previous assignment

in the format was the 50-over World Cup held in India in

All-rounder and Test skipper Ben Stokes was not considered for selection as he has been recovering from a has been recovering from a left hamstring injury sustained during the third Test against New Zealand earlier this month.

Seasoned batter Jos Buttler will lead the side, and the Lancashire man will also captain England in the T20I series against India, which precedes the ODIs.

England will play five T20Is and three ODIs during the



white ball tour to India. Leg-spinner Rehan Ahmed, who made his Test debut against India earlier this year, was included in the T20I

In-form Harry Brook will get another chance to play international bilateral cricket in India after pulling out of the Test series earlier this year due to personal reasons.

England ODI squad: Jos Buttler (Captain), Jofra Archer, Gus Atkinson, Jacob Bethell, Harry Brook, Brydon Carse, Ben Duckett, Jamie Overton, Jamie Smith, Liam Livingstone, Adil Rashid, Joe Root, Saqib Mahmood, Phil Salt, Mark

Wood. England T20I squad: Jos Buttler (Captain), Rehan

Ahmed, Jofra Archer, Gus Atkinson, Jacob Bethell, Harry Brook, Brydon Carse, Ben Duckett, Jamie Overton, Smith, Iamie Livingstone, Adil Rashid, Saqib Mahmood, Phil Salt, Mark Wood.

India vs England Schedule: T20I: 1st T20I: January 22, Eden Gardens, Kolkata. 2nd T20I: January 25, MA Chidambaram Chennai.

3rd T20I: January 28, Niranjan Shah Stadium, Raikot.

4th T20I: January 31, MCA Stadium, Pune. 5th T20I: February 2,

Wankhede Stadium, Mumbai ODIs: 1st ODI: February 6, VCA

Stadium, Nagpur. 2nd ODI: February Barabati Stadium, Cuttack. 3rd ODI: February 12, Narendra Modi Stadium,

hasises that it will never

Grêmio said on X it was

supporting its players, who

"We regret what happened

condemn

discriminatory acts," the team

Grêmio coach Thaissan Passos said her players told

her River Plate players had

previously called them

would file a police report.

tolerate such incidents."

said in the statement.

# stuns Barcelona

**AP** ■ MADRID

Atletico Madrid coach Diego Simeone ran down the touchline in joy while Barcelona players sunk to the turf in dismay.

Super sub Alexander Sørloth struck again deep in stoppage time to hand Atletico a 2-1 comeback win at Barcelona and ensure Atletico will spend La Liga's short winter

break on top of the table. Atletico's 12th straight win in all competitions lifted it three points above Barcelona. Barcelona has only two wins

in its last nine games and could find itself third on Sunday if Real Madrid beats Sevilla.

Simeone, coaching Atletico since 2011, celebrated winning at Barcelona for the first time.

"We finally did it," Atletico goalkeeper Jan Oblak said. "We are playing well, we started poorly but we knew our chances would come. And in the last minute Sørloth came through. Thanks to him we finally won here. He is the striker we needed."

It was a much more impressive performance from Barcelona, which dominated for long periods and took a deserved lead in the 30th minute.

Pedri started and ended the move, playing a one-two with Gavi, and firing an angled shot into the bottom right corner.

Raphinha almost doubled Barcelona's lead in stunning lobbed the goalkeeper but the ball came off the crossbar. Robert Lewandowski got to the rebound but sent it onto the head of Axel Witsel, who needed treatment.

fashion in the 57th when he

Barcelona was made to rue its missed opportunities when Atletico levelled just three minutes later, partly thanks to a defensive blunder.

Barcelona midfielder Marc Casadó tried to clear Julián Álvarez's cross but passed it straight to Rodrigo De Paul, who fired into the bottom right corner. Casadó put his hands to his head and dropped to his knees in

Worse was to come for Barcelona as, in the sixth minute of stoppage time, Nahuel Molina made a fantastic run to latch onto a through ball and cross in for Sørloth to fire into the back of the net. It was Sørloth's eighth goal of

the season, five of them after he's come off the bench. BILBAO'S UNBEATEN RUN Athletic Bilbao came from behind to beat Osasuna 2-1 and extend its unbeaten run to 14 matches and remain just five points behind Atletico. Gorka Guruzeta and Alex Berenguer sealed the comeback win for fourthplaced Bilbao after Lucas Torro gave Osasuna a 25thminute lead at El Sadar.

Guruzeta headed Bilbao level in the 31st and Berenguer struck the winner in the 74th. Mallorca won at Getafe 1-0 and moved up to fifth.

#### Women's players arrested over racist incident in Brazil soccer semifinal 'The organisation reaffirms **AP** ■ SAO PAULO its anti-racist stance and

Pour River Plate women's  $\Gamma$  players were arrested by Sao Paulo police and accused of making a racial slur, Sao Paulo's public security secretariat told The Associated Press.

On Friday, a Brazil Ladies Cup soccer semifinal between Argentina's River Plate and Brazilian team Grêmio was stopped in the first half after River Plate's Candela Díaz was accused of making monkey gestures to a ball boy, according to broadcast footage and local media

reports. Díaz was detained along with teammates Juana Cangaro, Milagros Naiquen Diaz, and Camila Ayelen Duarte, the players' lawyer, Thais Sankari, told The AP. They remained in custody on Saturday. Sankari said the River Plate

players reacted only after being provoked. "We see in this decision a



great arbitrariness and the Brazilian judiciary's desire to send a message. They used this case for that purpose," she said.

After Díaz's gestures on Friday, the Grêmio players walked off in protest. The referee showed red cards to six River Plate players following an on-field fight and ended the match because there was no longer the minimum number of players required to continue. The score was 1-1 but the

referee awarded the match to Grêmio, which will play in the tournament final on Sunday.

The Brazil Ladies Cup banned River Plate from the tournament for two years on Saturday.

Tournament organizers said in a statement on Saturday that future editions will immediately ban any participating team whose athletes or staff "engage in racist gestures on the playing

monkevs. "Incidents like this cannot keep happening. How long will we keep pretending racism doesn't exist?" she told

and

local broadcaster SporTV. Díaz has not commented publicly. River Plate also condemned

the discriminatory gestures. The club said in a statement on X it was "taking the disciplinary appropriate measures and will continue working to eradicate such

### Manchester City crisis deepens after lossing to Aston Villa 2-1 in the Premier League

**AP** MANCHESTER

 $M_{
m slump}$  anchester City's stunning slump deepened after losing to Aston Villa 2-1 in the Premier League. Goals from Jhon Duran and

Morgan Rogers at Villa Park consigned the four-time my principles and give defending champion to a certainty to the team." ninth defeat in 12 games in a season that is unravelling. Pep After winning six titles in Guardiola's team has won just once during that run.

'We don't have a defense for the results. They are not good," Guardiola said. Third-placed Arsenal closed

the gap on league leader Liverpool to three points with around. a 5-1 win at Crystal Palace, but has played two games more. City dropped to sixth in the

Liverpool, and has played two games more. It's about what I can do with

my people to get the results back and continue," Guardiola said. "If there is a moment that I cannot overthink, it is right now. Try to be simple, stick to TITLE HOPES FADING

years and an seven unprecedented four in a row, City's remarkable fall shows little sign of stopping. Guardiola admitted last week he had not been good enough

City was without a win in any of its last eight away games in all competitions. While it

straight title, a place in the top four and Champions League qualification could also be in jeopardy after fourth-placed Nottingham Forest won at Brentford 2-0 to move four points clear of City. Only once under Guardiola

has City managed to win the title when losing six times in the league. That was in 2021, when it lost two of its last three games, having already been confirmed as the champion. City lost nine times when Liverpool won the title in 2020, but its sixth defeat didn't until February. come Guardiola also lost six times in his first season in English soccer in 2016-17 and City finished third.

The latest defeat could have standings, nine points below looks unlikely to win a fifth been even more emphatic minute from Rogers' assist.



from a dominant Villa, which moved up to fifth. Duran scored his sixth goal in as many starts in the 16th

Duran had a goal disallowed for offside in the second half and Rogers hit the post before doubling Villa's lead in the Phil Foden pulled a goal back for City in stoppage time, but it wasn't enough to spark a late comeback.

'We have to stay positive, even

though it's difficult, and we have to keep working hard," City striker Erling Haaland JESUS STREAK

It's five goals in a week for Gabriel Jesus against Crystal Palace.

After scoring a hat trick in Arsenal's 3-2 comeback win against Palace in the English League Cup quarterfinals on Wednesday, the Brazil striker hit another two goals when the teams met again on Saturday.

Going into Wednesday's game, Jesus had only scored once for Arsenal since the end of January.

Jesus struck twice in a frantic start at Selhurst Park. He opened the scoring in the sixth, with Ismaila Sarr leveling five minutes later. Jesus restored Arsenal's lead n the 14th and was denied backto-back hat tricks when hitting the post and then having another close range effort saved by Palace goalkeeper Dean Henderson. Kai Havertz, Gabriel Martinelli and Declan Rice

also scored for Arsenal. FOREST FLYING HIGH If City's demise is a surprise

story of the season, so is Forest's rise.

After battling relegation for much of last term, Forest is in contention to qualify for the Champions League and possibly more.

Facing a Brentford team that was unbeaten at home, goals from Ola Aina and Anthony Elanga secured another statement win on the road for Nuno Espirito Santo's side, having already won at Anfield and Old Trafford this year. ISAK TREBLE

Alexander Isak hit a hat trick in Newcastle's 4-0 win at Ipswich.

The Sweden international, who has 10 goals in his last 11 games, wrapped up his treble inside 54 minutes at Portman Road, including one in the opening minute. Murphy also scored.

Brighton was 1-0 up at West Ham through Mats Wieffer, Mohammed Kudus but levelled for the draw.

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