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MONEY 10
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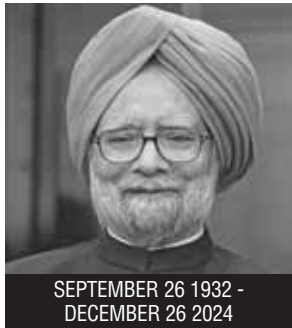
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ARCHITECT OF INDIAN ECONOMY PASSES AWAY

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

Former Prime Minister Manmohan Singh, the architect of India's economic reforms, died on Thursday night. He was 92. Singh's death was announced by the All India Institute of Medical Sciences (AIIMS), Delhi, where he was admitted in the Emergency ward around 8.30 PM in a critical condition. An AIIMS bulletin said "he was treated for age related medical conditions and had sudden loss of consciousness at home" on December 26. "Resuscitative measures were started immediately at home. He was brought to the medical emergency at AIIMS Delhi at 8.06 pm. Despite all efforts, he could not be revived and was declared dead at 9.51 pm," said the bulletin. Singh, who was PM for two terms in the Congress-led United Progressive Alliance (UPA) Government from 2004 to 2014, had been in poor health for the last few



SEPTEMBER 26 1932 - DECEMBER 26 2024

months. He is survived by wife Gurcharan Singh and three daughters. Congress leader Priyanka Gandhi Vadra and her mother Sonia Gandhi reached the hospital as soon as the news of his hospitalisation became known. Singh, who was Finance Minister under the then PM PV Narasimha Rao, was the architect and the brainchild of economic reforms in 1991 that pulled India from the brink of bankruptcy and ushered in an era of economic liberalisation that is widely believed to have changed the course of India's economic



trajectory. Singh died as the Congress party concluded its Congress Working Committee meeting at Belagavi in Karnataka, where all top party leaders were present. Party chief Mallikarjun Kharge and Rahul Gandhi rushed to Delhi from Belagavi followed by several top party leaders and workers from across the country. A galaxy of leaders across the political party lines condoled the death of Singh with Prime Minister Narendra Modi remarking "We had extensive deliberations on various subjects relating to

governance; his wisdom, humility were always visible". "With the passing of former PM Manmohan Singh, India has lost a visionary statesman, a leader of unimpeachable integrity," said Mallikarjun Kharge. "Manmohan Singh's policy of economic liberalisation and rights-based welfare paradigm profoundly transformed lives of crores," Kharge added before leaving the CWC meet at Belagavi. "Few people in politics inspire the kind of respect that Sardar Manmohan Singh did. Manmohan Singh's honesty will always be an inspiration

for us. He remained steadfast in commitment to serve the nation despite being subjected to unfair, deeply personal attacks," Priyanka Gandhi said as her husband Robert Vadra was the first to announce on social media the demise of Dr Singh. Rahul Gandhi in his remarks said he lost a mentor and guide as millions like him admired Dr Singh who will be remembered with the utmost pride. "Manmohan Singh led India with immense wisdom and integrity. His humility and deep understanding of economics inspired the nation. My

heartfelt condolences to Mrs. Kaur and the family," Rahul Gandhi said. Here is the timeline of his five-decade old career in bureaucracy and politics. 1954: Completed Master's in Economics from Panjab University 1957: Economic Tripos (3-year degree prog) from Cambridge University 1962: D.Phil in Economics from Oxford University 1971: Joins Government of India as Economic Advisor in Commerce Ministry 1972: Appointed Chief Economic Advisor in Finance Ministry 1980-82: Member, Planning Commission

1982-1985: Governor of the Reserve Bank of India 1985-87: Served as Deputy Chairman of Planning Commission 1987-90: Secretary General of South Commission in Geneva 1990: Appointed Advisor to Prime Minister on Economic Affairs March 1991: Appointed chairman of University Grants Commission 1991: Elected to Rajya Sabha from Assam, and re-elected in 1995, 2001, 2007 and 2013 1991-96: Finance Minister under P V Narasimha Rao government 1998-2004: Leader of the Opposition in Rajya Sabha 2004-2014:

Prime Minister of India. President Draupadi Murmu led the nation to condole the demise of former PM. "Former Prime Minister Dr Manmohan Singh Ji was one of those rare politicians who also straddled the worlds of academia and administration with equal ease. In his various roles in public offices, he made critical contributions to reforming Indian economy. He will always be remembered for his service to the nation, his unblemished political life and his utmost humility. His passing is a great loss to all of us. I pay my respectful homage to one of the greatest sons of Bharat and convey my heartfelt condolences to his family, friends and admirers," Murmu said in a statement. As a correspondent this reporter was fortunate to have covered Dr Manmohan's last Press conference as PM when he announced to hang his boots from active politics on January 3, 2014 and from where he remarked that history will be kind to him than the contemporary India.

Congress and AAP cloud over INDIA Bloc

RAJESH KUMAR ■ NEW DELHI

In a development that could be a major setback to the India Bloc as the growing rift between the Congress and the Aam Aadmi Party (AAP) has escalated into open hostility thereby putting the alliance on shaky grounds. The AAP on Thursday threatened that it would talk to other parties of the INDIA Bloc to remove the Congress from the alliance, if it didn't take action against Delhi Congress leader Ajay Maken for making derogatory remarks against party's



supremo Arvind Kejriwal, calling him an 'anti national'. The AAP leaders now demanded that the Congress take disciplinary action against Maken and other party leaders



within 24 hours. Slamming Congress for having crossed all boundaries, Rajya Sabha MP Sanjay Singh accompanied by Chief Minister Atishi warned that the AAP has given an ultimatum to its leadership to take immediate action against Maken within 24 hours, failing which AAP will be forced to demand Congress's expulsion from the INDIA Bloc. "We will ask the other parties

in the alliance to remove the Congress," Singh said. He further alleged that the Congress's Delhi unit is working with the BJP to ensure AAP's defeat in the Delhi polls due early next year. Atishi accused the Congress's candidates' list is being prepared by the BJP, and their funding is also being provided by them. This comes amidst rising tensions and accusations from both sides, further weakening the opposition bloc. The reason for the AAP's grouse is the Congress' FIR against Kejriwal on charges of fraud and forgery, accusing him of "misleading and deceiving" the public with promises of non-existent welfare schemes and derogatory remarks by senior Congress leaders Ajay Maken and Sandeep Dikshit on party's national convener. The tension escalated during the Winter session of Parliament when murmurs arose about changing the leadership of the INDIA Bloc, with some including Rashtriya Janata Dal (RJD) chief Lalu Prasad suggesting Mamata Banerjee to take over. The INDIA Bloc, comprising parties like the Samajwadi Party, Trinamool Congress (TMC), RJD, Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam (DMK), Shiv Sena (UBT), and AAP, face a crucial test of unity. The AAP's decision to hold talks with its allies could deepen the ongoing crisis. Singh accused Maken, and Dikshit of targeting AAP instead of focusing on the BJP. Singh slammed Maken for allegedly calling Kejriwal "anti-national" and urged Congress to take action against him within 24 hours. "At this point, all limits have been crossed. Filing an FIR, calling someone

EC makes world's largest electoral dataset public

RAJESH KUMAR ■ NEW DELHI

The Election Commission (EC) on Thursday released the world's largest electoral dataset for 2024 Lok Sabha and four State Assembly polls held this year. The move was aimed at enhancing "public trust" in the country's electoral system at a time when the opposition has been raising doubts over its credibility after it changed its rules to restrict public access to CCTV footage of polling booths and

other poll documents. Sources in the election watchdog said since the One Nation One Election (ONOE) has been tabled in the Parliament and a Joint Parliamentary Committee (JPC) is monitoring it, this data will help the stakeholders to tread the path of ambitious simultaneous polls in the country. The EC officials asserted that such granular data is not shared by any of the election management bodies in

democracies across the world. "This suo motu initiative is to enhance the public trust that constitutes the underpinning of India's electoral system," the EC said. In its 40 statistical reports related to Lok Sabha 2024 polls, released by the poll body on Thursday showed that the six national parties bagged over 63 per cent share of the total valid votes polled in the Lok Sabha elections held this year. The Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP), Congress,

Bahujan Samaj Party (BSP), Communist Party of India (Marxist) [CPI(M)], Aam Aadmi Party (AAP) and National People's Party (NPP) are the six national parties. Six recognised National parties, 47 State parties and 690 registered, unrecognised political parties contested the Parliamentary polls. Besides, 3,905 independent candidates forfeited the deposits. Out of the 3,921 independent candidates, 279

Continued on page 8

Kejriwal may lose NDMC membership

SAUMYA SHUKLA ■ NEW DELHI

The New Delhi Municipal Council (NDMC) on Wednesday passed a resolution condemning former Chief Minister and Aam Aadmi Party (AAP) convener Arvind Kejriwal for failing to implement the Narendra Modi-led Government's flagship scheme Ayushman Bharat. The Council is seeking legal opinion from the law department to cancel his membership as he has not been able to attend the meetings. The AAP Convener is an ex-officio member of the council, which falls under the Ministry of Home Affairs (MHA), since he is the MLA from the New Delhi Assembly constituency. Kejriwal has consecutively missed the meetings of the

new council for the fourth time since the first took place on November 9 and also missed the oath taking ceremony. Launching an all-out attack on the AAP supremo Arvind Kejriwal from all corners ahead of the Delhi Assembly elections 2025, NDMC Vice-Chairman Kuljeet Chahal flagged the issue of him remaining absent from the council meetings, stating that the law department has been consulted in the matter and will reply by the next weekly meeting about the legality of the matter. "The matter will be raised in the next council meeting after receiving the department's response," he said while addressing the media. A condemnation resolution was also passed in the meeting against the AAP chief. The members of the Council

also passed a censure motion against Kejriwal on the fraud of 'Mukhyamantri Mahila Samman' and 'Sanjeevani Yojna'. Chahal said, "Kejriwal is not allowing the Ayushman Bharat Yojna implemented by the Prime Minister to reach the citizens of Delhi due to his personal and political reasons." New Delhi BJP Member of Parliament P Bansuri Swaraj, who is also a member of the NDMC, attended the meeting. "Today I attended the weekly meeting of NDMC with the council officials. In the meeting, a resolution condemning the neglect of public interest by former Chief Minister of Delhi Arvind Kejriwal by not implementing the Ayushman Bharat scheme in Delhi was unanimously passed," she shared in a tweet. Continued on page 8

Continued on page 8

From deep sea, to outer space, Indian explorers will make history

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ HYDERABAD

As India is gearing up for its first space mission in 2026, plans are afoot to send a human into the deep sea the same year thereby showcasing the country's prowess in frontier scientific endeavours. Disclosing this, Union Minister of State (Independent Charge) for Science, Jitendra Singh said on Thursday "... One Indian up there, and one Indian in the deep sea. That will be once again, a record of sorts." He also emphasised the increasing importance of oceanic exploration in the country's journey toward becoming a 'Viksit Bharat'. The Centre is planning to send a human into the deep sea with the mission likely to coincide with the human space mission in early 2026, Singh said while speaking at the 'Commemoration of the 20th anniversary of the 2004 Indian Ocean Tsunami' at the Indian National Centre for Ocean Information Services (INCOIS). The minister recalled that Prime Minister Narendra Modi had mentioned the Deep Sea Mission in the past Independence Day address. "We are also planning to send a human



Representative photo

abundant marine resources, the minister said the government is working to create an ecosystem to support these efforts. He told a news agency that the services and information provided by INCOIS are not only relevant to coastal communities along India's shoreline but also to people worldwide. Lauding the state-of-the-art facility, he said the institute is providing services that contribute not only to the development of a 'Viksit Bharat' but also to India's significant contribution to the world. Recalling the devastation caused by the 2004 Tsunami, Singh spoke about the crucial lessons learned and the transformative policies that followed. He added that the tragedy catalysed the establishment of institutions like INCOIS, which now stands as a testament to India's commitment to safeguarding lives and livelihoods. An official release in 2023 had stated that as a part of the Samudrayaan Mission undertaken by the Union Ministry of Earth Sciences, the country aims to send three individuals 6,000 meters below sea level for exploration.

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3 robbers held after separate encounters

PNS ■ LUCKNOW

The Lucknow police arrested three individuals, who were shot in their legs, during two separate encounters in the early hours of Thursday in Gomti Nagar and Krishna Nagar areas. Of the three arrested, two were allegedly involved in the robbery and assault of a businessman and his wife, where they stole ornaments and attacked them at Neeraj Chowk during the intervening night of December 21/22. The third accused, Anil Mishra, was allegedly involved in opening fire at the house of a retired army man in the Krishna Nagar area. The first encounter took place in Krishna Nagar around 2 am, during which one suspect was shot in the leg while the other was arrested. A second encounter, about 40 minutes later in Gomti Nagar, saw two suspects shot in the leg and both arrested. The three injured individuals have been admitted to hospital. The two accused arrested from Krishna Nagar, Mohammed Shamim and Akash Gautam, were allegedly involved in throwing petrol bombs at the

house of retired army man Manoj Mishra, who currently works as a security guard at the Vidhan Bhawan. According to the deputy commissioner of police (South), "The police were conducting checks in the Vijay Nagar area of Krishna Nagar at 2 am when they spotted Shamim and Akash Gautam riding a motorcycle. When they were signalled to stop, they opened fire on the police team. In retaliation, Shamim was shot in the leg and Akash was arrested. Shamim has been admitted to Krishna Nagar CHC." The DCP further revealed that Shamim has 24 cases of robbery, burglary, and rape registered against him, while Akash has more than 12 cases. The two suspects had previously fired at the house of Manoj Mishra on December 15, before revisiting the house and throwing petrol bombs. The police had been searching for them ever since. In the second encounter, two robbers, Aman Singh and Veer Yadav, were caught in Gomti Nagar for their involvement in a series of robberies at gunpoint. "The police were on high

alert due to the upcoming Christmas and New Year celebrations, conducting checks under the Janeshwar Mishra Park bridge in Gomti Nagar. A black car (Brezza), driven by Aman Singh and also carrying Veer Yadav, approached and refused to stop. The suspects opened fire on the police team. The police fired back in retaliation, and Aman Singh was shot in the leg. The suspects continued to flee, firing again at the police, who shot Veer Yadav in the leg." DCP (East) Shashank Singh said. The police recovered the car, firearms, and mobile phones from the arrested suspects. Both Aman and Veer were injured and have been admitted to Gomti Nagar CHC. The police confirmed that the suspects were involved in a gunpoint robbery at Neeraj Chowk in Gomti Nagar on the night of December 21/22, where they targeted a businessman, his wife, and another man. The police also revealed that two accomplices of Aman Singh and Veer Yadav are hiding in the forest cover nearby, and a search operation is underway to apprehend them.

CM discusses job generation, USD 1-trillion economy vision

PNS ■ LUCKNOW

Uttar Pradesh Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath on Thursday held a meeting at his official residence to focus on employment generation in the state. During the meeting, representatives from various departments and institutions presented potential job creation strategies. The chief minister stressed the importance of concrete action plans by each department to effectively generate employment. Emphasising the vision of transforming Uttar Pradesh into a \$1-trillion economy, CM Adityanath called for the cooperation of subject matter experts to accelerate efforts. He reiterated that providing timely employment opportunities to the state's youth, based on their skills and qualifications, is a top priority for the government. The chief minister urged officials to harness local resources to create maximum job opportunities and improve the effectiveness of skill development programmes to encourage youth entrepreneurship. The chief minister also highlighted the ongoing sector-



wise efforts to realise the goal of a \$1-trillion economy. Work is being carried out across 10 sectors, with all state departments integrated into these initiatives. CM Adityanath personally reviews progress every three months, while ministers concerned review monthly, and administrative heads conduct reviews every 15 days. The progress is closely monitored on the CM dashboard, with the chief minister encouraging institutional representa-

tives to familiarise themselves with the dashboard to understand the state's working approach. Focusing on sectors with the most potential for employment, CM Adityanath identified medical, education, tourism, construction, and manufacturing as key areas requiring special attention. He also emphasised the importance of the upcoming Maha Kumbh 2025 as an opportunity to showcase the state's image to the world and generate employment.

The chief minister proposed that discussions during the Maha Kumbh should centre around employment, skill development, knowledge, and technology. Further, CM Adityanath called for accelerated efforts in building super specialty hospitals in each district and expanding telemedicine services. He also instructed officials to increase the number of UPSRTC buses and develop new routes to enhance connectivity across the state.

CPI (ML) seeks judicial probe into Pilibhit encounter

PNS ■ LUCKNOW

The CPI (ML) has called for a high-level judicial inquiry into the encounter that took place in Pilibhit on December 23. The party has raised concerns about the authenticity of the encounter, citing contradictions between the police's claims and the statements made by the relatives of the deceased. State secretary Sudhakar Yadav, in a statement on Wednesday, highlighted that two of the deceased were young labourers aged 18 and 25, and both belonged to poor families. According to their families, the two men, Jashanpreet Singh (18) and Gurdvinder Singh (25), were not involved in any terrorist activities. Jashanpreet, a truck labourer, had no criminal history, while Gurdvinder, though previously involved in a case, was allegedly framed, according to his relatives. The CPI (ML) argued that the discrepancies in the police's version of events and the families' statements raised strong doubts about the legitimacy of the encounter, calling for a thorough investigation.

Class VII student killed in road mishap

Lucknow (PNS): A student heading to school was crushed by a dumper on Thursday morning in the Bijnor police station area. The seriously

injured student was rushed to Lokbandhu Hospital, where he succumbed to injuries during treatment. The driver, who fled after abandoning the dumper, was later apprehended by the locals. The police have sent the body for a post-mortem. A case has been registered based on the complaint filed by the deceased's father, and the dumper has been seized. Kartikeya Maurya (14), also known as Aryan, a resident of Golden City in Aurangabad Jagir, Bijnor, was a Class VII student at Krishna Public School in Behasa, Sarojinagar. He was cycling to school at around 8 am when the incident occurred. According to reports, near the Aurangabad underpass, a high-speed dumper (UP32 LN0249)

coming from Bijnor hit Kartikeya's bicycle from behind, severely injuring him. The locals chased and caught both the dumper and its driver, Govind Singh Kushwaha. Upon receiving the information, Kartikeya's family members arrived at the spot and rushed him to Lokbandhu Hospital in critical condition, but he passed away during treatment. The in-charge of Bijnor police station stated that the child's father had filed a complaint, the dumper had been seized, and the driver arrested. An investigation is currently underway. Kartikeya was the only son of his parents — father Chandra Prakash and mother Sudha. The couple is now left with a daughter, Anu.

18 seized vehicles found missing during shifting of police station

PNS ■ LUCKNOW

During the relocation of the Hazratganj police station from its previous location at the multi-level parking to its current site, a shocking discovery was made: 18 seized four-wheelers were missing. These vehicles had been stored in a yard under Chinhat police station. A case was filed based on a report from the DCP's investigation, dated December 23. The complaint was lodged by a head constable, who stated that during the transfer of Hazratganj police station in

2009, 36 unclaimed four-wheelers were sent to a yard in Matiyari, Chinhat, under the supervision of the then Hazratganj inspector, Ajit Singh Chauhan. The missing vehicles were discovered while preparing an inventory in 2018. The Hazratganj police station had been scheduled for relocation in 2009, and as per higher authorities' orders, 36 vehicles were registered as unclaimed and sent to Matiyari. However, during the inventory process in 2018, it was found that 18 of these vehicles

were damaged, while the other 18 were completely missing. Upon the revelation, the investigation was handed over to the DCP (Central). Following the completion of the investigation, an FIR was filed on December 25 based on the findings. The vehicles that were found in the yard were in dilapidated conditions, with the number plates and chassis numbers erased. Hazratganj police station staff, along with the clerk, visited Matiyari in Chinhat to match the vehicles with the list. The vehicles were found haphazardly piled up, some over-

turned, while others were buried in a drain. It was nearly impossible to identify the vehicles based on their damaged number plates and chassis numbers. Additionally, vehicles that arrived in 2008 were improperly stored. Over a span of ten years, the police assigned to guard the Malkhana (storeroom) from Hazratganj failed to maintain proper surveillance. Furthermore, the storehouse in-charges at Chinhat police station did not oversee the vehicles adequately, leading to the disappearance of the 18 seized vehicles.

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I Jari M/o Kandali Rabha (No-15780555L) do affirm that in my son's army service record my name and D.O.B was wrongly entered as Jari correct name Jaribala Rabha, wrong D.O.B 01-07-1953 correct D.O.B 01-01-1960 for all future ref.

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

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It is to inform all that I, Amrendra Bahadur Singh S/o Surendra Bahadur Singh am changing my name Amrendra Bahadur Singh to AMRENDRA SINGH. I will be known as Amrendra Singh for all future purposes. Amrendra Singh S/o Surendra Bahadur Singh R/o Vill. Sairampur Po. Bhagwant Nagar Thana - Bihar Tahseel - Beeghapur Dist - Unnao (U.P)

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I MOHD AZIZ R/o KISHUNGANJ, SANDWA CHANDIKA, PRATAPGARH, have changed my name AJEEJ to MOHD AZIZ for all future purposes.

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विषय- अंग्रेजी (01 पद), अर्थशास्त्र (01 पद), राजनीति विज्ञान (01 पद), इतिहास (01 पद), समाजशास्त्र (01 पद)
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ई-मेल- yashrajle@gmail.com
पता-बाघमऊ, गोमतीनगर, विस्तार-6, लखनऊ, उ०प्र०- 226010

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सूचना

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I kamran warsi son of rais Ahmad declares that with his free will has embraced hindu religion, consequently changed my name as kiritath (कृताथ) and I am being known as kiritath (कृताथ) from March 2024

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Due to mistake in class 10th marksheet/certificate of my son Mohd. Ibrahim my (Mother's) name written as Neelofar Ahmad whereas my correct name is Nelofar, please correct accordingly. Neelofar W/o Mohammad Ahmad 229/108 Sobatiya Bagh, Raja Bazar, Lucknow-226003

CLASSIFIEDS

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I Have Changed My Name From Mohammad Nasir to Mohammad Nasir Ayyub and Henceforth I shall be named and Known as Mohammad Nasir Ayyub for all purposes. Mohammad Nasir Ayyub s/o Late Hafiz Mohammad Ayyub, Flat no 114, 16/8, Sutherland Appratment, Civil Lines, Kanpur

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I have changed my son's name From Mohammad Onais Mahfooz to Muhammad Ahmad Mahfooz S/o Mohammad Danish Mahfooz, R/o L 39 Ganga Vihar K D A Colony Jajmau, Kanpur Nagar. he will be known and recognised by the new name in future

Chinhat bank robbery: Kin distance themselves from mastermind

PNS ■ LUCKNOW

After the arrest of Vipin Verma, the alleged mastermind behind the bank robbery in Chinhat, his family distanced itself from him. They stated that Vipin had not visited his home in Sitapur for a year, and showed no interest in their problems or financial challenges either. They explained that Vipin had a separate room in the house that had been locked for a year. "He went away with his family and hasn't returned since then. We learned about the incident from the newspapers and mobile phones," they said. The family mentioned that Vipin had previously been incarcerated in a similar case. "Even when he was at home in Sitapur, he would drink heavily and fight with people around him. When he left, we hoped he would change, but nothing changed," they told local reporters, who had gathered outside their home after the news of his arrest in Ghazipur district spread. Vipin is allegedly the mastermind behind the robbery at the Indian Overseas Bank in

Chinhat, where he and his accomplices broke into 42 lockers and stole gold and silver items. Vipin had a violent temper since childhood. His father died when he was still in his mother's womb, and after his birth, his mother left him and remarried. Vipin was raised by his uncle and aunt. Growing up with constant taunts from others, Vipin became involved in drugs. When he grew older, his family arranged his marriage. He moved to Jalandhar with his wife Radha, but was jailed on charges of theft. After this, his wife left him, taking their year-old son and remarrying. Vipin's mother-in-law and brother-in-law allegedly insulted him and drove him out of their house. Troubled by these events, Vipin moved to Takrohi in Lucknow, and married another woman. In his desire to become wealthy quickly and driven by greed, he hatched the plan for the major robbery with a friend he had met in jail, police explained. Vipin's brother Pradeep said they no longer wanted anything

to do with him. "Don't link us with him. If our name is associated with his, we will be ruined because of his actions," he said. The villagers stated that Vipin rarely interacted with people. "It's hard to believe he could commit such a major crime," they added. It was revealed that Vipin had associated with the wrong people while in Jalandhar and had committed his first robbery in a bank there, along with his wife's maternal uncle. The police arrested him and he was sent to jail. To recall, around midnight on December 21, 42 lockers were broken into at the Indian Overseas Bank in Chinhat and jewellery worth crores was stolen. Information about the incident was received December 22 after noon. The police arrived at the bank and launched an investigation. On December 23, three of Vipin's associates were apprehended in Lucknow, while four others fled. Upon strict questioning, the accused revealed that they had committed the robbery with seven people involved.

RLD hits out at opposition

Lucknow (PNS): Rashtriya Lok Dal (RLD) leader Anil Dubey, speaking at a membership ceremony in Rajajipuram on Thursday, criticised the opposition for allegedly undermining the social fabric of society.

He asserted that while opposition parties were creating divisions, RLD president and Union minister Jayant Chaudhary was focused on fostering social harmony in the state. Dubey subtly directed his comments at opposition leaders, accusing them of damaging social brotherhood with their remarks and actions. The event was part of RLD's ongoing Samajik Samrasata Abhiyan (social harmony campaign) and membership drive, which started on the birth anniversary of Chaudhary Charan Singh and will run until December 31. As the chief guest, Anil Dubey encouraged local leaders like Neeraj Tiwari and hundreds of others to join RLD. The ceremony was chaired by educationist Mayank Trivedi and coordinated by party's state general secretary Chandrakant Awasthi.

Fire breaks out in flat

Lucknow (PNS): A fire broke out in a flat on the sixth floor of Silver Apartment on Thursday, damaging most of the household items. Luckily though, no one was inside when the fire erupted, and there were no injuries.

The incident was reported to the fire station at 11:39 am, prompting the Gomti Nagar fire station officer (FSO) to respond with two fire tenders. Upon arrival, it was found that the fire had already been extinguished by local residents who gained access to the flat by cutting the lock. The flat in question (No. 609 in B block) is owned by Pankaj Nimani, a resident of Bihar. The tenant, Mohit Tiwari, a resident of Ayodhya, had been away from Lucknow for the past three days. The fire damaged several items, including the dining room furniture, sofa, TV, and air conditioner.

LDA to repair statues installed across city

Lucknow (PNS): Repair work on the statues installed across the city will begin in the second week of January next year. The initiative will also include beautifying their surroundings to attract public attention and encourage visits to these locations, Lucknow Development Authority Vice-Chairman Prathmesh Kumar said on Thursday.

The proposal for the project was finalised during a meeting chaired by Lucknow Divisional Commissioner Roshan Jacob. During the meeting, it was revealed that a sum of Rs 50 crore has been allocated for the repair and beautification work, while an additional Rs 65 crore will be used for other related tasks. The commissioner assured that the first installment of funds will be released within two weeks. According to the LDA

records, the city currently has around 60 statues installed in various parks and public places, many of which are in dire need of repair and maintenance. The statues, particularly busts, will undergo repainting, and their surroundings will be restored to improve their overall appearance. The LDA VC explained that maintenance of these statues has been neglected for the past 12 years, leading to their deteriorated condition. He emphasised the need to address this issue and make the statues more appealing to the public, creating better environments around them to encourage people to visit these areas. The neglected parks and surroundings where the statues are located have fallen into disrepair, discouraging people and even tourists from visiting them.

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1.	For Verka Head Office, Chandigarh	
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NOTE:
1. For complete details regarding above tender (NT), please visit our website i.e. www.verka.coop & e Tendering portal i.e. eproc.punjab.gov.in.
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Dy. General Manager (Purchase)

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NOTICE

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Corporate Identification Number- L40101DL1975G01007966

The applicant above named has made an application before the Central Electricity Regulatory Commission (CERC), New Delhi for determination of tariff of Feroze Gandhi Uncharh Thermal Power Station Stage-II (420 MW) from 01.04.2024 to 31.03.2029.

- The beneficiaries of the generating station are:
 - Uttar Pradesh Power Corp. Ltd. (UPPCL), Shakti Bhawan 14, Ashok Marg, Lucknow-226001.
 - Rajasthan Urja Vikas Nigam Limited (RUVNL) (on behalf of DISCOMs of Rajasthan), Vidyal Bhawan, Janpath, Jaipur-302005.
 - Tata Power Delhi Distribution Ltd. (TPDDL), Grid Substation, Hudson Road, Kingsway Camp, Delhi-110009.
 - BSES Rajdhani Power Ltd. (BRPL), BSES Bhawan, Nehru Place, New Delhi-110019.
 - BSES Yamuna Power Ltd. (BYPL), Shakti Kiran Building, Karkardooma, Delhi-110092.
 - Haryana Power Purchase Centre (HPPC), Shakti Bhawan, Sector-VI, Panchkula, Haryana-134109.
 - Punjab State Power Corporation Ltd. (PSPCL), The Mall, Patiala-147001
 - Himachal Pradesh State Electricity Board Ltd. (HPSEB), Kumar Housing Complex Building-II, Vidyal Bhawan, Shimla-171004.
 - Power Development Department (PDD-J&K), Govt. of J&K, Civil Secretariat, Srinagar.
 - Electricity Department (Chandigarh), Union Territory of Chandigarh, Addl. Office Building, Sector-9 D, Chandigarh.
 - Uttarakhand Power Corporation Ltd. (UPCL), Urja Bhawan, Kanwali Road, Dehradun-248001.
- Capacity of the generating station : 420 MW
- Approved capital cost of the project : Rs. 1306.09 Crore
- Authority which has approved the Capital Cost : CERC
- Scheduled date of commercial operation : Not Applicable
- Actual date of commercial operation : 01.01.2001
- Capital cost on date of Commercial operation of Station : Not Applicable

8. Details of tariff:

Particulars	Year-wise tariff sought to be determined					
	Tariff for the previous year	2024-25	2025-26	2026-27	2027-28	2028-29
1. Capacity Charges (Rs. Lakh/ year)	35963.62	36350.09	37104.93	39916.73	42482.63	45987.55
2. Energy Charges (Rs./kwh)			3.67			

*As per Petition for triung-up of tariff for 2019-24 period for Feroze Gandhi Uncharh Thermal Power Station Stage-II (420 MW) filed before Hon'ble CERC.
9. A copy of the petition made for determination of tariff is posted on the website of NTPC, namely www.ntpc.co.in under the Tab "Notices".
10. The suggestions and objections, if any, on the proposals for determination of tariff contained in the petition may be filed by any person, including the beneficiaries through e-filing portal of the Commission, with a copy to the Petitioner within 30 days of publication of this notice.

Place : Noida (P. Piyush)
Date : 30.11.2024 Addl. General Manager (Comm.)

Leading the Power Sector

'Incidents in Pak, B'desh, remind us of sacrifices by Sikh gurus'

PNS ■ LUCKNOW

Uttar Pradesh Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath on Thursday highlighted the rich legacy of the Sikh tradition, emphasising their resilience in adverse circumstances. He praised the community for not only preserving their traditions but also inspiring others through their sacrifices for the nation and their faith.

Addressing the main event of Veer Bal Diwas (Sahibzada Diwas) held at the chief minister's residence, he remarked, "The Sikh community has a glorious history, yet we hear that only a handful of Sikh families remain in Kabul. Incidents in Bangladesh and atrocities in Pakistan remind us of the sacrifices of the Sikh gurus."

"The ideals of the Sikh Gurus provide us with the energy to move forward. Their blessings serve as our inspiration. By carrying forward their legacy, we can prevent situations like those in Kabul and Bangladesh. Places like Nankana Sahib will come to us naturally, without the need for agitation or struggle," the chief minister added.

The event also saw a historical gathering and the commencement of 11,000 'sahaj paaths'. Additionally, the chief minister released a book based on the teachings of Guru Teg Bahadur. Chief Minister Adityanath praised the Sikh community as a resilient and prosperous segment of the nation, setting exemplary standards through their strength, dedication and hard work. "At one time, Sikhs safeguarded India by joining the Army in significant numbers. Yet, there are forces conspiring to undermine their efforts, attempting to entrap the youth in drug abuse," he said.

He emphasised the need to identify and remain vigilant against such adversaries. "Sikhs and Hindus complement each other. We must steer clear of those who seek to create discord between us. May Guru Maharaj grant us the wisdom to distinguish between friends and foes," he said, stressing unity.

Reflecting on past events, the chief minister noted that in 2019, during the 550th Prakash Parv of Guru Nanak Dev, a 'shabad-kirtan' programme was held at his residence. Since 2020, the annual observance of Veer Bal Diwas has become a tradition at the chief minister's residence, he said. "Today, this



Uttar Pradesh Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath during a ceremony organised on 'Veer Bal Diwas' to commemorate the martyrdom of Guru Gobind Singh's sons Bala Zorawar Singh and Baba Fateh Singh, at his official residence in Lucknow, Thursday. PTI

event has grown into a national observance. On this day, two 'sahibzaades' (sons) of Guru Gobind Singh — Baba Zorawar Singh and Fateh Singh — were walled up alive by Wazir Khan," he added. The chief minister also recounted the sacrifices made during the Battle of Chamkaur, where Guru Gobind Singh's elder sons, Baba Ajit Singh and Baba Jujhar Singh, attained martyrdom. "Maa Gujri could not endure the immense pain of these losses. The suffering they endured is beyond imagination. Yet, their unwavering commitment to protecting the country and religion remained steadfast. By sacrificing their lives, the four Sahibzaades laid a solid foundation for safeguarding the nation and its values. Their bravery continues to be a source

of pride, not just for the Sikh community but also for the entire nation," he said. Highlighting Sikhism's origins rooted in service to the nation and religion, Chief Minister Adityanath remarked, "Guru Nanak Dev was the first to stand against Babar's atrocities. Guru Arjun Dev's martyrdom in Lahore was to protect India from Jahangir's tyranny. "Guru Teg Bahadur sacrificed his life but upheld India's honour, ensuring that Kashmir remained an integral part of India. Guru Gobind Singh Ji Maharaj witnessed the ultimate sacrifice of his sons and father for the nation," Adityanath said.

The chief minister also noted that this year marks the 350th martyrdom anniversary of Guru Teg Bahadur. Recalling

the historical significance of the UP capital, he said, "Lucknow is fortunate that Guru Teg Bahadur ji had come here with Guru Gobind Singh ji. To honour this heritage, a comprehensive plan for the beautification of associated gurudwaras should be prepared in collaboration with the municipal corporation." He assured financial support from the state government and urged coordinated efforts, saying, "The responsibility must not be passed around. The state government, municipal corporation and development authority should work together to rehabilitate shopkeepers by constructing high-rise buildings or malls on their land. Gurudwaras linked to this historical legacy must be aesthetically enhanced."

Gorakhpur Link Expressway to be inaugurated next year

PNS ■ GORAKHPUR

The Gorakhpur Link Expressway is set to be officially inaugurated in the new year as 98% of the work has been completed, according to official information. The link expressway, which connects Gorakhpur to Azamgarh while passing through four districts, is set to transform connectivity in the region. It also significantly eases travel to the state capital, Lucknow.

With 98% of the construction work completed, the expressway is already open for vehicular movement. The Yogi government is steadily enhancing road connectivity across Uttar Pradesh and is now preparing for the formal inauguration of the Gorakhpur Link Expressway in the new year, officials said. This expressway will enable

seamless and faster connectivity from the Gorakhpur region to Lucknow, Agra, and Delhi via the Purvanchal Expressway. One of CM Yogi Adityanath's priority projects, the link expressway begins at Gorakhpur Bypass NH-27 near Jaitpur village and ends at Salarpur in Azamgarh, connecting to the Purvanchal Expressway. Stretching 91.35 kilometres, the project has a total cost of Rs 7,283.28 crore, including land acquisition expenses. The link expressway benefits Gorakhpur, Ambedkar Nagar, Sant Kabir Nagar, and Azamgarh districts, offering faster travel and bringing communities closer together. According to the latest update on December 23 from the Uttar Pradesh Expressway Industrial Development Authority (UPEIDA), 98% of the construction work is com-

plete. The main carriageway's clearing and grubbing work is 100% complete, along with 100% of the earthwork. Out of the 343 proposed structures on the expressway, 337 have been constructed, while the remaining structures are being completed at a rapid pace. The construction of the Gorakhpur Link Expressway was a challenging task, primarily due to the low-lying terrain in the Gorakhpur district. The region's roads were prone to damage every year, making the process of filling soil for the expressway particularly difficult. However, the administration overcame this challenge. Once completed, the Gorakhpur Link Expressway will significantly reduce travel time from Gorakhpur to Lucknow, taking just 3.5 hours via the Purvanchal Expressway. Additionally, it will enhance connectivity, offering travellers

a smooth journey from Gorakhpur to Delhi and Agra. The completion of this expressway will pave the way for the overall development of the Gorakhpur region. Its controlled entry points will not only reduce fuel consumption and save time for vehicles, but will also help reduce environmental pollution. This expressway will drive the social and economic development of the areas it connects, boosting agriculture, commerce, tourism, and industries. By linking various production units, development centres, and agricultural zones to the national capital, it will serve as a key industrial corridor. Furthermore, the Yogi government is developing an industrial corridor along both sides of the expressway, further promoting regional growth and prosperity.

Akhilesh questions UP government preparedness on Maha Kumbh

PNS ■ LUCKNOW

Samajwadi Party president Akhilesh Yadav on Wednesday questioned the Uttar Pradesh government's preparedness for the upcoming Maha Kumbh and accused it of mismanagement. In a post on X, he flagged several issues regarding security arrangements, local concerns, and overall administration in Prayagraj, urging the government to take immediate corrective action.

"This is the truth of preparations for 'Prayagraj Mahakumbh 2025' under the BJP government! At least the work of the police department should have been completed long ago because the management of the security circle does not wait for the last day," he said in a post.

The SP chief also drew attention to the alleged delay in addressing the needs of local residents and the fair area, stating that people in Prayagraj were questioning the government's priorities. "The aggrieved people of Prayagraj are asking why the BJP government was very prompt in removing the statue

AWTs to prevent, tackle, fire incidents

Mahakumbh Nagar (PNS): As preparations for Maha Kumbh 2025 intensify, the Uttar Pradesh Fire and Emergency Services Department has deployed four articulating water towers (AWTs) equipped with advanced features in the fair area to prevent and tackle fire incidents, officials said here on Thursday.

These towers have been deployed in view of the large tent city and extensive tent setups. The AWTs are equipped with advanced technologies, including video and thermal imaging systems, to prevent fire incidents and enhance safety,

they added. In addition to conducting firefighting operations, the AWTs will play a crucial role in safeguarding the lives of firefighters, acting as a protective shield during high-risk incidents, officials said. Maha Kumbh's nodal fire officer Pramod Sharma stated that AWT is a modern firefighting vehicle specifically designed to tackle fires in multi-storey structures and large tents. The AWT, made of four booms, can conduct firefighting operations up to a height of 35 metres and a horizontal distance of 30 metres. It is equipped with advanced features, including video and thermal imaging

cameras, which enhance its effectiveness. These capabilities not only allow the AWT to carry out rescue operations and protect lives and property but also provide a shield for the safety of firefighters during high-risk operations. Deputy Director Aman Sharma said that to make Maha Kumbh a fire-accident-free zone, a budget of Rs 66.75 crore has been allocated to the department, in addition to the department's budget of Rs 64.73 crore. This brings the total expenditure for fire protection measures at the Maha Kumbh to Rs 131.48 crore.

is ready to assist the government as the "BJP people would be busy earning money or in election planning." "If the government-administration has failed in the preparations for the Mahakumbh, then we propose to send our true and dedicated workers to help because the BJP people would be busy earning money or in election planning," he said in a dig at the ruling party.

Ken Betwa Link Project to rejuvenate Bundelkhand region

PNS ■ LUCKNOW

Renowned for its valour and rich cultural heritage, the Bundelkhand region of Uttar Pradesh is on the cusp of a significant transformation driven by a series of ambitious projects. Among these projects, the Ken Betwa Link Project stands out as a significant initiative, officials said here on Thursday.

Once completed, the project will rejuvenate the region by irrigating 2.51 lakh hectares of farmland across Jhansi, Mahoba, Banda, and Lalitpur in Uttar Pradesh, while also providing drinking water to 21 lakh residents, they added.

Ken Betwa Link was a part of the ambitious river-linking project envisioned by former prime minister Atal Bihari Vajpayee, officials said. Designed to provide a lasting solution to the nation's flood

and drought crisis, the project reflects his visionary leadership. The foundation stone of this Rs 44,605-crore project was laid by Prime Minister Narendra Modi on the 100th birth anniversary of Atal. Under this initiative, 90% of the funding will be contributed by the Central government, with the remaining 10% shared by the respective state governments, officials said.

Although the foundation stone of the project was laid on December 25, the Yogi government had already begun preliminary work to expedite the project's benefits for the people of Bundelkhand, they added. The office for the Ken Betwa Link has been opened in Banda. The topographical survey has been completed in the four districts—Jhansi, Mahoba, Banda, and Lalitpur—laying the groundwork for the detailed project report (DPR),

which is slated for completion early next year. The tender process for constructing a 24-kilometre canal in Uttar Pradesh will commence soon. In preparation, gram panchayats requiring approximately 245 hectares of land acquisition have been identified. In early December, the Yogi cabinet approved a revised expenditure of approximately Rs 1,192 crore for the project. Under the leadership of CM Yogi, Bundelkhand is addressing its two major challenges: water scarcity and industrial development. In the past seven and a half years, significant efforts have been made to transform Bundelkhand into a hub of solar energy, officials said. The development of the Defence Corridor is further boosting the industrial environment here. Additionally,

the government has plans to establish an industrial corridor, the Bundelkhand Industrial Development Authority (BIDA), spanning 36,000 acres across 33 villages in Jhansi. This corridor, which will be larger than Noida, is being developed between Kanpur and Jhansi, with work already underway. Moreover, an industrial corridor is being developed along the Bundelkhand Expressway, taking into account the region's unique traditions. The government's focus is also on Bundelkhand, along with Purvanchal, under the UP Agri Yojana. Furthermore, the state's first farm is also being developed in Lalitpur. With the completion of the Bundelkhand Expressway, connectivity issues have been addressed. The government is now work-

ing on linking it to Chitrakoot through a dedicated expressway. It is worth mentioning that the Arjun Sahayak Canal project, a pivotal initiative for the region, was completed by the Yogi government approximately two years ago and inaugurated by Prime Minister Modi. In addition, around four to five dozen irrigation-related schemes were also completed during Yogi Adityanath's tenure, based on local needs. Bundelkhand also received focused attention under the Har Ghar Talab Yojana. To improve irrigation resources and ensure water availability for livestock during droughts, the government is actively implementing the Khet Talab Yojana. Last year, around 3,370 ponds were excavated under this scheme, with a goal of digging 8,499 ponds in the current financial year, officials said.

Maha Kumbh: Land allotted to over 4000 organisations

PNS ■ MAHAKUMBH NAGAR

Acting on the instructions of Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath during his recent visit to Prayagraj, authorities have swiftly allocated land to over 4,000 organisations, with an estimated 8,000 to 10,000 organisations expected to participate in Maha Kumbh 2025. A key highlight of the grand event is the establishment of Akharas, which is progressing steadily. Some Akharas have already set up their camps, while the Mela Authority has completed land allocation for most Akharas and other organisations. The remaining allocations, including for new applicants, are underway and set to be finalised by the year-end.

According to the Mela Authority, land allocation has been completed for all Akharas, their followers Akharas, Mahamandaleswar, Khalsa, Dandiwada, Acharyawada, and Khakachowk. The allocation process for Prayagraj groups and new organisations is expected to be finished by December 31. In a review meeting with Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath, it was reported that land has already been allocated to a total of 4,268 organisations. This includes 19 land allotments for Akharas and their sub-groups, 460 for Mahamandaleswar, 750 for Khalsa, 203 for Dandiwada, 300 for Acharyawada, 300 for Khakachowk, and 1,766 for other organisations. Additionally, 450 land allotments have been made to Prayagraj

groups so far. The land allocation for Prayagraj groups began on December 12 and will continue until December 31. Similarly, the process for new organisations started on December 16 and is set to conclude by the end of the year. The land allocated to Akharas and other organisations is now a hub of activity, with tent construction and decorations progressing rapidly. In the Jhansi area, representatives from Akharas, Mahamandaleswar, Khalsa, Dandiwada, Acharyawada, Khakachowk, and other organisations are busy setting up tents and decorations in line with their traditions and culture. The administration has laid checkered plates across the area and is rapidly installing signages to help visitors easily locate their designated spaces.

Kannauj police first in UP to adopt e-office system

PNS ■ LUCKNOW

With implementation of an e-office system across all police stations under its jurisdiction, Kannauj has become the first district in Uttar Pradesh to go paperless, eliminating the clutter of thick files, a senior official said here on Thursday.

This marks a significant step towards smart policing, with the e-office system now in place across all police stations, circle officer's offices and additional superintendent of police (SP) offices.

Kannauj superintendent of police Amit Kumar Anand said, "As part of this initiative, Kannauj police transitioned to a digital platform, replacing paper-based systems and

ensuring smooth administrative operations." "With this transformation, Kannauj has set a benchmark and become the first district in Uttar Pradesh to implement a 100 per cent e-office system across all police stations and offices," he said. Anand said that DGP Prashant Kumar launched the e-office system on December 25 on the occasion of Good Governance Day. "Developed by the National Informatics Center (NIC) and based on the Central Secretariat Manual (CSMeOP), this system has been successfully implemented after strengthening the district's digital infrastructure," the officer said. All police stations and offices have been equipped with the

necessary technical resources, he added. The primary goal of the e-office system is to enhance transparency and efficiency in administrative operations through digital file and data management, Anand said. By accelerating complaint handling and reporting, the system ensures quicker justice for the public. "Digital file monitoring will also enable officers to better track progress and streamline decision-making. Furthermore, the e-office system will prevent delays in resolving pending complaints, ensuring timely and transparent reporting. It will also reduce corruption in police stations and district offices," he said.

SP seeks access to CCTV footage of polling booths in constituencies where it lost

PTI ■ LUCKNOW

The Samajwadi Party has submitted a memorandum to the chief electoral officer of Uttar Pradesh, demanding the release of CCTV footage of candidates at polling booths in seven assembly constituencies where bypolls were held last month. The constituencies include Katehari, Kundarki, Phulpur, Majhawan, Meerapur, Khair, and Ghaziabad, according to a statement issued by the party here. The SP had lost all these seats in the November 13 bypolls. The memorandum, highlighting the party's demand for transparency in the electoral process, was handed over by party representatives KK Srivastava, Harishchandra Singh, and Radheshyam Singh, the statement added. Bye-elections to

nine assembly constituencies were held on November 13 and its results declared on November 23. The SP had won the polls on two seats of Sishamau (Kanpur) and Karhal (Mainpuri). The BJP had won six seats while its ally RLD bagged one seat of Meerapur (Muzaffarnagar). The Centre last week tweaked an 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 prevent their misuse. Based on the recommendation of the Election Commission of India, the Union law ministry on Dec 20 amended Rule 93(2)(a) of the Conduct of Election Rules, 1961, to restrict the type of "papers" or documents open to public inspection.

Mayawati accuses Cong of disrespecting Ambedkar

PTI ■ LUCKNOW

Bahujan Samaj Party supremo Mayawati on Thursday hit out at the Congress party, accusing it of disrespecting Dr. Bhimrao Ambedkar and his followers while promoting the interests of capitalists. In a post in Hindi on X, Mayawati criticised political parties for relying on the financial support of capitalists and big businesses, and adopting a "pro-rich" and "anti-poor and anti-farmer" stance. She referred to the financial donations received by parties in 2023-24, citing reports that revealed the BJP received the highest contributions, followed by the BRS (Bharat Rashtra Samithi) and the Congress. Mayawati said, unlike other parties, the BSP is clean and



free from the influence of the wealthy elite as it functions on the "hard-earned money" donated by its workers. She said the BSP relies on grassroots support unlike the Congress, which, according to her, opposes capitalists in public but benefits from their financial contributions. "The Congress party has double standards," Mayawati said, adding that the party acts in

favour of the rich once it assumes power. Mayawati also accused the Congress of ignoring the legacy of India's Constitution, and disrespecting him and his followers. She claimed that the party uses Ambedkar's name for "deceptive politics" aimed at securing votes and asked people to remain cautious of such tactics.

BJP will again achieve success in 2027 assembly polls: Maurya

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ VARANASI

Deputy Chief Minister Keshav Prasad Maurya exuded confidence that the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) will repeat the success of 2017 and 2022 in 2027 assembly polls. "In 2014 no one could believe it but we formed the government on our own strength and this is the result of blessings of former Prime Minister and Bharat Ratna Atal Bihari Vajpayee", he said while addressing a seminar organised by city and district units of BJP at Bharatiya Shiksha Mandir located at Englisha Line here on Wednesday as the chief guest on the centenary birth anniversary of Vajpayee. "Today is the birth anniversary of two great men. First 'Bharat Ratna' Atal Bihari Vajpayee who gave good governance to the country, and second 'Bharat Ratna' Mahamana Madan Mohan Malaviya who made an unprecedented contribution in the field of freedom struggle and education", said the DyCM, adding that the inspiration of Atal's life always helps us to move forward providing a new thinking and direction in Indian politics, which will always be the source of our guidance. He said Atal's leadership was not limited to political achievements only. "The message of national unity, integrity and social harmony of Atal inspires us even today. Atal was a skilled speaker and a great poet, who shared feelings and thoughts through his poetic compositions. His political foresight and



DyCM KP Maurya at a seminar to mark the centenary birth anniversary of former PM Atal Bihari Vajpayee in Varanasi

bold decisions led the country on the path of development", Maurya said, adding that Atal spent five decades in the mainstream of Indian politics and his political life remained spotless. "In these five decades, Atal worked as a propagator of Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS), journalist, editor, poet, and skilled politician. While representing India in the United Nations, Atal was the first person to give a speech in Hindi", he said. "The work of realising the vision of Antyodaya of Pandit Deendayal Upadhyaya and good governance of Atal is going on under the leadership of Prime Minister Narendra Modi. Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath is working to speed it up in the state", he said, adding that after 2014, Jan Dhan accounts of 55 crore people were opened in the country whereas five crore people were given housing and now in the third term (Modi government), three crore more

people will be given housing. "Besides, 12 crore farmers are being given Rs 2,000 every year under Kisan Samman Nidhi. For treatment of illness, the poor are being given health security up to Rs 5 lakh under the Ayushman Bharat scheme. There is a plan to make 10 crore women Lakhpati Didi. Gas connections were given under the Ujjwala scheme. Work is going on to provide tap water to every house", he said. Maurya said be it rail, road or air, work has been done to improve every sector with Atal's inspiration. In 2014, the country's economy was the 11th largest economy in the world, today it is at number five and will become the third largest economy by 2027, he added. "Under the leadership of Atal, India became a nuclear power. The tricolour was hoisted in Kargil. It was Atal's inspiration that surgical strikes were carried out on Pakistan. Under the leadership of PM Modi, a grand temple of Baba Vishwanath

was built, beautification of Sarnath and Ganga Ghats was done. Today, lakhs of tourists and devotees are coming to Kashi. Whether it was the work of washing the feet of sanitation workers during Kumbh in Prayagraj or the work of showering flowers on workers during the inauguration of Kashi Vishwanath Corridor, PM Modi did it", he said. The DyCM said Congress, which has always 'insulted' Babasaheb Ambedkar, is today pretending to be his follower. He said that as we worship Atal as much as we worship Ambedkar. Under the leadership of PM Modi, development work has been done at five pilgrimage sites related to Babasaheb", he said. Regional president Dilip Patel welcomed the guests while the meeting was conducted by city president Vidyasagar Rai and the vote of thanks was proposed by district president and MLC Hansraj Vishwakarma. Prior to the seminar, Maurya inaugurated a picture exhibition based on the personality and works of Vajpayee by cutting the ribbon. Mayor Ashok Tiwari, Zila Panchayat Chairperson Poonam Maurya, MLAs Saurabh Srivastava and Anil Maurya, former Mayor Kaushalendra Singh Patel, Rakesh Trivedi, RP Kushwaha, regional media in charge Navratan Rathi, Naveen Kapoor, Santosh Solapurkar, Madhukar Chitransh, Jagdish Tripathi, Atma Visheshwar, Ashok Patel, Rahul Singh, Ashok Yadav, Sadhana Vedanti, etc were also present.

Shankaracharya demands separate nation for Hindus in Bangladesh

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ VARANASI

Jyotishpeethadhishwar Shankaracharya Swami Avimuktेश्वरानanda Saraswati demanded a separate nation for Hindus in Bangladesh which should be near the area bordering India or an autonomous safe zone for Hindus in which the Bangladesh government does not have much interference. Expressing serious concern over the increasing atrocities on the Hindus in Bangladesh while addressing a press conference at Srividya Math, Kedarghat, during his two-day visit here on Wednesday, along with some Bangladeshi Hindus, he said a lot of anarchy is prevailing in Bangladesh following a political crisis since August 5. "We are with the oppressed Bangladeshi Hindus. It is horrifying to hear their pain", Shankaracharya said, informing that recently a delegation of 12 members from Bangladesh met him along with Vidushi Madhu Kishwar from Delhi. "Recently, when I was on a winter Chardham Yatra, a large group of about 100 people



Shankaracharya Swami Avimuktेश्वरानanda, along with Bangladeshi Hindus addressing a press conference in Varanasi

from various states of India was also with me and I listened to pain of Bangladeshi Hindus", he said, adding that on his visit to Kashi, a delegation of Bangladeshi Hindus came here and each one of them shared their pains and experiences. Shankaracharya also demanded that population exchange between India and Bangladesh in which the Hindu population of Bangladesh is sent to India and the Muslim population to Bangladesh in a convenient manner in the same proportion. "The compulsion of residing in India before the due date

under the Citizenship Amendment Act should be abolished and it should be opened forever so that any Hindu coming to India at any time from the due countries and expressing the intention of Indian citizenship can become an Indian citizen", he said. Shankaracharya said the Hindu born anywhere in the world should be considered natural citizens of India as is the case in Israel. "The visa period of those Hindus of Bangladesh who came to India on visa before August 5, 2024, and are forced to return to

Bangladesh after the visa period expires should be extended until the situation in Bangladesh becomes normal", he said, adding that the provision of employment for Hindus who are forced to work or are laid off from their jobs so that Hindus can earn their livelihood with dignity. He also stressed the need for sending a delegation from Shankaracharya Peethas to support and cooperate with Hindus in Bangladesh and to assess the ground situation so that it can boost the morale of Hindus in Bangladesh. "We support these demands of Bangladeshi Hindus", he said, adding that although the results of these efforts will take time and also that the anger and pain in the hearts of Hindus will not be reduced by these efforts alone, but efforts have to be started from somewhere. "Therefore, we should at least start from this and the path ahead will be made on its own and if God wishes, the circumstances will change soon and God will soon take notice of the pain of Hindus because in God's house there is delay, but no injustice", Shankaracharya said.

Kashi Vandan completes 200 days at Namoghat

Varanasi (PNS): A colourful programme was organised by the district administration to mark the completion of 200 days of Kashi Vandan cultural programme at Namoghat here on Wednesday evening. Mayor Ashok Tiwari was present as the chief guest. Along with this,

District Magistrate and Kashi Heritage Conservation Committee president S Rajalingam, Chief Development Officer (CDO) and committee vice president Himanshu Nagpal, Basic Shiksha Adhikari (BSA) Arvind Pathak etc were also present. The cultural event

began with a programme of Tabla Tarang under the leadership of Chandan Vishwakarma, Assistant Professor, Banaras Hindu University (BHU). Then the programme of Ganga Avtaran was performed by the disciples of Pandit Ravishankar Mishra. Nearly 2,000 artistes

have performed in the Kashi Vandan cultural programme so far. Artistes from India and abroad have performed in it. In the day's programme, Pt Ravishankar Mishra, Pt Rohit Mishra, Pt Anand Kumar Mishra and colleagues gave their cultural presentation.

Atal started a new era of development: Patel

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ VARANASI

On the centenary year of former Prime Minister Bharat Ratna Atal Bihari Vajpayee on Wednesday, as a mark of respect garlands were placed on Vajpayee's picture at all 28,087 booths of Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) in Kashi region, including Varanasi district and city units here. On the occasion, personality and deeds of Vajpayee were discussed. Before this, a cleanliness campaign was launched at BJP offices and 'Sushasan Yatra' (good governance march) was taken out. In this direction, regional BJP president Dilip Patel offered flowers on Vajpayee's picture at booth number 169 of Kardameshwar Mandal and booth number 291 (Rohania regional office) of Rohania Mandal and discussed personality and deeds of former PM. Patel said Atal started a new era of development and good governance in the country with dedication to ideology and value-based politics. "Atal, who made cultural nationalism a work culture, always kept the country's security and public welfare paramount. Atal made BJP popular with purity and self-restraint in political life. Atal will continue to guide the countrymen on the path of national service till eternity", he said. He further said to increase local connectivity, the NDA government under the leadership of Atal started programmes like Pradhan Mantri Gram Sadak



Yojana. "Delhi Metro started during his rule, which our government is expanding today as a world class infrastructure project. Through such efforts, Atal not only gave new power to economic progress, but also strengthened the unity of India by connecting far-flung areas with each other", he said. On the occasion, 'Sushasan Yatra' was also taken out on the Korauta (Rameshwar mandal) road constructed under the Pradhan Mantri Gramin Sadak Yojana. A chaupal was organised and the achievements of both Atal and Modi governments were discussed and blankets were distributed among the destitute. District BJP president and MLC Hansraj Vishwakarma, Rajesh Rajbhar, Shriprakash Shukla, regional media in charge Navratan Rathi, co in charge Santosh Solapurkar, Anil Srivastava, Surendra Patel, Rajesh Kumar Patel, Manish Singh, Rajesh Srivastava, Rakesh Rajbhar etc were present. Meanwhile, 'kavi sammelan' and a seminar were organised at DAV Degree College in the City South assembly area on Good Governance Day. MLA Dr Neelkanth Tiwari said Atal

strengthened the foundation of good governance during his tenure. Later, in the 'Kavyanjali' (Kavi Sammelan) poets like Saand Banarasi, Damdaar Banarasi, Salim Shivalvi, Dr Prashant Singh, Saurabh Tripathi, Vibha Singh, Omprakash Singh and Samar Ghazipuri recited their poetry. The programme was conducted by Damdaar Banarasi. The main participants in the programme were college manager Ajit Kumar Singh, principal Prof. Mishrilal, vice principal Prof. Rahu, Prof. Brijbhushan Ojha, Pandit Deepak Malviya, Sandeep Chaturvedi, Alok Shukla, Alok Srivastava, Nalin Nayan Mishra, Sandeep Chaurasia, Gopal Ji Gupta, Prof. Sanjay Sah, Prof. Sangeeta Jain, Dr Ramendra Singh, Dr Vijay Yadav, Dr Neelam Singh, etc. **Mahamana Mahotsav:** On the second day of Mahamana Mahotsav being organised by Sevagya Sansthanam, an essay competition on the topic 'Relevance of Mahamana's thoughts in today's India' was held at Sanatan Dharm Inter College here on Thursday. About 400 students from more than 50 schools participated in the competition. The programme began with the Principal of Sanatan Dharm Inter College Vijay Ram, lighting the lamp and garlanding the portrait of Mahamana Madan Mohan Malaviya. The Mahotsav will run till January 4, including a series of seven different competitions.

Minister hears problems of people

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ VARANASI

Uttar Pradesh Minister of State (Independent Charge) for Stamp and Court Registration Fees Ravindra Jaiswal held a public hearing at Prime Minister's parliamentary office in Jawahar Nagar, Ravindrapuri here on Thursday and heard the problems of the people and resolved them. During the public hearing, many people present on the spot requested the minister to resolve their problems. Ismita Biswas, who came from Guwahati, said that her late husband was working as a malaria supervisor in CMO

office in Varanasi and had died but the medical reimbursement amount for the expenditure on his treatment has not been received by the department till now. Taking it seriously, the minister immediately spoke to the chief medical officer over the phone and directed him to investigate the matter and make immediate payment of the medical reimbursement amount. During this on many complaint applications received related to police, water works and other departments, the minister held telephonic talks with the departmental officers concerned.

Heavy crowd at Xmas Mela

Varanasi (PNS): Heavy rush was seen on the second day of the popular three-day Christmas Mela at St Mary's Cathedral here on Thursday. Not only children but a good number of men and women also thronged there. The rush of visitors reached a peak in the evening as it was seen on the first day. The children enjoyed food items and games. Earlier, all the local churches have been glittered with attractive lighting arrangements on the occasion of Christmas. At St Mary's Cathedral, the Bishop of Diocese of Varanasi Eugene Joseph and other dignitaries were present and greeted all the Christians Merry Christmas. Various religious and cultural programmes were also organised and the festival was celebrated with traditional gaiety and religious fervour. At Lal Girjaghar and church-



Rush of people at Christmas Mela at St Mary's Cathedral in Varanasi on Thursday.

Peshwai of Shri Panch Agni Akhara taken out

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ PRAYAGRAJ

The Peshwai (procession) of Shri Panch Agni Akhara was taken out with great pomp in the Maha Kumbh Mela area on Thursday. About a 1,000 saints and seers who arrived from many states entered the Maha Kumbh after touring the city for 13 km via Khuldabad and Chauhatka. Saints and Naga sadhus came out riding elephants and horses. People standing on the roadside showered flowers on them and the proclamation of Har-Har Mahadev and Har-Har Gange were heard resonating. Saints were walking ahead in the procession carrying the religious flag of the Akhara.



After which five Mahamandaleshwars and one Acharya Mahamandaleshwar of the Akhara were seen riding on a carriage. This was the fourth Akhara in the Maha Kumbh, which entered the Mela area. Earlier, Panchdashnam Awahan Akhara had entered on December 22 and Shripanchdashnam Juna Akhara and Kinnar Akhara on December 13. Meanwhile ADG Law and

Order and STF Amitabh Yash has said that UP Police knows very well how to deal with threats and dangers. Coordination is being established with central agencies for intelligence information. During inspection in Sangam area on Wednesday, he said threats have been received regarding Maha Kumbh earlier also, but the police gave them a befitting reply. It is true that due to the recent incidents and threats received, the risk is more this time. Keeping this in mind, extensive security arrangements are being made and STF has also been prepared along with ATS and coordination is also being established with central agencies.

Truck driver killed in mishap

Kanpur (PNS): A truck driver was killed while four others were injured when a bus ramed into his stationary vehicle from behind on Kanpur-Aligarh highway under Shivajipur police area early on Thursday morning. The injured included the bus driver and conductor. Police sent all the injured to a hospital and body to the mortuary. The incident took place when due to fog the bus going to Delhi from Kanpur suddenly ramed into the stationary truck on Kanpur-Aligarh highway. Due to powerful collision, the truck fell into a pit which led to the killing of its driver Devendra (46) of

Khalerpura Sariwal, Gurdaspur (Punjab) on the spot. Bus driver Manoj Kumar, conductor Atul Kumar of Ramadevi, Kanpur, and two passengers were injured. The SO Shivrajpur said the mishap took place due to fog. Kin of the deceased had been informed and the body sent for autopsy, he said. **MUSIC PROGRAMME:** Noted Thumri and Ghazal singer Dr Shalini Ved Tripathi will perform in a music programme 'Aaghaaz' (Ek Sham Ghazal Ke Naam) here at the United Public School auditorium in Civil Lines on December 28. She is the founder of Shalini School of Cultural Society

(SSCS). Addressing mediapersons, she said the event aimed at inspiring younger generation towards the mainstream of singing and music. It was an effort to make people return to ancient culture. **STUDENTS EXCEL:** three students of Ranjiana Devi Sangeet Mahavidyalaya & Dhruwad Kendra did the city proud by excelling in the state music competition organised by the UP Sangeet Natak Academy. They are : Daivya Gupta (first in Dhruwad recital, child category); Shashwat Pandey (first in Dhruwad recital, teenage category) and Mrdul Awasthi (second in Khayal recital, youth category).

Works for use & propagation of Rajbhasha highlighted

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ PRAYAGRAJ

A meeting of the Regional Official Language Implementation Committee was held here on Thursday under the chairmanship of General Manager (GM) Upendra Chandra Joshi at North Central Railway (NCR) Headquarters. Addressing the officers Joshi said most of our officers and employees are either proficient in Hindi or have working knowledge. Therefore, we should promote the use of official language Hindi. Joshi said that both Hindi and English languages should be compulsorily used in information related to passenger and customer service and facilities and all other items at the stations. Mahakumbh Mela is starting from January 13 in Prayagraj. Indian Railways has a tradition of providing the best facilities to the devotees coming to Kumbh Mela. Railways is fully



committed to provide its best services to the tourists coming from India and abroad in the Maha Kumbh Mela with full readiness. During the Maha Kumbh, we have to strengthen the spirit of unity in diversity by providing our services in simple and understandable Hindi to the passengers coming from every corner of the country at Prayagraj Junction and other important stations. Upendra Chandra Joshi said the arrangement of announcements in major Indian languages during the Maha

Kumbh at the stations of NCR located at Prayagraj for the convenience of non-Hindi speaking passengers is a very commendable work. Joshi directed all department heads and officers to maintain the progress achieved in the use of Hindi or Hindi-English bilingual in the provisions of the Official Language Act and Rules, all types of correspondence, comments, dictation, inspection reports, departmental proceedings, etc. and to achieve the desired target. Joshi congratulated the North Central Railway's Rail Spring

Factory, Sitouli on being selected as the ideal factory by the Railway Board for the excellent use and propagation of Hindi and for this the Railway Minister announced the award of Rajbhasha Shield. At the beginning of the programme, GM released the Maha Kumbh Special Issue of the headquarters 'Rajbhasha magazine' 'Rail Sangam'. In the meeting Deputy Chief Rajbhasha Officer and Deputy Chief Signal and Telecommunication Engineer/Project Priyanka Singh welcomed the Chairman of the Committee, GM UC Joshi and all members and apprised them of the works done and achievements made for the use and propagation of Rajbhasha. Singh informed that a Rajbhasha exhibition of works being done in the electric traction distribution branch was organised in the DRM's office, Agra, and use and propagation of Rajbhasha was reviewed.

UPSIDA committed to promoting entrepreneurship among women

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ KANPUR

In alignment with the Central Government's "Nari Shakti Mission", which is dedicated to women's empowerment, the Uttar Pradesh State Industrial Development Authority (UPSIDA) is making remarkable strides in creating secure and inclusive work environment for women within its industrial areas. The "Nari Shakti Mission" plays a vital role in the socio-economic development of the nation, aiming to empower women through education, health, employment, safety, and political participation. It focuses on implementing effective laws and policies to combat violence and pro-

vide girls' education, economic independence and entrepreneurship. UPSIDA is actively supporting this mission through various initiatives. UPSIDA is committed to generating new employment opportunities and fostering entrepreneurship among women. Under the Central Government's ambitious "Mission Shakti" scheme, UPSIDA has taken a significant step by allocating 45 industrial plots to women entrepreneurs through e-auctions and the Nivesh Mitra portal during the financial year 2024-25. These plots will facilitate the establishment of diverse industries, including steel fabrication, garment accessories, and plastic production, contributing to both women's economic empowerment and the industrial growth of Uttar Pradesh. Recognising the importance of skill development, UPSIDA conducts training programs to

enhance women's employability. The authority plays a crucial role not only in promoting industries but also in creating safe and secure industrial areas for women. Key initiatives for women's safety and empowerment include street lights and CCTV cameras; pink community toilets; pink dormitories; crèches/Day Care centres; pick-and-drop facility; police pink booths; Prerna canteens and organising health camps. Chief Executive Officer Mayur Maheshwari said, "Ensuring a safe and inclusive workplace for women employees in our industrial areas is one of our top priorities. We have taken several important steps to promote women's safety, including the installation of CCTV cameras. We are constantly striving to create a better environment for our women employees. Additionally, we take responsibility for their

healthcare by organising regular health camps, providing essential health information and check-up services". UPSIDA believes that women's active participation is essential for industrial progress and remains dedicated to building an environment where they can work without fear and contribute significantly to the nation's development. **METRO RIDE:** Kanpur Metro made Christmas Day truly special for the children from Rajkiya Baal Griha, Kalyanpur, by organising a memorable free metro ride for them. To add to the festive spirit, Santa Claus visited Kanpur Metro stations, distributing toffees and cookies to passengers, spreading joy throughout the day. It organised a special free ride for approximately 40 children and their accompanying staff from Rajkiya Baal Griha, Kalyanpur.

President confers Pradhan Mantri Rashtriya Bal Puraskar to 17 children for excellence in various fields

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

President Droupadi Murmu on Thursday presented the Pradhan Mantri Rashtriya Bal Puraskar to 17 children, recognizing their exceptional courage and outstanding achievements across diverse fields, including art, culture, sports and innovation. The President underlined the importance of nurturing and celebrating young talents. "Providing opportunities and recognizing children's talents has always been a part of our tradition. This tradition should be further strengthened to ensure that every child realizes their full potential," she said. The award celebrates extraordinary accomplishments in seven categories: art and culture, bravery, innovation, science and technology, social service, sports and environment. The honourees -- seven boys and ten girls selected from 14 states and Union Territories -- were presented with a medal, certificate and citation booklet. Among them was Keya Hatkar, a 14-year-old author and disability advocate, recognized for her excellence in art and culture. Despite living with spinal muscular atrophy, she founded initiatives like "IM POSSIBLE" and "SMA-ART," promoting inclusivity and disability awareness.



President Murmu highlighted the importance of honouring such talents, saying, "The tradition of recognising and nurturing children's potential has always been a part of our culture. Their contributions will lead India to the pinnacle of progress." She further emphasised the Ministry of Women and Child Development's role in sharing these stories of inspiration with the wider public. The President also paid homage to the unparalleled sacrifices of Guru Gobind Singh's sons, commemorated as 'Veer Bal Diwas' on December 26, saying, "Their sacrifices for faith and self-respect continue to inspire countless generations. On this day, the nation bows in reverence to their bravery and spirit." Among the other awardees was Ayaan Sajad, a 12-year-

old Sufi singer from Kashmir, honoured for his soulful contributions to Kashmiri music, while 17-year-old Vyas Om Jignesh, who has cerebral palsy, was lauded for his dedication to Sanskrit literature, having memorised over 5,000 shlokas and performed in over 500 shows. In bravery, Saurav Kumar (9) was recognised for saving three girls from drowning, and 17-year-old Ioanna Thapa was honoured for rescuing 36 residents from a fire. "Examples of courage and patriotism in children strengthen the nation's confidence in its future. Such acts are truly commendable," President Murmu remarked as she presented the award to the two children. In the innovation category, 15-year-old Sindhoora Raja was awarded for creating self-

stabilizing devices for Parkinson's patients, and cybersecurity entrepreneur Risheek Kumar (17) was honoured for launching Kashmir's first cybersecurity firm. "Contributions to science, technology, and innovation by children like these show their unparalleled potential to transform lives," the President observed. Hembati Nag, a judo player from a Naxal-affected area was awarded in the sports category. She overcame numerous challenges to win a silver medal at the Khelo India National Games. Mentioning Nag's story, President Murmu said, "Hembati's resilience amidst adversity is an example of unmatched courage and determination." Chess prodigy Anish Sarkar, the youngest FIDE-ranked player at just three years old, was also honoured. The President envisioned a bright future for the awardees, adding, "In 2047, when we celebrate the centenary of our independence, these award winners will be enlightened citizens of the country. Such talented boys and girls will become the builders of a developed India, shaping its destiny through their talent and efforts." "May every child of this nation have a bright and prosperous future, for in their success lies the future of India," she said.

PM Modi pitches for equipping youngsters with skills in emerging technologies

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Thursday stressed the need for a futuristic approach to equip youngsters with skills in emerging technologies like artificial intelligence and machine learning, as he highlighted the crucial role they play in the country's progress. Speaking at an event to mark Veer Bal Diwas, Modi underscored the need to adapt to rapid changes and challenges across various fields, emphasising the government's "youth-centric" policies and efforts to move in that direction with the start of the new education policy. With his government marking the journey of the Constitution's 75 years in a major way, Modi said the Constitution's principle of equality aligns with the teachings of gurus who advocated the welfare of all. Modi said his government is committed to supporting young talent and fostering their self-confidence. "This era has moved beyond machines to machine learning. AI is taking centre stage, and we can see its application replacing conventional software. It is essential to make our youth future ready to tackle



these challenges," he said. He urged the youth to work towards making their respective sectors, be it railways, semiconductors, travel or astronomy, the best. Remembering the "unparalleled" sacrifice of Guru Gobind Singh's sons, the Sahibzadas, he said they chose "unwavering courage and faith over submission to the Mughal Empire's oppression". He noted that Veer Bal Diwas teaches an enduring lesson: "No matter how adverse the circumstances, nothing is greater than the nation's cause. Every act done in the interest of the nation is an act of valour." "More than 300 years ago, on December 26, the Sahibzadas, despite their tender age, displayed unparalleled bravery

and sacrificed their lives. They rejected every temptation and endured unimaginable torture, showing that for them, the nation's cause was supreme," he said, urging youngsters to draw inspiration from their legacy. He said India's strong democracy was built on the bravery and sacrifice of the Sahibzadas. "The Constitution teaches us that no one is small or big in the country," he said, adding that this principle aligns with the teachings of our gurus, who advocated for the welfare of all. The prime minister also interacted with the winners of the Pradhan Mantri Rashtriya Bal Puraskar. Seventeen children from 14 states and Union Territories were honoured for their exceptional contributions in fields like art and culture,

bravery, innovation, science and technology, social service, sports, and environment. Congratulating the awardees, Modi said, "These children have demonstrated what India's youth are capable of achieving. I extend my best wishes to all the winners on behalf of the nation." He elaborated on the government's focus on empowering the youth through targeted policies. "From startups to science, sports to entrepreneurship, a new wave of transformation is happening. Our policies prioritise giving strength to the youth. Whether it is the startup ecosystem, the future of the space economy, or sports and fitness, all our initiatives are youth-centric." On the occasion, Modi launched the 'Suposhit Gram Panchayat Abhiyan', a programme aimed at improving nutritional outcomes through active community participation. The initiative aligns with the government's broader goal of ensuring the well-being of every Indian. Modi also urged young Indians to embrace the values of courage, innovation, and service to propel the nation towards greater unity and progress.

Defence Secretary launches Rashtraparv website, mobile app

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

A website that will facilitate access to information related to the organisation of events such as Republic Day and Independence Day, host their live streaming and provide details related to tickets and seating arrangements was launched on Wednesday. Defence Secretary Rajesh Kumar Singh launched the Rashtraparv website along with its mobile app on the occasion of 'Good Governance Day' that commemorates the birth anniversary of former prime minister Atal Bihari Vajpayee, the defence ministry said. "The website will facilitate access to information related to organisation of national events such as Republic Day, Beating Retreat ceremony, Independence Day, live streaming, purchase of tickets, provide information related to seating arrangements and route-maps of events," it said in a statement. The defence secretary said the website and mobile app, developed by the ministry, "also has



a system for managing the tableaux proposals and historic data regarding events". It will host a tableau management portal to facilitate states and Union Territories, ministries and departments in designing and finalising their tableaux for the Republic Day event, the statement said. The website and mobile application have been a result of a consultative process adopted by the ministry. The states had suggested for a portal for the management of data related to the design of tableaux. Similarly, viewers of Republic Day events in the feedback had

suggested having information regarding events, parades, tableaux. The Rashtraparv website has been developed by incorporating all these inputs, it added. The website can be accessed at rashtraparv.Mod.Gov.In and the mobile app can be downloaded from the government app store (M-Seva), the ministry said. The initiative is a step further towards openness, transparency and citizen-centric governance and is a fitting tribute to the late former prime minister on Good Governance Day, the statement said.

Delhi tutor held for protests by civil service aspirants in Patna

PTI ■ PATNA

A Delhi-based tutor was held on Thursday on the charge of instigating aspirants who tried to "storm into" the Bihar Public Service Commission (BPSC) office in Patna, demanding cancellation of its December 13 examination, an official said. Patna's District Magistrate (DM) Chandrasekhar Singh told PTI that preliminary investigations into Wednesday's protests found that one Rohit, a tutor, mobilised and instigated the aspirants. Senior Superintendent of Police (SSP) Rajeev Mishra said, "Initial investigations have revealed that Rohit had come from Delhi and brought along a number of persons, including girls, posing as disgruntled BPSC aspirants. He is being examined by the investigators." The source of their funding is also being investigated as they seem to be part of a larger conspiracy, he said. "We are probing the larger conspiracy behind yesterday's



incident. What is the source of funding for those who came from outside the state to instigate BPSC aspirants is also the focus of our probe. Rohit seems to be the mastermind of yesterday's protest. Patna Police will send a preliminary report to the Economic Offences Unit (EOU) to investigate their source of funding," he told PTI. Alleging irregularities in the 70th Integrated Combined Competitive Examination (CCE), aspirants demonstrated outside the BPSC office and sought re-examination. The police baton-charged the aspi-

rants to bring the situation under control. The protesters claimed they were treated "like terrorists" and many of them were injured in the police action, a charge which was denied by the authorities. Popular vlogger Motiur Rahman Khan, known as Guru Rahman, also joined the protests at Gardani Bagh. "Police action against BPSC aspirants was highly condemnable. Protesting BPSC aspirants should not have been treated like this. My support is always with the students," he said.

Home Minister Shah to embark on two-day visit to Odisha from Dec 28

PTI ■ BHUBANESWAR

Union Home Minister Amit Shah will embark on a two-day visit to Odisha from December 28, during which he will hold an interactive meeting with BJP leaders and workers and attend several other events, a senior party leader said on Thursday. BJP's Odisha in-charge Vijaypal Singh Tomar said that Shah will arrive in Bhubaneswar on December 28 night and stay till the evening of December 29. On December 29, Shah will attend a programme of Indo-Tibetan Border Police (ITBP), and interact with BJP MPs, MLAs and workers at an event in Kalinga Stadium. Shah will also virtually attend from Bhubaneswar an important meeting of BJP state unit presidents, organisational secretaries, in-charges, deputy in-charges, and national office bearers from across the coun-



try, he said. Replying to a query, Tomar said there was no plan for Shah to visit Sambalpur though it was scheduled earlier. Shah had last visited Odisha from November 30 to December 1 to attend the DGP-IGP conference. Prime Minister Narendra Modi will also visit Odisha on January 9 to attend the Pravasi Bharatiya Diwas here. He will again visit the state on January 28 to inaugurate the 'Utkarsh Odisha: Make in Odisha' investors' meet.

Thousands offer prayers at Sabarimala during mandala puja

PTI ■ PATHANAMTHITTA (KERALA)

Thousands of devotees offered prayers at the Sabarimala Lord Ayyappa temple on Thursday as the auspicious mandala puja was performed at the hill shrine. This marked the culmination of the 41-day-long first leg of the annual pilgrimage season. The mandala puja was conducted in a deeply devotional atmosphere between noon and 12.30 pm after the idol of Lord Ayyappa, the principal deity, was adorned with the "thanka anki," the sacred golden attire brought to the sannidhanam (temple complex) in a ceremonial proces-



sion on Wednesday evening. The temple will close for the night with the recitation of 'Harivarasnam,' temple

authorities said. They added that the Sabarimala temple will reopen at 5 pm on December 30 for the makar-

avilakku festival, which will conclude on January 14. The rituals were led by the temple's head priest, Kandararu Rajeevaru, who adorned the idol with the sacred attire. Thousands of pilgrims from Kerala and other states, who waited in queues for hours in and around the sannidhanam, attended the ceremonies. Prominent officials of the Travancore Devaswom Board were also present near the sanctum sanctorum. According to officials of the TDB, the apex temple body that manages the shrine, as of Wednesday, 32.5 lakh pilgrims had visited the shrine, an increase of 4.07 lakh compared to the same period last

year. In 2023, 28.42 lakh devotees visited the shrine during this period. Spot bookings were limited to 5,000 on December 25 and 26 as part of the arrangements for mandala puja. However, darshan was ensured for all devotees who arrived at Sabarimala, TDB officials said. On Wednesday, when the 'thanka anki' procession reached the sannidhanam, over 62,000 devotees had darshan, they said. By noon on Thursday, nearly 20,000 devotees visited the hill shrine through virtual queue and spot booking facilities before the temple closed, they added.

Rajnath Singh to chair sixth edition of Armed Forces Flag Day CSR conclave today

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

Defence Minister Rajnath Singh on Friday here will chair the sixth edition of the Armed Forces Flag Day (AFFD) Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) conclave, defence ministry said on Thursday. Giving details, officials said the event organised by Kendriya Sainik Board under Department of Ex-Servicemen Welfare aims to highlight the measures taken towards rehabilitation, resettlement and welfare of the veterans, widows and their dependents and for mobilis-



ing the CSR support towards these efforts. The defence minister will also felicitate the prominent CSR contributors to the AFFD Fund. Minister of state for defence Sanjey Seth, Chief of Defence

Staff (CDS) General Anil Chauhan, Secretary ESW, Niten Chandra, members from the CSR fraternity, veterans, the defence service personnel and other senior officials of the ministry will also attend the conclave.

Yogi Adityanath's 2024: A year of fiery rhetoric and political messaging

BISWAJEET BANERJEE ■ LUCKNOW

In a year marked by political contests and cultural debates, Uttar Pradesh Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath's speeches in 2024 transcended electoral rallies, becoming rallying cries that resonated deeply across India. His carefully crafted remarks, blending critique of opposition parties with appeals for unity among followers of Sanatan Dharma, cemented his position as a mass leader with a vision for a unified and culturally proud India. Among his most impactful slogans was "Katenge Toh

Batenge, Ek Rahenge Toh Nek Rahenge," delivered in Agra in August. This phrase, urging unity among communities, gained traction nationwide as a symbol of his call for solidarity and shared purpose. It underscored a year where Adityanath repeatedly sought to redefine narratives on governance, culture, and justice. Throughout 2024, his speeches targeted the opposition, particularly the Samajwadi Party (SP) and Congress, accusing them of fostering division, lawlessness, and pseudo-secularism. In Etawah, he raised the issue of justice for the families of victims of mafia violence, including the widows

of slain leaders like BJP MLA Krishnanand Rai and Umesh Pal. He said: SP should give account of Mangalsutra of Alka Rai, Pooja-Jaya Pal" (April 25, Etawah). By questioning the opposition's silence on these matters, Adityanath positioned himself as a crusader for justice and law and order. In his addresses to marginalised communities, Adityanath invoked symbols like Bajrang Bali to emphasize the collective power of unity. At a BJP Backward Class Morcha meeting in Lucknow, he likened the strength of the OBC community to Bajrang Bali's might,



declaring their unity as a force capable of dismantling the divisive strategies of pseudo-secular politics. He said:

"Bajrang Bali's power in OBC society will burn Ravana's Lanka" (July 29, Lucknow) The Chief Minister's rhetoric

often combined vivid imagery with sharp criticism. Phrases like "No Sadbhavna for Mafia and Goons, only the Bullet Train of Justice" captured his administration's stance on women's safety and law enforcement, while "SP ki Topi Laal, Kaarname Kaale" evoked allegations of corruption and criminality against his political opponents. In Haryana, during an election rally, Adityanath critiqued Congress leaders as "Accidental Hindus raised in Roman culture," a remark aimed at reinforcing BJP's Hindutva narrative. His comments drew sharp criticism but also bolstered his party's

ideological position among its core supporters. Adityanath's speeches also highlighted his focus on cultural pride and historical legacy. At the unveiling of Rashtraveer Durgadas Rathore's statue in Agra, he called for national unity by reflecting on the lessons of divided nations like Bangladesh. His one-liner: "Batenge to katenge, ek rahenge to nek rahenge" (August 26, Agra) became the theme of election campaign in Haryana and Maharashtra. In the Winter session of the state assembly, he reaffirmed India's cultural identity, emphasizing the legacy of

figures like Ram, Krishna, and Buddha while advocating mutual respect among religious communities. He said: "India will uphold the legacy of Ram, Krishna, and Buddha" (December 16, Lucknow). Through his speeches, Adityanath painted a narrative of a strong, unified, and culturally rooted Uttar Pradesh, countering what he described as the opposition's failures and divisive politics. As the year closes, his rhetoric has not only solidified his political standing but also ensured his voice continues to echo in the state's political and cultural discourse.



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PAPER WITH PASSION

A blow to regional peace

The fragile peace of South Asia faced a severe setback when Pakistan conducted airstrikes in Afghanistan

On the night of December 24, 2024, a series of airstrikes conducted by Pakistan in Afghanistan's Barmal district of Paktika province claimed the lives of at least 15 civilians, including women and children. The strikes targeted seven villages, causing significant destruction, particularly in areas like Murg Bazaar and Laman, where an entire family of five was killed. This incident has further strained relations between Pakistan and Afghanistan, raising serious concerns about the stability of South Asia. The airstrikes appear to be a direct response to Pakistan's growing concerns over the activities of the Tehreek-e-Taliban Pakistan (TTP). Pakistan has justified the strikes as a necessary measure to eliminate TTP hideouts and secure its borders. However, the Afghan Taliban strongly denies these allegations, claiming instead that the airstrikes targeted civilians, including Waziristani refugees who had previously fled military operations in Pakistan's tribal areas. The implications of this attack extend far beyond the immediate violence, casting a shadow over peace and security in South Asia. The airstrikes, coupled with the Taliban's vow to retaliate, risk escalating into a broader conflict between Pakistan and Afghanistan. Such hostilities could destabilise the region, which is already grappling with insurgencies, cross-border terrorism, and long-standing disputes.



In addition to the geopolitical ramifications, the humanitarian impact is profound. Afghanistan, a nation still recovering from decades of war, now faces further devastation. Civilian populations, particularly refugees, are bearing the brunt of this violence, with villages like Murg Bazaar reduced to rubble and countless families displaced. The destruction exacerbates an already dire humanitarian crisis, highlighting the urgent need for international aid and support. This conflict also undermines ongoing peace efforts in the region. Dialogues involving Afghanistan, Pakistan, and other stakeholders, essential for fostering stability, risk being derailed by such incidents. Additionally, it hinders cooperative initiatives against terrorism, a shared threat that requires coordinated regional action. The situation further complicates geopolitics in South Asia, prompting countries like India, China and Iran to reassess their strategies. Pakistan's actions, though driven by immediate security concerns, may strain its relationships with traditional allies and global powers advocating for peace in the region. To address this growing crisis, both countries must prioritise dialogue and cooperation. Constructive bilateral engagement is crucial to resolving mutual concerns, particularly regarding the TTP and border security. Neutral mediators, such as the United Nations, could play a vital role in facilitating these discussions. Beyond bilateral efforts, regional cooperation is essential. A unified initiative led by organisations like the South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC) could encourage collective action against terrorism and promote economic interdependence, reducing the incentives for conflict.

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PICTALK



The Badrinath Dham covered with snow during fresh snowfall, in Chamoli

Jordan's ambivalent stance on Palestine



BHOPIINDER SINGH

While maintaining a façade of solidarity, Jordan's actions often reveal a pragmatic, if controversial, approach to safeguarding its own interests in a volatile region

Jordanian reality towards the Palestinians) Jordanians have had a wounded, complicated, and manipulative history. House of Hashim or the Hashemite dynasty rules Jordan with the current King Abdullah II, as the 41st generation of the direct descendants of Prophet Muhammad. While Hashemites were the Sharif and Emir of Mecca with rule over larger Hejaz, they were violently ousted from the control over the same by the rival Saud family. This military loss led to the loss of the symbolically vital title of the "Custodian of the Two Holy Mosques" to the Saud family, of modern-day Saudi Arabia. Hashemites were also to lose monarchical claim of rule on lands of Syria, Lebanon, Palestine and Iraq and were left with only the Jordanian swathes – which unlike other Arab lands was bereft of oil, natural resources, ports, or any other meaningful lever of power. They had to be creative in dealing with the situation and remaining relevant and protected. Geographical contiguity to Palestinian lands led to Jordan demonstrating fluctuating concern that oscillated from supporting the Palestinian cause to willy-nilly, acting against the same. During the Arab-Israeli War of 1948, Jordan occupied the West Bank and East Jerusalem (which it annexed in 1950), only to lose the same to Israel in the Six-Day War of 1967. Historians often note the unique culture of "back channels" (facilitating clandestine meetings) between the Jordanians and Israelis that led to counterintuitive accommodations, even amid war. In the subsequent Arab-Israeli War of 1973 (Yom Kippur War), Jordan had curiously avoided joining Arab ranks against Israel. Jordanian King Hussein had secretly flown to Tel Aviv to warn Israeli Prime Minister Golda Meir of the impending Arab plans to attack Israel. Ultimately when Jordan was morally forced to support the war against Israel, declassified accounts confirm that it was only to preserve Jordan's image in the Arab world and that it had already entered into a tacit agreement with Israel that it would not attack Israeli elements. By 1994 the two countries



It wasn't the first time the Jordanians had worked duplicitously against the Arab or Palestinian cause, as just a couple of years earlier, the infamous and bloody "Black September" (Sep 1970 – July 1971) had occurred, Jordanian Army had surrounded camps and townships with Palestinians fideayen of various groups and brutally cut them down to size. Nearly 3500 were killed in the purge and the PLO (Palestinian Liberation Organisation) fighters were expelled to neighbouring Lebanon. Again, the Jordanians had aligned with Israel before commencing this attack. Importantly Syrian forces that had intervened on behalf of Palestinian fighters were repulsed leaving 600 Syrians dead and a loss of 120 tanks. Interestingly, like the historically insincere support of Jordanians towards the Palestinians, one important figure who participated along the Jordanian forces in massacring the Palestinians was a then Pakistani Brigadier (later dictator) Zia-ul-Haq, who was on deputation. In 1987 Jordanian King Hussein and Israeli foreign affairs minister (later President) Shimon Peres met secretly to work on a peace treaty which was followed up with Jordanians forsaking their claim on the West Bank, the subsequent year. By 1994 the two countries



IN THE SUBSEQUENT ARAB-ISRAELI WAR OF 1973 (YOM KIPPUR WAR), JORDAN HAD CURIOUSLY AVOIDED JOINING ARAB RANKS AGAINST ISRAEL

signed a formal Peace Treaty (the second Arab nation after Egypt) and normalised relations with Israel. Odd public bickering on issues like Al Aqsa Mosque aside, the top leadership of both countries kept meeting discreetly, whilst Jordan kept maintaining the façade of support towards Palestine. Practically, they engaged and operated as allies. Post the Hamas terror attack (7th Oct 2023) on Israel and the subsequent and disproportionate bludgeoning of the Gaza Strip, the Jordanians had no choice but to expel the Israeli ambassador to maintain face in the Arab world. However, as it was only Iran and its proxies like the Syrian Bashar Al Assad government and the Lebanese Hezbollah who were offering any meaningful resistance to the Israelis – then the Jordanians did the unthinkable in favour of the Israelis when they shot down Iranian drones attacking Israel. Practically, the Jordanians weighed in favour of the Israeli military (all perfunctory concerns towards the beleaguered Palestinians, notwithstanding). Jordanians watched silently as Southern Lebanon was attacked and as the Syrian regime was overrun by forces born out of Al Qaeda, ending the last possible faction that had taken on the Israelis in favour of the Palestinians. For

a long, Jordanian King Abdullah had warned against the spectre of a rising "Shia Crescent" (assertion of Shiite rule in Iran, Iraq, Syria and Lebanon). He therefore would be presumably pleased to see the decimation of the sectarian rivals, which coincidentally also ended the last modicum of challenge to the Israelis. Beyond vacuous words, the practical conduct of the Jordanians has been suspiciously two-faced on the ostensible redlines as defined by King Abdullah i.e., "No to abandoning the guardianship of Jerusalem and the holy sites, no to the one-state solution, and no for Jordan to be an alternative homeland for the Palestinians". The picture has perhaps never been further from the so-called Jordanian redlines, as now, the fate of Palestinians, Jerusalem, and the possibility of a two-state solution, is at its lowest. History will judge the conduct of Arab monarchies and their lip-serving commitment towards Palestine, but perhaps none as ambidextrously as the Jordanians, who often fancy themselves to be of the highest order. (The writer, a military veteran, is a former Lt Governor of Andaman & Nicobar Islands and Puducherry. The views expressed are personal)

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

SOLVING INDIA'S WATER CRISIS

Madam — Recently, Prime Minister Narendra Modi has laid the foundation stone of the Ken-Betwa river linking project, the first initiative under the national river linking policy, at Khajuraho in Madhya Pradesh. It is really a welcome step in solving the water crisis in India. Nearly 65 lakh people of Madhya Pradesh and Uttar Pradesh will get drinking water, and more than 7 lakh farmer families of 2000 villages will benefit from the project. Also, it has been proposed to generate 103 MW of hydropower. The project aims to transfer surplus water from the Ken River in Madhya Pradesh to Betwa in UP to irrigate the drought-prone Bundelkhand region. Under the project, a 77 m high and 2.13 km long Daudhan dam and two tunnels will be constructed on the Ken River. Interlinking rivers can control both floods and droughts. This river linking project can have significant ecological consequences, can impact the biodiversity of the region, and can affect Panna Tiger Reserve too. Even then the project will create many employment opportunities as well as boost the rural economy. Ken-Betwa is the first river linking project under the National Perspective Plan (NPP) for the linking of rivers. The National Water Development Agency should identify a few more river linking projects to avoid floods and to cultivate more lands in drought-prone areas in India.

P Victor Selvaraj | Tirunelveli

DEBATE ON CONSTITUTION

Madam —The recent debate commemorating 75 years of the Constitution's adoption left the citizens highly disappointed. The expectation from our parliamentarians was of a healthy debate and an academic discussion. Instead what we saw was a brownie point scoring match between our parliamentarians, who decided to nitpick on what our founding fathers had said and when without providing the context in which it was said.



KAPEEL BARSAIYAN

India's hidden crisis: Battling malnutrition for a healthier future

Malnutrition among children in India stands as a pressing public health challenge, intricately linked to poverty, systemic inequalities and environmental hurdles

Malnutrition among children remains a critical public health issue in India, deeply intertwined with poverty, systemic inequalities, and environmental challenges. Despite the nation's economic progress, the persistent issues of undernutrition and micronutrient deficiencies continue to hinder India's overall growth and development, casting a shadow over its aspirations for a healthier future. The 2023 Global Hunger Index paints a grim picture, with India ranked 111th out of 125 countries and a score of 28.7, indicating a "serious" hunger situation. Although there has been marginal improvement from a score of 29.2 in 2015, the pace of progress lags behind peer economies. Disturbingly, India records the world's highest rate of child wasting at 18.7 per cent, while 35.5 per cent of children under five are stunted. These figures highlight the long-term health and developmental implications of malnutrition. Several interconnected challenges exacerbate this issue.



Poverty remains a significant factor, with India contributing nearly 40 per cent to the global poverty rate and 389 million people living in poverty across South Asia. Millions of children are left vulnerable to malnutrition due to limited resources. Compounding this is inadequate nutrition and sanitation, as poor dietary intake, restricted access to clean water, and insufficient healthcare facilities worsen the situation. The health and cognitive impacts of malnutrition are profound, weakening immune systems, increasing susceptibility to diseases, and impairing cognitive development. These effects

ripple through to academic performance and future opportunities, trapping many in a cycle of poverty. Regional disparities further intensify the problem, with states like Uttar Pradesh, Bihar and Madhya Pradesh shouldering a disproportionate burden of malnourished children. Higher poverty rates and systemic challenges in these regions make addressing the issue even more complex. To combat malnutrition, the Government of India has implemented various programs. POSHAN Abhiyaan aims to enhance the nutritional status of children, pregnant women, and lactating mothers. The Integrated Child Development Services (ICDS) program offers supplementary nutrition, education, immunisation, and health check-ups. The Mid-Day Meal Scheme addresses hunger and malnutrition among school-going children, while the National Food Security Act (NFSA) provides subsidised food grains to economically vulnerable populations. Other initiatives, such as the Pradhan Mantri Matru

Vandana Yojana (PMMVY) and the National Health Mission (NHM), include financial incentives for pregnant women and specialised care through Nutrition Rehabilitation and Lactation Management Centres. While these efforts have yielded positive outcomes, more comprehensive strategies are needed to address the root causes of malnutrition. Tackling poverty, improving education, expanding healthcare access, and ensuring sanitation are critical steps toward sustainable progress. Collaborative efforts among policymakers, non-governmental organisations, and local communities are essential to create meaningful change. True progress is reflected in the wellbeing of every individual, especially the youngest members of society. By prioritising nutrition and equity, India can foster a healthier, well-nourished generation and pave the way for sustainable development. (The writer is Kapel Barsaiyan, President, Buddhi Jyoti Foundation; views are personal)

One Nation, One Subscription



The Government of India's One Nation-One Subscription (ONOS) initiative aims to transform education, research, and innovation by ensuring equitable access to academic resources. Announced in 2022 by Prime Minister Narendra Modi, it aligns with the National Education Policy (NEP) 2020 to create a knowledge-based society. With a Rs 6,000 crore budget allocated for 2025-2027, ONOS will provide subscriptions to international research

journals, academic databases, and other resources, addressing disparities in education and research. The initiative will empower students and researchers, especially from rural and smaller institutions, by granting them access to resources previously limited to well-funded universities. This inclusivity will bridge the rural-urban divide and foster innovation by enabling access to global advancements. Additionally, its focus on digital platforms reduces dependency on physical materials, supporting environmental sustainability and the objectives of the Digital India campaign. Despite its promise, ONOS faces challenges, including concerns over its high cost and limited digital infrastructure in rural areas, which could restrict access. Critics caution that without transparent implementation, the initiative may primarily benefit larger institutions.

RK Jain | Barwani

Our parliamentarians decided to cherry-pick the words of our founding fathers, like B R Ambedkar, J L Nehru, K M Munshi, etc., to suit their own narrative. The constituent assembly had various members with varying views. Each motion was debated and voted in favour of or against, and ultimately the majority carried, but to now selectively pick up each and every sentence and comma from their speeches to paint a narrative is a disservice to the memory of our founding fathers. It is necessary to remember the words of two members of the Constituent Assembly who went on to forge different paths later in life—one Minoo Masani, a parsi who joined Savantartar Party and became Leader of Opposition in Lok Sabha who said, "Where the state belongs to the people, the state is subordinate to the people and only then does the state serve the people" and Shyama Prasad Mukherjee, a devout hindu who served in Nehru's cabinet who said, "We shall go ahead with our work in spite of all obstacles and help to create that great India, united and strong

which will be the motherland of not this community and that, not of this class Or that but of every person, man, woman and child inhabiting this country. " May these words of our founding fathers guide our parliamentarians in securing a bright future for India, and may their sacred constituent be their conscious keeper.

Gurnoor Grewal | Chandigarh

KHEL RATNA CONTROVERSY

Madam —It is baffling that Manu Bhaker, who made history by bagging two medals in a single Olympics in Paris, is absent from the list of Major Dhyan Chand Khel Ratna awardees. If any athlete deserves to be given this award this year, it is Manu Bhaker. Her father is absolutely right: Manu has done her part by giving huge laurels to the country where we have only a handful of individual medal winners; now it is up to the GoI to recognise her feat and reward it.

Bal Govind | Noida

Send your feedback to: letterstopioneer@gmail.com



FIRST COLUMN

ACHIEVERS NEVER QUIT

Achievers are not born but forged by their ability to ignite their natural talents over time



KUMARDEEP BANARJEE

Jack Croushore was a charismatic leader, a successful steel magnate and an achiever, who never called it quits, regardless of the situation that confronted him. He was also equally adept in adopting the strategy of using kid gloves when situations so required. Over a period, his mind learnt that situational factors influence leadership effectiveness. Successful leaders are high-end achievers, those who do not quit. They are blessed with halcyon days in life, which provide them with joyful moments, and there may be woebegone incidences that fortuitously do not cripple their passion to climb the ladder of prosperity. Nancy Gibbs says, "High achievers, we imagine, were wired for greatness from birth. But then you must wonder why, over time, natural talent seems to ignite in some people and dim in others." Recall the talismanic movie 3 Idiots. Amir Khan, Sharman Joshi and R. Madhavan essayed the principal roles.

They were euphemistically called the 3 idiots by the director of the institute. Among them, Rancho (Amir Khan) was an achiever blessed with natural talent, out-of-the-box thinking and revolutionary ideas. There is a poignant scene in the movie where Ali Fazal, who played the role of Joy Lobo, snuffs out his life as he was unable to meet the deadline for completing the assigned project work and thus became a laggard. He was working on a battery-operated 'flying machine', which could capture various events through its magical eyes and features. Alas, his attempts were abortive, while the consummate Rancho was successful in designing the machine... and during a test flight, he and the entire college were witnesses to the shocking tragedy of Joy Lobo taking his life. Dismayed at the turn of events, Lobo prominently wrote on the walls of his room - I QUIT.



The scene graphically recorded the miscarriage of the project and the abject subjugation of the character who was not an achiever. Once, some superiors decided to cashier an employee for a lacklustre performance. He decided to quit all relationships and his spirituality, and in sheer desperation informed God that he had decided to abandon his life. God asked him to look around in a forest for ferns and bamboo. When God planted ferns and bamboo seeds, he took special care of them and protected them from all the vagaries of weather. Within a year the ferns became resplendent and iridescent, covering the entire floor space, while the bamboo seeds showed no growth.

Over the following four years, the forest became verdant with the ever-expanding ferns and yet there was no sign of the bamboo growing or developing into a tree. In the fifth year, the bamboo seeds began to sprout. Within the next six months, the bamboo shoots rose to a height of a hundred feet, lording over the fern plantation. God smiled at the man and said that he never gave up on the bamboo seeds over five years. During this timeframe, the roots of the bamboo tree were growing. Our period of struggle is akin to the development of the roots of the bamboo tree. Both the fern and the bamboo grew at their own pace, as willed by the universe and nature. They complemented each other's growth and were not competitors. Happiness makes us sweet and trials fortify us; sorrows when encountered should make us strong and success ought to make us grateful and radiant. In the ultimate analysis, it is only a positive disposition and thoughts that keep us ticking so that achievers do not lower their guard and thereby do not quit.

(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)

The key to shaping inclusive future

As automation, artificial intelligence and globalisation reshape industries, lifelong learning and adaptability are essential to staying competitive



DINESH SOOD

In an era of rapid technological advancements and shifting economic landscapes, the conversation around skill development has never been more relevant. Skills are no longer just tools for employment; they are the chisels and hammers that sculpt our collective future, shaping individuals and nations. Historically, skills were tied to tradition and geography. A farmer learned the trade from generations before, and an artisan honed their craft through years of apprenticeship. But the 21st century has shattered these boundaries. Today, the Advent of automation, artificial intelligence, and globalisation demands a workforce that can continuously adapt, innovate, and learn. Skills are not static; they evolve, and the pace of this evolution is accelerating. At the heart of this transformation lies the understanding that skill development is no longer a one-time event but a lifelong journey. The future belongs to those who embrace this mindset. A software engineer may need to transition to being a data analyst tomorrow. A marketer should delve into behavioural psychology or artificial intelligence. The world is moving toward a gig economy, where flexibility, creativity, and adaptability are not just assets but necessities. Those who rest on their laurels risk being left behind in a world where change is the only constant. India has the brain power needed to rise in the skilled world. Governments, educational institutions, and private enterprises all play a role in fostering a skill development culture.

Traditional education systems, built to serve industrial-era needs, must undergo a radical shift. The focus should be more than rote learning or degree acquisition, fostering critical thinking, problem-solving, and technical competencies. Initiatives like coding boot camps, vocational training, and online learning platforms have already begun to disrupt the status quo, democratising access to quality education. But more must be done to ensure inclusivity and widespread reach. When we talk of skills, we mean making one employable and decently. As per the National Policy of Skill Development and Entrepreneurship 2015, we had the target to impart various skills to 40 crore people by the end of 2022. However, around 4 crore people have been trained. Still, there is a massive opportunity for varied stakeholders to come forward and arm our men and women with employable skills. It is nothing but aligning the entire skill ecosystem with the demands of employers. Today, a considerable gap exists between the demand for a skilled workforce and their availability in the market.

Among 150 million young people in developing countries, around 33 per cent are skilled but unemployed, as their employability quotient could be better. Government policy interventions can bridge the gap between demand and supply in the workforce market. Incentivising employable skill development through subsidies, tax benefits, or public-private partnerships can empower citizens to upskill or reskill. Furthermore, governments must create frameworks encouraging lifelong learning, such as subsidised courses or learning credits for professionals looking to update their skills. Meanwhile, industries must recognise their role in creating agile workforces.



AMONG 150 MILLION YOUNG PEOPLE IN DEVELOPING COUNTRIES, AROUND 33 PER CENT ARE SKILLED BUT UNEMPLOYED, AS THEIR EMPLOYABILITY QUOTIENT COULD BE BETTER. GOVERNMENT POLICY INTERVENTIONS CAN BRIDGE THE GAP BETWEEN DEMAND AND SUPPLY IN THE WORKFORCE MARKET

Corporate training programs, mentorship initiatives, and collaborations with educational institutions are not just investments in employees but investments in the future of the business itself. Companies that foster a culture of continuous learning often enjoy higher productivity, better employee retention, and a competitive edge in their industries. Moreover, the private sector can lead the way in identifying future skills by analysing market trends and technological advancements, ensuring training programmes remain relevant and forward-looking. However, skill development is not just about economic progress but also a tool for social empowerment. In many developing nations, lack of access to education and skills has perpetuated cycles of poverty. Equipping marginalised communities with in-demand skills can uplift entire populations, ensuring more inclusive growth. A young woman in a rural village learning coding or a displaced worker mastering digital marketing are potent examples of how skills can change lives. These stories highlight the transformative potential of skill development, turning adversity into opportunity and fostering hope where it is needed most. This empowerment extends beyond individuals to communities and entire societies. Skilled populations are better equipped to address local challenges, from improving infrastructure to boosting small businesses. In this way, skill development catalyses innovation and self-reliance, reducing dependency on external aid and fostering sustainable growth. Communities investing in their human capital often see a ripple effect, where increased productivity and prosperity lead to better healthcare, education, and quality of life. As we champion skill development, addressing the challenges it pre-

sents is also critical. The digital divide, for instance, threatens to exclude those who lack access to technology or internet connectivity. Rural areas and underserved regions often bear the brunt of this inequity, leaving millions without the tools to participate in the modern economy. Bridging this gap requires a concerted effort from the public and private sectors, including infrastructure investments, affordable technology, and localised training programs catering to specific regional needs. Similarly, a one-size-fits-all approach to skills training is likely to fail. Each individual's journey is unique, shaped by their aspirations, context, and potential. Personalised, learner-centric approaches must become the norm. Adaptive learning technologies powered by artificial intelligence can significantly tailor educational content to suit individual needs and learning styles. This ensures that skill development is essential, practical, engaging, and relevant. Moreover, we must shift the narrative around failure in skill acquisition. Learning a new skill often involves trial and error, and creating an environment where individuals feel encouraged to experiment and grow without fear of judgment is essential. Employers and educators must foster a culture that values resilience and continuous improvement over perfection. The metaphor of skill as a sculptor is apt. Like marble, raw talent has limitless potential. But becoming something remarkable requires the right tools, guidance, and effort. Skill development chisels away ignorance, carves out opportunities and polishes the rough edges of human potential. It bridges the gap between dreams and reality, between where we are and where we aspire to be. As we look to the future, let us remember the power

of skills to redefine what is possible. Whether combating climate change, revolutionising healthcare and wellness, or exploring the frontiers of space, skilled individuals will be at the helm of every breakthrough. By investing in skill development today, we are not just preparing for tomorrow but shaping it. The urgency of this investment cannot be overstated. The COVID-19 pandemic served as a wake-up call, highlighting the vulnerabilities of unskilled or under-skilled workers in a volatile economy. Millions faced job losses, and industries struggled to adapt to new remote work and digital operations norms. Yet, it also demonstrated the resilience of those equipped with the right skills to pivot and thrive in uncertain times. The lessons learned must guide our approach, emphasising the importance of resilience, adaptability, and future-proof skills. Furthermore, as technology evolves, ethical considerations must be integrated into skill development. Understanding the implications of artificial intelligence, data privacy, and sustainability is as crucial as mastering technical competencies. This holistic approach ensures rapid and responsible progress, fostering a future where innovation aligns with human values and societal well-being. In conclusion, skill development is more than a response to economic demands; it is a transformative force that shapes our world. It empowers individuals, drives innovation, and fosters inclusive growth. By investing in skills, we invest in people, and by investing in people, we invest in the future. (The writer is co-founder and MD of Orane International, a training partner of the National Skill Development Corporation and a network Member of India International Skills Centres. The views expressed are personal)

Witch-hunting in India: A persistent plague claiming women's lives Despite legal interventions, witch-hunting remains a grim reality in parts of India, targeting marginalised women

In 2014, Partners for Law in Development (PLD), a legal resource group working on social justice and women's rights, carried out a study to understand the reasons behind rising violence against women in the name of witch hunting in Bihar, Chhattisgarh and Jharkhand. They found that women were blamed for illness, death and even a bad crop and branded as witches.

The targets of this belief system were largely middle-aged married women with little formal education, from lower economic strata and marginalised castes and communities. Moreover, victims and perpetrators were, more often than not, closely related to each other and,



SWAPNA MAJUMDAR

there was complicity in the community. Their study also revealed that although laws in Bihar, Jharkhand and Chhattisgarh criminalising acts/offences particular to witch hunting, such as 'identifying' any person as a witch along with the mental and physical torture accompanying such identification existed, the apathy of the state led to the continuation of witch hunting prac-

tices. Ten years later, nothing seems to have changed. Witch hunting continues to claim women's lives even in 2024. Over 663 were killed for allegedly practising witchcraft during 2015 and 2021 according to the National Crime Research Bureau (NCRB).

Worryingly, the main perpetrators of this violence also remain the same, says Nirantar Trust, a NGO working on gender and education. Findings of the Trust's recent survey on witch hunting in 114 villages across 10 districts in Bihar showed 43 per cent of the victims were targeted by members from their own family. Their study, released earlier this month, also found a significant proportion of the

women victimised as witches were between the age group 45 to 60. Moreover, 73 per cent of the victims had never been to school. Nirantar also found that more than single women or widows, it was married women who were branded as witches, corroborating the findings of the 2014 PLD study.

In many instances, perpetrators were related to the male kin of the husband and thus negated the traditional belief that married women were safer than single women. Another grave concern raised in the 2024 study is the targeting of women from marginalised backgrounds who have shown agency and the courage to raise their voices against the



deeply entrenched patriarchy. The inability of the government to sensitise men while pushing for women's empowerment has endan-

gered many women in leadership roles. One of the easiest ways to show the woman her place has been to brand her as a witch. Of the 44 per cent of women who faced

accusations of witchcraft from castes other than their own, the majority were from the upper caste. Nirantar found that most women preferred not to report this mental and physical assault as they were afraid it would lead to increased violence, greater social ostracisation and humiliation. They also lacked trust in the sincerity and efficacy of law enforcement agencies. The inability to provide timely justice can be fatal as found by Action Aid Association. The NGO, which detailed 102 case studies from Odisha's 12 districts reporting maximum witch-hunting incidents in 2021, found that despite the law, more than 30 per cent of the total cases had led to the death of the

woman branded as a witch. Chhutki Mahto, the fire-brand social activist from Jharkhand, who received the Padma Shri in 2021 for her role in rescuing over 100 women accused of witchcraft, knows the pain because she, too, was targeted as a witch. She survived and embarked on a mission to help others. But why is the onus only on survivors? NCRB data shows that since 2000, over 2,500 women have been killed for being witches. How many more women need to die before action against such inhuman acts is given the priority it deserves? (The author is a journalist writing on development and gender. The views expressed are personal)

EC makes world's largest electoral dataset public

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 were women, the EC noted. The datasets cover a range of variables, such as details of PC/AC /State wise electors, number of polling stations, State/ PC wise voter turnout, Party wise vote share, gender-based voting behaviour. It also included State wise participation of women electors and much more. "This suo moto initiative, is to enhance the public trust that constitutes the underpinning of India's electoral system," the poll body said in the Statement. "The release of extensive data sets is also in furtherance of the Commission's policy of maximum disclosure, greater transparency and accessibility of election-related data for all stakeholders including academia, research and the general public," it added. The data showed Maharashtra

had the highest number of women contesting candidates with 111 in the fray, followed by 80 in Uttar Pradesh and 77 in Tamil Nadu. But at the same time, out of the total 543 Lok Sabha constituencies, there were 152 where there were no women candidates. The data showed a total of over 97.97 crore citizens had registered themselves as electors as compared to over 91.19 crore in 2019, an increase of 7.43 per cent. Out of these registered electors, 64.64 crore had cast votes in 2024, compared to 61.4 crore in 2019. It also showed that 42.81 lakh postal votes were received but 5.35 lakh were rejected owing to various reasons, including late submission. The data on Lok Sabha Polls, 2024 and four Assembly elections, Andhra Pradesh, Odisha, Sikkim and Arunachal Pradesh, held alongside

parliamentary polls comes against the backdrop of allegations of non-disclosure by the EC. Referring to women participation in the polls, EC said the number of female contesting candidates was 800, compared to 726 in 2019. The data showed that total votes polled, using EVM and postal ballot option, stood at 64,64,20,869. Votes polled on EVMs alone stood at 64,21,39,275, with 32,93,61,948 male voters and 31,27,64,269 female voters. A little over 13,000 registered third gender voters exercised their franchise (27.09 per cent), according to the data. Nearly 43 lakh electors used the postal ballot option to vote. The Dhubri parliamentary constituency in Assam registered the highest turnout of 92.3 per cent while Srinagar in Jammu and Kashmir

registered the lowest turnout of 38.7 per cent, compared to 14.4 per cent in 2019. According to the dataset issued by the EC, as many as 11 parliamentary constituencies saw voting percentage of less than 50 per cent. Repolls, the EC pointed out, were held in 40 polling stations or 0.0038 per cent of the total 10.52 lakh polling stations as compared to 540 in 2019. Referring to overseas Indian electors, EC said over 1.19 lakh such people were registered in the category, including 1.06 lakh men, 12,950 women and 13 third gender, compared to 99,844 registered overseas electors in 2019. Overseas Indian electors are those who are Indian citizens residing abroad due to various reasons and eligible to vote here. They have come to India to vote showing their original passport as a proof of identity.

New police recruits will undergo specialised training to handle law and order situations, says Manipur CM

PTI ■ IMPHAL

Manipur Chief Minister Biren Singh on Thursday said the newly recruited personnel of the 10th and 11th India Reserve Battalion (IRB), who recently concluded training in Assam, would undergo specialised exercise so that they can be deployed for highway protection and handling the law and order situation. During a visit to Manipur Police Training Centre at Pangei in Imphal East district, the CM said the recruits would undergo specialised training at this centre before being deployed across the state. "They will undergo specialised training at Pangei where they will be taught



how to handle law and order situation. If the personnel are deployed in various police stations now, their morale may be down. So, we decided to keep them at one place and use their services wherever and whenever needed," the CM said. "Some of them will be used for highway protection, while others will be used to tackle law and order situation," Singh added.

Singh also said many of the police personnel will undergo refresher courses, and arrangements for procuring new gear for mob control have been made. The CM said construction and maintenance work at the battalion headquarters of 10th and 11th IRB at Nungba and Saivom are also going on currently, he said. "Police are the backbone of society and cannot be demoralised. Many of them will undergo refresher courses to improve their physical fitness and mob control with full gear. Their identity needs to be protected also," Singh added. Singh also requested recruits' parents not to approach ministers and MLAs for transfers and allow them to serve the

state and nation. "Today, I visited the Manipur Police Training Centre at Pangei to inspect the newly constructed barracks, which will soon be utilised for training purposes. Given the current law and order situation in the state, the newly recruited constables will undergo specialised training. This step is essential to enhance the strength and readiness of our police force to ensure safety and security across Manipur," he posted on X. "We are committed to equipping our police personnel with the best facilities and training to meet any challenges," Singh said. He also said houses are being made for internally displaced persons (IDPs) who are staying in schools and colleges.

Congress Vs AAP war can crumble India Bloc

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anti-national-such audacity from Ajay Maken and his party is unacceptable. I demand that the Congress take action against Ajay Maken within 24 hours. Otherwise, we will appeal to the other constituent parties of the INDIA Bloc to expel Congress from the alliance," asserted the AAP Rajya Sabha MP. Ajay Maken reads the BJP script, makes statements at the BJP's behest, and targets AAP leaders on BJP's instructions. And yesterday, he crossed all limits and called our leader Arvind Kejriwal anti-nation," Singh said. The Congress or Ajay Maken have never called any BJP leader in Delhi "anti-national," Singh said. "The audacity Ajay Maken has shown, I demand that the Congress acts against him within 24 hours. Otherwise we will approach the partners in the INDIA Bloc and seek removal of Congress from the Bloc," he said. "We had not said a single word against the Congress during the

Haryana election. Yet the Congress seems to be reading out from the BJP's script. Its candidates' list looks as if it was finalised at the BJP office," Singh said. Atishi echoed similar sentiments, stating that Congress is actively undermining AAP. Atishi said the Congress's actions and words make it clear that it has "tied up" with the BJP for the Delhi election. The Delhi CM also noted that Congress had filed an FIR against her and Arvind Kejriwal. "Why? Has Congress filed any FIR against any BJP leader ever? We have found through credible sources that Congress candidates' election expenditure is coming from the BJP. BJP is funding Congress candidates. We have heard that Sandeep Dikshit is getting funded by BJP," Atishi alleged. "If Congress thinks we (AAP) are anti-national, then why did they contest Lok Sabha elections in alliance with us? It is clear that Congress leaders have reached some mutual understanding with BJP to

defeat AAP and make BJP win in Delhi. If there is no understanding between Congress and BJP, then they should take action against Ajay Maken within 24 hours," she said. Earlier in its complaint, the Youth Congress claimed AAP was using "false and deceptive" promises to gain voters' trust. The Congress also accused the AAP of misappropriating public funds through deceptive advertisements. "AAP leaders, including MLAs and MCD councillors, have been actively collecting sensitive personal information such as voter ID details and phone numbers through an online registration process requiring OTP verification," the complaint alleged. Besides this, the Congress has questioned AAP and Kejriwal on two schemes, free treatment and Rs 2,100 per month to women. The schemes were announced in view of the upcoming Delhi assembly elections 2025. Adding fuel to the fire, several Congress leaders in Delhi have openly targeted AAP convener Arvind

Kejriwal. Maken accused Kejriwal of corruption and administrative failure and called him an 'anti national'. "During the pandemic, when people were dying, Arvind Kejriwal spent crores on a luxurious bungalow. Even after 11 years, ration cards have not been issued to thousands of families in Delhi," Maken said. He also claimed that funds meant for welfare schemes were wasted on advertising campaigns. Moreover, former Delhi CM Sheila Dikshit's son Sandeep Dikshit also attacked AAP and Kejriwal. Citing the conditions set out by the Supreme Court for his release from prison in the excise policy case, Dikshit said that Kejriwal is unfit for the CM post. He explained that Kejriwal cannot sign files or go to the office, thus, the necessity of appointing Atishi as the CM. Dikshit is contesting against Arvind Kejriwal from the New Delhi constituency in the upcoming state polls. This contest is not just a political one but is also being seen as a means of settling scores against Kejriwal.

Kejriwal may lose NDMC membership

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Chahal also informed that on May 25, 2022, the Council had given in-principle approval to the implementation of the Centre's flagship 'Ayushman Bharat Pradhan Mantri Jan Arogya Yojana' (AB-PMJAY) scheme for the residents of New Delhi area in a meeting in which the then Chief Minister Arvind Kejriwal himself was present. "Ayushman Bharat Yojna, launched by the Prime Minister, is one of the flagship schemes of the Government of India. This scheme was created to achieve the goal of universal health coverage under the recommendation of National Health Policy 2017. The Prime Minister had ordered to implement this scheme in all the states, but the Delhi Government has deprived the citizens of Delhi of this scheme due to political reasons," he said.

Over 70 hours on, girl still stuck in borewell in Rajasthan

PTI ■ JAIPUR

Three-year-old Chetna has been stuck inside a narrow 150 feet deep borewell for over 70 hours as the rescue operations were still underway on Thursday to save the girl. Worried about her daughter's condition, Dholi Devi has not eaten anything since the tragic accident on Monday. Chetna fell into the borewell while playing in the agricultural farm of her father in Badiyali Dhani under Sarund police station of Kotputli-Behror district. With each passing moment, the hope for the girl being well is diminishing as the rescue team was not able to supply any food or water to Chetna. Dholi Devi and others are constantly praying for the well-being of Chetna amid the non-stop rescue operation by NDRF and SDRF teams, assisted by the local police and administration. Initially, efforts were made to



pull the girl out of the borewell with the help of a ring but all attempts failed. After two days of repeated attempts that fetched no results, a piling was brought to the spot on Wednesday morning and a pit parallel to the borewell was dug. ".... Now a horizontal tunnel will be made through which the experts will reach the girl," Sarund SHO Mohammad Imran said. He said all possible efforts were made to pull out the girl but all hard work went in vain as the borewell is narrow and

the technique could not deliver results. A team of doctors with an ambulance are at the spot. "The rescue operation is likely to conclude today," the SHO said. Kotputli-Behror District Collector Kalpana Agarwal reached the village late Wednesday night to take stock of the situation. She said that the rescue operation had been constantly going on. A lot of preparations had to be done to bring the piling machine to the farm.

Kerala Govt declares two-day mourning as mark to respect MT Vasudevan

KUMAR CHELLAPPAN ■ KOCHI

Kerala bade a tearful farewell to M T Vasudevan Nair, the numero uno of Malayalam literature who breathed his last on late Wednesday night at a corporate hospital in Kozhikode, a city which was immortalized by his presence. He has been honored with Jnanpith Award in 1995 for his comprehensive contributions to Malayalam literature. The President of India had decorated him with Padma Bhushan in 2005. Ninety-one year old MT (as he is known) was ailing for some time due to age related issues and a team of doctors were attending to him on a round-the-clock basis. MT is rated as the last of the titans of Malayalam literature. In addition to short stories, novels, and travelogues, he left the characteristic "MT Touch" in six feature films which he directed, by walking away with the best director award (three times) in the National Film Festival). One has lost count of the number of times he bagged the Kerala State Film Awards as a director and



script writer. He has authored scripts for more than 60 films and all were run away hits. Nirmalyam (Malayalam for Yesterday's Offerings"), his first venture as a director bagged many national and international awards. P J Antony, who played the role of a village oracle was honored with Bharath award for perfecting the role in the movie which turned out to a trendsetter in Malayalam movies. The novels authored by M T remain as fresh and interesting decades after they were published. Having born and brought up in a village on the banks of Nila, all his literary works feature people whom

one meet in the day-to-day life in the countryside. The theses in his novels and short stories were based on the rising, disintegration and fall of the Nair ancestral families in Malabar. His novel Randamoozham (The Second Turn) published in 1984 tells the story of Mahabharath as seen through the eyes of Bheem. There are no literary works attributed to MT which have gone unrecognized and it is said that he was the one who elevated Malayalam literature to the global arena. The multi-faceted author leaves behind his wife Saraswathi and daughter Aswathi. MT had married

Prameela Nair in 1962 but they were separated in 1978. The couple has a daughter Sitara born out of this marriage. Prime Minister Narendra Modi expressed his sorrow over the passing away of the celebrated writer and movie maker. "Saddened by the passing away of Shri MT Vasudevan Nair Ji, one of the most respected figures in Malayalam cinema and literature. His works, with their profound exploration of human emotions, have shaped generations and will continue to inspire many more. He also gave voice to the silent and marginalised. My thoughts are with his family and admirers. Om Shanti," the PM wrote in X. The Kerala Government has declared a two-day mourning as a mark of respect to MT. The last rites were performed at Smrithi Path, the Kozhikode corporation owned crematorium on Thursday evening in the presence of thousands of fans and well wishers of the last of the Titans in Malayalam literature.

Chhattisgarh Govt cancels constable recruitment in Rajnandgaon, sets up SIT to probe irregularities

PTI ■ RAJNANDGAON

The Chhattisgarh government has cancelled the process of recruitment of police constables in Rajnandgaon district amid allegations of irregularities and set up a SIT for a probe into it, an official said. State Deputy Chief Minister Vijay Sharma, who holds the home portfolio, gave an order to this effect on Wednesday afternoon, he said. "Irregularities came to light in the ongoing recruitment process in the 8th battalion of Rajnandgaon and a case was registered in this connection at Lal Bagh police station on December 17," the official said. Since November 16, candidates from Rajnandgaon, Khairagarh-Chhuikhadan-Gandai, Kabirdham (Kawardha) and Mohla-Manpur-Ambagadh Chowki districts have been participating in the recruitment process here, he said. The police have so far arrested seven persons -- four police constables, two employees of

the event management company and one female candidate -- in connection with the alleged irregularities in the recruitment process, the official said. During the investigation in the case, constable Anil Ratnakar allegedly committed suicide. A note written with a pen was found on his left palm, which stated employees were being targeted in alleged irregularities in recruitment and officers were being protected, he said. Rajnandgaon (Range) Inspector General of Police Deepak Jha has set up a Special Investigation Team (SIT) for a probe into Ratnakar's suicide and sought a report in 10 days, he said. Meanwhile, Superintendent of Police Mohit Garg has handed over the investigation of the alleged irregularities in the recruitment process to the City Superintendent of Police Pushpendra Nayak, the official said. Garg on Wednesday said the

order to cancel the recruitment process for District Police Force Constable Cadre Selection Examination 2023-24 has not been received from the state government so far. Former chief minister and assembly speaker Raman Singh welcomed the state government's decision to cancel the recruitment process. "Today, on the occasion of Good Governance Day, under the leadership of Hon'ble Chief Minister Shri @vishnudasi, Home Minister Shri @vijaysharmacg took a commendable decision to cancel the entire recruitment by taking immediate cognizance of the Rajnandgaon Police Recruitment case," Singh said on X. The CM has directed formation of an SIT for an impartial investigation into the entire matter, he said. "No kind of negligence or corruption will be tolerated in this government of good governance," Singh added. During the recruitment process, the marks obtained by

many candidates in the physical efficiency process were tampered, an official said. "This irregularity was revealed in the investigation by the internal team of Rajnandgaon police, after which an FIR was registered at the Lal Bagh police station in the city," he said. After this, the body of constable Anil Ratnakar, who was posted on marshal duty in the recruitment process, was found hanging in Rampur village on December 21. Ratnakar had written a note on his hand, stating the officers on duty in the recruitment process have implicated the employees, the official said. The opposition Congress has been attacking the state BJP government led by CM Vishnu Deo Sai on the issue of irregularities in the recruitment process. State Congress president Deepak Bajj and former CM Bhupesh Baghel earlier demanded cancellation of the recruitment process and action against the culprits.

Full support to Telugu film industry but no compromise on law and order: Telangana CM

PTI ■ HYDERABAD

Telangana Chief Minister A Revanth Reddy on Thursday made it clear to a visiting Telugu cinema industry delegation that there would be no compromise on law and order in the state and that it applies to everyone including the film fraternity. The CM also conveyed to the delegation of Telugu film personalities led by ace producer and Telangana Film Development Corporation (FDC) Chairman Venkata Ramana Reddy, that a Cabinet Sub-Committee will be constituted to resolve the problems of the film industry and suggested to them to set up an in-house panel as well. The meeting between the CM and the film personalities was held at the Police Integrated Command Control Centre here, and in the wake

of actor Allu Arjun's recent arrest that had led to speculations of 'strained' ties between the ruling dispensation and the cinema industry post the police action against the 'Pushpa' star. A 35-year-old woman died at Sandhya Theatre here in a stampede where Allu Arjun-starrer 'Pushpa 2' was screened on December 4, leading to his subsequent arrest on December 13 and release. "As the Chief Minister, it is my responsibility to enforce the laws. I do not have any personal preferences. Let us all develop the film industry together without confining ourselves to Telugu only. Government is ready to extend all support to the film industry," official sources quoted the CM as saying. Asserting that the cinema industry is as important to the



government as the IT and pharma sectors, Reddy said a Cabinet Sub-Committee will be constituted to resolve the

problems of the film industry. The government is considering organising a major convention to encourage other

film industries to come to the city, he said. "Our intention is to take the (Telugu movie) industry to

the next level," the sources quoted the CM as saying. He also pointed out that the film industry should remember its social responsibility and join the efforts to check drugs and other societal problems. Venkata Ramana Reddy, popularly known as Dil Raju, said besides Telugu movies, shooting of movies of other languages, including Hindi, Tamil and Kannada, are also happening in the city. "So, the view of the CM is that the film industry should give suggestions to government to see that, not just Indian films but Hollywood films are also shot in Hyderabad," he told reporters after the meeting. Asked for the government's stance on allowing benefit shows and hiking ticket prices on special occasions, Dil Raju said they are only a "small part" of the issue and that the

bigger vision is how to take Telugu cinema to the international level and to make Hyderabad city an "international hub". "Time would throw light on all that," he said. When contacted, producer Daggubati Suresh who was part of the delegation which called on Revanth Reddy, told PTI that permission for benefit shows and ticket price hike during the initial days of film release is not a necessary requirement for all filmmakers, but an individual production house. The delegation included actors Nagarjuna, Venkatesh, Murali Mohan and directors Trivikram Srinivas, K Raghavendra Rao and producers Daggubati Suresh, Allu Aravind (father of Allu Arjun) and C Kalyan. Asserting that there would not be any benefit shows

(special shows), Cinematography minister Komatireddi Venkat Reddy recently said the state government, in future, may consider ticket price hike only for certain categories such as films made on history, freedom struggle or others like those with messages against the use of drugs. The minister's statement, if implemented, will have a huge impact on the high budget films such as Ram Charan's "Game Changer", Nandamuri Balakrishna's "Daaku Maharaj" and Venkatesh's "Sankranthiki Vasthunnam" which are slated for release during Sankranti in three weeks from now. Directed by popular Director S Shankar, Game Changer is produced by Dil Raju. The film is reportedly made with a budget of nearly Rs 400 crore.

China approves world's largest dam over Brahmaputra river close to Indian border

PTI ■ BEIJING

China has approved the construction of the world's largest dam, stated to be the planet's biggest infra project costing USD 137 billion, on the Brahmaputra River in Tibet close to the Indian border, raising concerns in riparian states — India and Bangladesh. The Chinese government has approved the construction of a hydropower project in the lower reaches of the Yarlung Zangbo River, the Tibetan name for the Brahmaputra, according to an official statement quoted by state-run Xinhua news agency on Wednesday. The dam is to be built at a huge gorge in the Himalayan reaches where the Brahmaputra river makes a huge U-turn to flow into Arunachal Pradesh and then to Bangladesh. The total investment in the dam could exceed one trillion yuan (USD 137 billion), which would dwarf any other single infrastructure project on the planet including China's own Three Gorges Dam, regarded as

the largest in the world, the Hong Kong-based South China Morning Post reported on Thursday. China has already Operationalised the USD 1.5 billion Zam Hydropower Station, the largest in Tibet in 2015. The Brahmaputra dam was part of the 14th Five-Year Plan (2021-2025) and National Economic and Social Development and the Long-Range Objectives Through the Year 2035 adopted by Plenum, a key policy body of the ruling Communist Party of China (CPC) in 2020. Concerns arose in India as the dam besides empowering China to control the water flow, the size and scale of it could also enable Beijing to release large amounts of water flooding border areas in times of hostilities. India too is building a dam over Brahmaputra in Arunachal Pradesh. India and China established the Expert Level Mechanism (ELM) in 2006 to discuss various issues related to trans-border rivers under which China

provides India with hydrological information on the Brahmaputra river and Sutlej river during the flood seasons. Data sharing of trans-border rivers figured in the talks between India, China Special Representatives (SRs) for border question, NSA Ajit Doval and Chinese Foreign Minister Wang Yi, held here on December 18. The SRs "provided positive directions for cross-border cooperation and exchanges" including data sharing on trans-border rivers, a statement by the Ministry of External Affairs said. The Brahmaputra Dam presents enormous engineering challenges as the project site is located along a tectonic plate boundary where earthquakes occur. The Tibetan plateau, regarded as the roof of the world, frequently experiences earthquakes as it is located over the tectonic plates. The official statement on Wednesday sought to allay concerns about earthquakes, saying that the hydropower project is safe and prioritises ecological protection.

Through extensive geological explorations and technical advancements, a solid foundation has been laid for the science-based, secure, and high-quality development of the project, it said. The Brahmaputra flows across the Tibetan Plateau, carving out the deepest canyon on Earth and covering a staggering vertical difference of 25,154 feet before reaching India, the Post report said. The dam will be built in one of the rainiest parts of mainland China bringing bountiful flows of water. According to a 2023 report, the hydropower station is expected to generate more than 300 billion kWh of electricity each year — enough to meet the annual needs of over 300 million people. In 2020, Yan Zhiyong, then chairman of the state-owned Power Construction Corporation of China, was quoted in the media as saying the location on the Yarlung Tsangpo was one of the most hydropower-rich areas in the world. "The lower reaches area features a vertical drop of 2,000

metres over a 50km distance, representing nearly 70 million kilowatts of resources that could be developed — that is more than three Three Gorges Dams with an installed capacity of 22.5 million kilowatts," the Post quoted him as saying. To harness the hydropower potential of the river, four to six 20km-long tunnels must be drilled through the Namcha Barwa mountain to divert half of the river's flow at about 2,000 cubic metres per second, according to the report. Yan said that the hydropower exploitation of the Yarlung Zangbo River downstream is more than a hydropower project. It is also meaningful for the environment, national security, living standards, energy and international cooperation. "It is a project for national security, including water resources and domestic security," he said, noting that the project will also smooth cooperation with South Asia. The hydropower station could generate income of 20 billion yuan (USD three billion) annually for the Tibet Autonomous Region, he said.

Massive fire breaks out at Bangladesh Secretariat

High-level probe ordered as official documents damaged

PTI ■ DHAKA

A massive fire broke out at a major building of the Bangladesh Secretariat in Dhaka on Thursday, damaging official documents that prompted authorities to form a high-powered investigation committee amid suspicions that it could be an act of sabotage. The fire broke out in Building 7 of the Bangladesh Secretariat and it was brought under control after nearly six hours of firefighting efforts. According to officials, the fire broke out Thursday early morning in the nine-storey building housing seven ministries inside the high-security complex. However, no casualties were reported. "The fire broke out in three spots (of the building) simultaneously hours after midnight yesterday," fire service chief Brigadier General Zahed Kamal told newsmen indicating it might not be an accidental inferno.

Officials said a power outage caused by the fire forced as well other ministries apart from the building to halt their normal work while security agencies restricted entry inside the complex preventing many staff and officials from entering into the complex at the central part of the capital. They said most rooms on the sixth, seventh and eighth floors of building no 7 were severely damaged while a huge volume of documents from the local government and post & telecommunications ministries were burnt alongside the furniture. "The water used to douse the fire also damaged many documents...pigeons which made different parts of the building were seen dead and window spans were broken," an official said after visiting the building. Local government adviser or de facto minister Asif Mahmud Sajeb Bhuiyan, a leader of the Anti-Discrimination Students Movement that led the ouster of ex-prime minister Sheikh

Hasina's regime on August 5 said, "The conspirators have not stopped their activities" He said the documents which were damaged included papers and proofs of corruption of millions of dollars during the ousted Awami League regime. "But no one will be given a single inch pace to escape (punitive actions) if found involved to fail us," said Bhuiyan. Meanwhile, authorities formed a seven-member committee comprising senior civil bureaucrats, fire service and police officers. The committee, headed by Additional Secretary (district and field administration) Mohammad Khaled Rahim, was asked to submit its report within seven working days. The probe panel has been tasked with finding out the source and cause of the fire, uncovering whether anyone had personal or professional responsibility for it, and making recommendations to prevent such accidents, said an office order of the Cabinet Division.

Clashes between Islamists now in power in Syria and Assad's supporters kill 6 fighters

AP ■ DAMASCUS

Clashes between Islamists who took over Syria and supporters of ousted President Bashar Assad's government killed six Islamic fighters on Wednesday and wounded others, according to a British-based war monitor. The Syrian Observatory for Human Rights said the fighters were killed while trying to arrest a former official in Assad's government, accused of issuing execution orders and arbitrary rulings against thousands of prisoners. The fighters were from Hayat Tahrir al-Sham, or HTS, which led the stunning offensive that toppled Assad earlier this month.



Security forces of the newly formed Syrian government question two men on a motorcycle during a security checkpoint in the Karm Az-Zeitoun neighborhood of Homs, Syria on Thursday. AP/PTI

Syria's transition has been surprisingly smooth but it's only been a few weeks since Assad fled the country and his administration and forces melted away. The insurgents who ousted Assad are rooted in fundamentalist Islamist ideology, and though they have vowed to create a pluralist system, it isn't clear how or whether they plan to share power.

Since Assad's fall, dozens of Syrians have been killed in acts of revenge, according to activists and monitors, the vast majority of them from the minority Alawite community, an offshoot of Shiite Islam that Assad belongs to.

In the capital, Damascus, Alawite protesters scuffled with Sunni counter-protesters and gunshots were heard. The Associated Press could not confirm details of the shooting.

Alawite protests also took place along the coast of Syria, in the city of Homs and the Hama countryside. Some called for the release of soldiers from the former Syrian army now imprisoned by the HTS. At least one protestor was killed

and five were wounded in Homs by HTS forces suppressing the demonstration, said the Syrian Observatory. In response to the protests, HTS imposed a curfew from 6 pm until 8 am. The Alawite protests were apparently in part sparked by an online video showing the burning of an Alawite shrine. The interim authorities insisted the video was old and not a recent incident. Sectarian violence has erupted in bursts since Assad's ouster but nothing close to the level feared after nearly 14 years of civil war that killed an estimated half-million people. The war fractured Syria, creating millions of refugees and displacing tens of thousands throughout the country.

This week, some Syrians who were forcibly displaced, started trickling home, trying to rebuild their lives. Shocked by the devastation, many found that little remains of their homes. In the northwestern Idlib region, residents were repairing shops and sealing damaged windows on Tuesday, trying to bring back a sense of normalcy. The city of Idlib and much of the surrounding province has for years been under control of the HTS, led by Ahmad al-Sharaa, formerly known as Abu Mohammed al-Golani, once aligned with al-Qaida, but has been the scene of relentless attacks by the government forces. Hajjah Zakia Daemessaid, who was forcibly displaced

during the war, said coming back to her house in the Idlib countryside was bitter-sweet. "My husband and I spent 43 years of hard work saving money to build our home, only to find that all of it has gone to waste," said the 62-year-old. In the dusty neighborhoods, cars drove by with luggage strapped on top. People stood idly on the streets or sat in empty coffee shops. In Damascus, Syria's new authorities raided warehouses on Wednesday, confiscating drugs such as Captagon and cannabis, used by Assad's forces. A million Captagon pills and hundreds of kilograms (pounds) of cannabis were set ablaze, the interim authorities said.

Azerbaijan observes day of mourning for air crash victims as speculation mounts about its cause

AP ■ BAKU

Azerbaijan on Thursday observed a nationwide day of mourning for the victims of the air crash that killed 38 people and left all 29 survivors injured as speculation mounted about a possible cause of the crash that remained unknown. Azerbaijan Airlines' Embraer 190 was en route from Azerbaijan's capital of Baku to the Russian city of Grozny in the North Caucasus on Wednesday when it was diverted for reasons yet unclear and crashed while making an attempt to land in Aktau in Kazakhstan after flying east across the Caspian Sea. The plane went down about 3 kilometers (around 2 miles) from Aktau. Cellphone footage

circulating online appeared to show the aircraft making a steep descent before smashing into the ground in a fireball. Other footage showed part of its fuselage ripped away from the wings and the rest of the aircraft lying upside in the grass. On Thursday, national flags were lowered across Azerbaijan, traffic across the country stopped at noon, and signals were sounded from ships and trains as the country observed a nationwide moment of silence. Azerbaijani President Ilham Aliyev said that it was too soon to speculate on the reasons behind the crash, but said that the weather had forced the plane to change from its planned course. "The information provided to

me is that the plane changed its course between Baku and Grozny due to worsening weather conditions and headed to Aktau airport, where it crashed upon landing," he said. Russia's civil aviation authority, Rosaviatsia, said that preliminary information indicated that the pilots diverted to Aktau after a bird strike led to an emergency on board. According to Kazakh officials, those aboard the plane included 42 Azerbaijani citizens, 16 Russian nationals, six Kazakhs and three Kyrgyzstan nationals. As the official crash investigation started, theories abounded about a possible cause, with some commentators alleging that holes seen in the plane's tail section possibly indicate that it could have come under fire

from Russian air defense systems fending off a Ukrainian drone attack. Ukrainian drones had previously attacked Grozny, the provincial capital of the Russian republic of Chechnya, and other regions in the country's North Caucasus. Some Russian media claimed that another drone attack on Chechnya happened on Wednesday, although it wasn't officially confirmed. Osprey Flight Solutions, an aviation security firm based in the United Kingdom, warned its clients that the "Azerbaijan Airlines flight was likely shot down by a Russian military air-defense system." Osprey provides analysis for carriers still flying into Russia after Western airlines halted their flights during the war.

Pak confirms airstrikes targeting militants' hideouts in Afghanistan, Kabul terms it 'brutal act'

AP ■ ISLAMABAD

Pakistan on Thursday confirmed that it carried out strikes targeting militants' hideouts in Afghanistan, amid strong protest from the Afghan leadership, which condemned it as a "brutal act" and said such arbitrary actions are not a solution to any problem. According to the Afghan officials, at least 46 people, including women and children, were killed and several others injured in airstrikes by Pakistani fighter jets on parts of the Barmal district in Paktika province on Tuesday night that also damaged several homes. "The intelligence-based operation was conducted by Pakistani security forces in the border areas of Afghanistan," Pakistan Foreign Office spokesperson Mumtaz Zahra

Baloch said in response to a query about the Tuesday night strikes at the weekly press briefing here. She added that the operation was carried out "based on threats to the security of Pakistani citizens". The spokesperson, however, emphasised that Pakistan had "always prioritised dialogue in matters relating to ties with Afghanistan". "We respect Afghanistan's integrity and sovereignty." She also said that Pakistan's security forces and law enforcement agencies routinely conduct operations "against terrorist groups in the border areas". "Preparations for these operations are made in an extremely careful manner," she said, adding that protecting its citizens was Pakistan's top priority. The spokesperson reiterated

that there were threats posed by terrorist elements to Pakistan and its citizens. "Pakistan is committed to the security of its public," she said. Earlier, sources said that Pakistan targeted four locations of Tehreek-e-Taliban Pakistan (TTP) terrorists in Afghanistan's eastern Paktika province, killing several terrorists. The Afghan Taliban regime lodged a strong protest with Islamabad over the airstrikes, warning to give a response to the attack. The Afghan Taliban regime's Ministry of Defence spokesperson Enayatullah Khwarazmi said the Islamic Emirate considers this brutal act a violation of all international principles and an outright aggression. "Pakistan must realize such arbitrary actions do not solve any problems," he was quoted

as saying by TOLONews. Former Afghan president Hamid Karzai and some other leaders also condemned Pakistan's airstrikes, with Karzai describing it as blatant aggression and a violation of Afghanistan's sovereignty. The former president attributed tensions in the relations between the two countries to Pakistan's flawed policies of promoting extremism in the region and emphasized that Pakistan must reassess its policies toward Afghanistan, according to a statement released by his office. Abdullah Abdullah, the former Chairman of the High Council for National Reconciliation, also stated that Pakistan's airstrikes on Paktika province are a clear violation of Afghanistan's national sovereignty.

AI is game changer for students with disabilities, schools still learning to harness it

AP ■ WASHINGTON

For Makenzie Gilkison, spelling is such a struggle that a word like rhinoceros might come out as "rineanswsaurs" or sarcastic as "srkastik." The 14-year-old from suburban Indianapolis can sound out words, but her dyslexia makes the process so draining that she often struggles with comprehension. "I just assumed I was stupid," she recalled of her early grade school years. But assistive technology powered by artificial intelligence has helped her keep up with classmates. Last year, Makenzie was named to the National Junior Honor Society. She credits a customized AI-powered chatbot, a word prediction program and other tools that can read for her. "I would have just probably given up if I didn't have them," she said. Artificial intelligence holds the promise of helping countless other students with a range of visual, speech, language and hearing impairments to ex-

ecute tasks that come easily to others. Schools everywhere have been wrestling with how and where to incorporate AI, but many are fast-tracking applications for students with disabilities. Getting the latest technology into the hands of students with disabilities is a priority for the US Education Department, which has told schools they must consider whether students need tools like text-to-speech and alternative communication devices. New rules from the Department of Justice also will require schools and other government entities to make apps and online content accessible to those with disabilities. There is concern about how to ensure students using it — including those with disabilities — are still learning. Students can use artificial intelligence to summarize jumbled thoughts into an outline, summarize complicated passages, or even translate Shakespeare into common English. And computer-generated voices that can read

passages for visually impaired and dyslexic students are becoming less robotic and more natural. "I'm seeing that a lot of students are kind of exploring on their own, almost feeling like they've found a cheat code in a video game," said Alexis Reid, an educational therapist in the Boston area who works with students with learning disabilities. But in her view, it is far from cheating. "We're meeting students where they are." Ben Snyder, a 14-year-old freshman from Larchmont, New York, who was recently diagnosed with a learning disability, has been increasingly using AI to help with homework. "Sometimes in math, my teachers will explain a problem to me, but it just makes absolutely no sense," he said. "So if I give that problem into AI, it'll give me multiple different ways of explaining how to do that." He likes a program called Question AI. Earlier in the day, he asked the program to help him



write an outline for a book report — a task he completed in 15 minutes that otherwise would have taken him an hour and a half because of his struggles with writing and organization. But he does think using AI to write the whole report crosses a line. "That's just cheating," Ben said. Schools have been trying to balance the technology's benefits against the risk that it will do too much. If a special education plan sets reading growth as a goal, the student needs to improve that skill. AI can't do it for them, said Mary Lawson, general counsel at

the Council of the Great City Schools. But the technology can help level the playing field for students with disabilities, said Paul Sanft, director of a Minnesota-based center where families can try out different assistive technology tools and borrow devices. "There are definitely going to be people who use some of these tools in nefarious ways. That's always going to happen," Sanft said. "But I don't think that's the biggest concern with people with disabilities, who are just trying to do something that they couldn't

do before." Another risk is that AI will track students into less rigorous courses of study. And, because it is so good at identifying patterns, AI might be able to figure out a student has a disability. Having that disclosed by AI and not the student or their family could create ethical dilemmas, said Luis Pérez, the disability and digital inclusion lead at the Center for Accessible Technology. Schools are using the technology to help students who struggle academically, even if they do not qualify for special education services. In Iowa, a new law requires students deemed not proficient — about a quarter of them — to get an individualized reading plan. As part of that effort, the state's education department spent \$3 million on an AI-driven personalized tutoring program. When students struggle, a digital avatar intervenes. More AI tools are coming soon. The US National Science Foundation is funding AI research and development. One firm is developing tools to help

children with speech and language difficulties. Called the National AI Institute for Exceptional Education, it is headquartered at the University of Buffalo, which did pioneering work on handwriting recognition that helped the US Postal Service save hundreds of millions of dollars by automating processing. "We are able to solve the postal application with very high accuracy. When it comes to children's handwriting, we fail very badly," said Venu Govindaraju, the director of the institute. He sees it as an area that needs more work, along with speech-to-text technology, which isn't as good at understanding children's voices, particularly if there is a speech impediment. Sorting through the sheer number of programs developed by education technology companies can be a time-consuming challenge for schools. Richard Culatta, CEO of the International Society for Technology in Education, said the nonprofit launched an effort this fall to

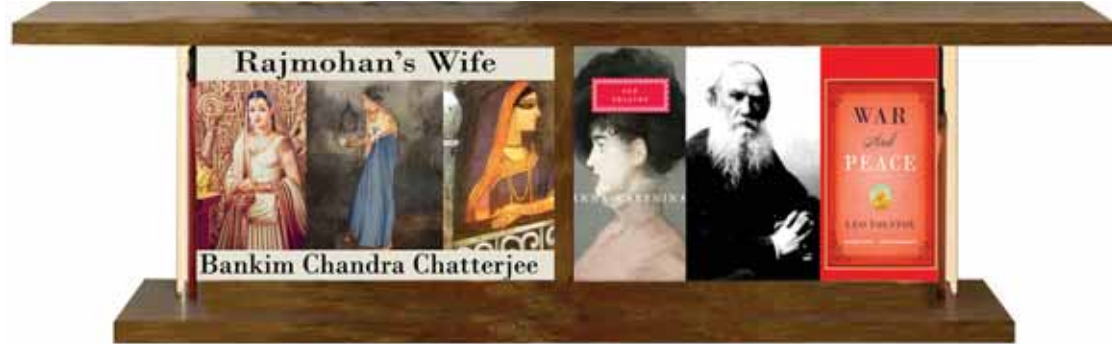
make it easier for districts to vet what they are buying and ensure it is accessible. Makenzie wishes some of the tools were easier to use. Sometimes a feature will inexplicably be turned off, and she will be without it for a week while the tech team investigates. The challenges can be so cumbersome that some students resist the technology entirely. But Makenzie's mother, Nadine Gilkison, who works as a technology integration supervisor at Franklin Township Community School Corporation in Indiana, said she sees more promise than downside. In September, her district rolled out chatbots to help special education students in high school. She said teachers, who sometimes struggled to provide students the help they needed, became emotional when they heard about the program. Until now, students were reliant on someone to help them, unable to move ahead on their own. "Now we don't need to wait anymore," she said.



2025

ushers in lot of hope in literary world

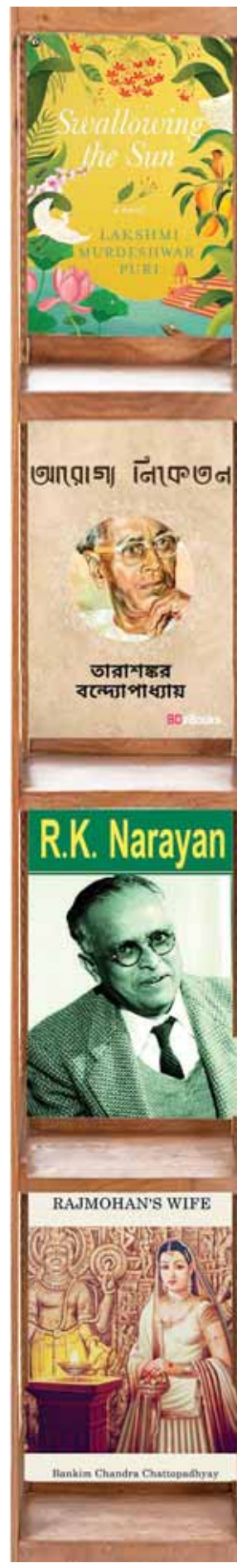
EXPLORING THE TIMELESS CHARM OF NOVELS, THEIR UNIQUE STORYTELLING AND THE PROMISING VOICES SHAPING INDIA'S LITERARY LANDSCAPE IN 2024, SAYS **KUMAR CHELLAPPAN**



It is not without reason that the word novel has been assigned two meanings. Although the English language can often be amusing with its many words having multiple meanings, the term novel has a significant connection to its different interpretations. The dictionary defines novel as "an invented prose narrative that is usually long and complex and deals especially with human experience through a usually connected sequence of events." The word also has another meaning - something that is new, original, and never seen, used, or even thought of before. A novel, as a literary form, tells a story and features multiple characters interconnected through a sequence of events. Each novel offers a new, fresh and unprecedented experience. What makes a novel truly special is its readability and the ease with which it allows readers to identify with the characters it presents. Let us reflect on the novels of the past. Timeless classics like *War and Peace*, *Anna Karenina* (Leo Tolstoy), *The Mother* (Maxim Gorky), *Gone with the Wind* (Margaret Mitchell), *The Far Pavilions* (M. M. Kaye), and *Crime and Punishment* (Fyodor Dostoevsky) continue to resonate with readers. These masterpieces transport us to a different world through their narrative, characters, and the time and space they depict. It is rare to encounter someone who feels these novels fall short of their expectations. The first novel to grace bookshelves in India was *Rajmohan's Wife* by *Bankimchandra Chatterjee* in 1864. This makes the novel as a literary genre relatively new in this region. India has produced remarkable writers like *Tarasankar*

Bandyopadhyay, whose works include *Ganadevata* and *Arogya Niketan*, the latter being particularly popular. *Bankimchandra Chatterjee's Anandamath* (1882), set against the backdrop of the *Great Bengal Famine of 1770*, is widely regarded as the finest novel ever written in the subcontinent. During my school days, our language teacher, *P. U. Madhavan*, emphasised the importance of reading these classics. He was our gateway to the world of literature. Years later, at university, we studied a prose piece by *A. J. Cronin*, the renowned Scottish novelist, about the art of writing a novel. *Cronin* often told his wife that he would write a novel loved by all. During a period of recovery from illness, *Cronin* wrote *Hatter's Castle*, a landmark in English literature. He abandoned his medical career to pursue writing full-time. *Cronin's* success, along with that of other novelists, lies in their ability to tell compelling stories. *Ponniyin Selvan* (Son of Ponna) by *Kalki Krishnamurthy*, for instance, is based on the life of *Arulmozhivarman*, a 10th-century *Chola* prince. Reading this book is akin to watching a film projected on a Vistarama screen, the most advanced film projection system I've ever seen. Novels, poems and stories resemble rivers and streams flowing from mountains, meandering through valleys, plains and plateaus. A well-written novel provides the sensation of sailing smoothly down a serene river. Conversely, a poorly written one feels like driving on a pothole-filled road. Unfortunately, contemporary Indian literature in English often lacks the quality we once enjoyed with authors like *R. K. Narayan*, *Raja Rao* and *Shobha De*.

These authors wrote straight from the heart. Today, however, publishers often dictate the content to maximise sales. In India, literary works that criticise certain religions or spiritual figures tend to attract significant attention and awards. While we lack the likes of *Mitchell*, *Tolstoy* and *Kaye*, a few noteworthy works of fiction emerged in 2024, offering hope for the novel genre. *Swallowing the Sun*, the debut novel by *Lakshmi Murdeshwar Puri*, was a breath of fresh air. *Puri* masterfully narrates India's freedom struggle and the emancipation of women from societal constraints. The protagonist, *Malati*, guides readers through a vivid journey across the Konkan region and Bombay, where she and her sister *Kamala* break into a male-dominated world. Thrilling and vibrant, *Swallowing the Sun* feels like a long-awaited monsoon, refreshing and full of intensity. Another standout author is *Harinder S. Sikka*, a former Indian Navy commander known for *Gobind*, *Vichhoda* and *Calling Sehmat*. Drawing on his naval experiences, *Sikka* crafts authentic stories, earning him the title of "India's Jeffrey Archer." Readers eagerly await more from writers like *Puri* and *Sikka*, who draw inspiration from real life. As Malayalam literary rebel *Keshava Dev* once said, "You will understand life only if you learn how to live. That experience will guide you in writing novels and stories. No university can teach you this." Thank you, *Lakshmi Puri* and *Harinder S. Sikka*, for giving us hope. And thank you, 2024, for these promising voices in literature.

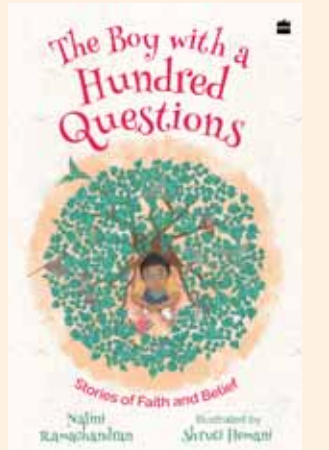


2024 HIGHLIGHTS BY HARPERCOLLINS

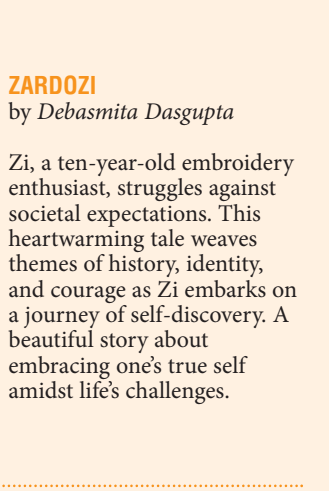


GOLDEN SPORTSPERSONS
by *Tanushree Podder*
A compelling compilation of India's legendary athletes like *Neeraj Chopra*, *Mary Kom*, and *P.V. Sindhu*. These stories of grit, discipline and resilience showcase how they overcame barriers to achieve greatness in sports such as athletics, boxing and chess. A must-read for sports enthusiasts and dreamers alike.

THE BOY WITH A HUNDRED QUESTIONS
by *Nalini Ramchandran*
Follow *Shunya*, a curious nine-year-old, on an enchanting adventure as he uncovers profound philosophies and the true meaning of his name. Through mystical tales and intriguing beliefs, this book celebrates the magic of curiosity and the wonder of exploring life's big questions.



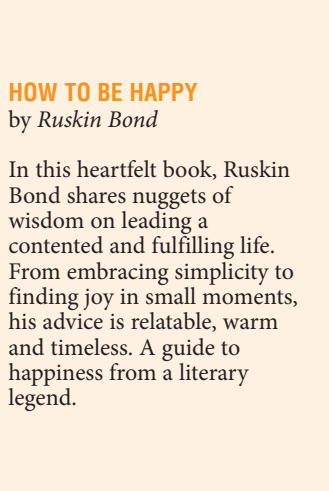
ZARDOZI
by *Debasmita Dasgupta*
Zi, a ten-year-old embroidery enthusiast, struggles against societal expectations. This heartwarming tale weaves themes of history, identity, and courage as *Zi* embarks on a journey of self-discovery. A beautiful story about embracing one's true self amidst life's challenges.



ROYAL-ISH
by *Amrita Gandhi*
Join *Lily Ray*, an awkward tween and nature vlogger, on a royal adventure in *Bagradoo*. With quirky companions and thrilling twists, *Lily* unravels a mystery threatening the kingdom's secrets. A delightful, action-packed tale filled with humour and heart.



HOW TO BE HAPPY
by *Ruskin Bond*
In this heartfelt book, *Ruskin Bond* shares nuggets of wisdom on leading a contented and fulfilling life. From embracing simplicity to finding joy in small moments, his advice is relatable, warm and timeless. A guide to happiness from a literary legend.



INDIA IN SCIENCE
Discover India's incredible journey in science, featuring pioneers like *J.C. Bose* and *Asima Chatterjee*. With engaging illustrations, Nobel laureate highlights, and hands-on activities, this book is perfect for young science enthusiasts eager to learn and experiment.



YEAR-END BESTSELLERS

As we bid farewell to another year. Here's a curated list of books that have been the year's most talked-about and cherished reads, brought to you by the publisher, Niyogi Books

MYTH, MEMORY & FOLKTALE OF THE WANCHO TRIBE OF ARUNACHAL PRADESH
Authors: *Tara Douglas & Jatwang Wangsa* Price: ₹595/-

WORLDS WITHIN WORLDS
Author: *Ajay Navaria*
Translator: *Nita Kumar*
Price: ₹495/-

HARRY HOBBS OF KOLKATA AND OTHER FORGOTTEN LIVES
Author: *Devasis Chattopadhyay*
Price: ₹595/-

CHARLES CORREA: CITIZEN CHARLES
Author: *Mustansir Dalvi*
Price: ₹299/-

DELHI HERITAGE TOP 10 FORTS
Author: *Vikramjit Singh Rooprai*
Price: ₹499/-

THE MANY LIVES OF PAULOMA CHATTOPADHYAY
Author: *Devangi Bhatt*
Translator: *Mudra Joshi*
Price: ₹350/-

REVOLUTIONARIES
by *Sanjeev Sanyal*
An abridged tale of India's armed resistance, this book chronicles the bravery of revolutionaries like *Subhas Chandra Bose* and *Bhagat Singh*. With intrigue, espionage, and adventure, it reveals the untold story of their fight for freedom. An inspiring read for young history buffs.

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Top order hepls Australia score 311/6, Bumrah keeps battle alive

PTI ■ MELBOURNE

Jasprit Bumrah's knack of coming up with magic deliveries in crunch situations kept India alive after Australia's top-order, headlined by teen debutant Sam Konstas' stroke-filled half-century, guided the hosts to 311 for 6 on the opening day of the fourth Test here on Thursday.

If Konstas' audacious 60 off 65 balls enthralled the near sell-out crowd of over 80,000 at the MCG during a humid morning session, Bumrah's (3/75 in 21 overs) deception of length to dismiss Travis Head (0) also had its takers as chants of 'Boom, Boom, B o o o m r a a a a a h' reverberated through the stands.

Coming into the Test with back-to-back hundreds, Head couldn't judge the length of a Bumrah delivery that was pitched slightly fuller than what the batter expected. He shouldered his arms trusting the bounce but the 66.2 overs old Kookaburra nipped back to clip the off-ball.

In the next over, he removed an out-of-form Mitchell Marsh (4), having got Usman Khawaja (57 off 121 balls)

with the half-tracker in the post-lunch session.

The first two sessions, however, belonged to Australia with senior players Khawaja, Marnus Labuschagne (72 off 145 balls) and Steve Smith (68 batting, 111 balls) scoring half-centuries.

The final session was all about Bumrah magic. The Indian spearhead didn't let the hosts completely walk away with the game which they threatened to do at one stage.

He now has 24 wickets in the series. With Mohammed Siraj (0/69 in 15 overs) off-colour, Bumrah didn't have much support save off-spinner Washington Sundar (1/37 in 12 overs), who bowled a containing line.

Akash Deep (1/59 in 19 overs) though got Alex Carey with the second new ball at the fag end of the day.

Even Ravindra Jadeja (1/54 in 14 overs) leaked runs despite getting Konstas out and Nitish Reddy, the batting all-rounder, was only used before the second new ball was taken.

'Sam Jams at the G' The morning was owned by the precocious 19-year-old



from New South Wales. Konstas didn't show any nerves during his scintillating knock, which comprised of two sixes off Bumrah. He also didn't mind a good scrap with India's superstar Virat Kohli, whose shoulder

brush with the 19-year-old led to a brief confrontation. In fact, Bumrah was hit for a six for the first time in a Test since Cameron Green hit him for one back in 2021. The gap between Konstas' first six, which was a lap scoop, and

the one that Green hit three years ago was 4000 legal Test match deliveries. After a conventional lap scoop for maximum, Konstas also hit a reverse lap scoop towards third man for another boundary. The

second six was pumelled over mid-on. The way he attacked the Indian bowling with gusto gave his veteran opening partner Khawaja a chance to get back to form with a patient half-century.

But Khawaja would be really annoyed with himself as he couldn't time a pull shot off a Bumrah half-tracker, which went straight into KL Rahul's hands in the post-lunch session.

The duo added 89 runs in such quick time that Labuschagne and last match's centurion Smith didn't need to show any urgency.

For Konstas, it all began with a few play and misses off Bumrah's opening over but as soon as the teenager got his first couple of runs, things changed dramatically.

The fearlessness of youth stood out on the big stage as Konstas pulled off the lap-scoop against Bumrah before smashing him over mid-on for another maximum.

The fans and experts alike were forced to think the last time Bumrah (1/50 in 15 overs) was hit for two sixes in his first spell of a Test match. They couldn't because it never happened in a first spell.

The stump mic caught Bumrah saying "Beginner's Luck" but Konstas seemed to have enough wares to answer his probing queries. And it was laced with a lot of spunk as he got into a verbal duel

with Kohli after their shoulders brushed while crossing each other. He often shuffled towards leg-stump to make room and on one occasion, crunched Bumrah past cover.

Mohammed Siraj was welcomed into the attack with a loud round of boos as he sledged the youngster due to his unconventional hitting style.

In all, Konstas hit six fours apart from the two maximums. Only Akash bowled a good channel among the pacers as Siraj was guilty of going too full or too short.

As Australia scored at more than a fair clip, skipper Rohit Sharma had to introduce Ravindra Jadeja (1/33 in 11 overs) in the 16th over to at least stem the flow of runs before it went out of hand.

The decision did pay dividends as the seasoned spinner got an arm ball to skid through with the angle to trap Konstas in front.

Khawaja and Labuschagne then added 65 for the second wicket with the Pakistan-born opener hitting Akash for a couple of boundaries to complete his first fifty of the series.



Indian women on course for clean sweep against West Indies

PTI ■ VADODARA

India would aim to push their boundaries in the batting department when they face a down-and-out West Indies in the third and final Women's ODI here on Friday.

Following another series loss against the mighty Australia, India have been able to dominate the West Indies in home conditions.

What has stood out is their ability to put scores in excess of 300 consistently in the series, something they must do against the likes of Australia to get themselves out of the doldrums.

Pratika Rawal, who has been opening the innings alongside Smriti Mandhana, did not set the stage on fire in her maiden international appearance but improved her play considerably in the second ODI to raise hopes for the future.

The Delhi-based cricketer was able to clear the ropes once, which is expected considering she has replaced Shafali Verma in the team.

Harleen Deol has been around for a long time but it was only in the previous game that she was able to record her maiden ODI hundred. She stuck at a 100 plus strike rate batting at number three and she would like to carry the momentum in the final game of the series.

Skipper Harmanpreet Kaur has looked good since regaining full fitness but is yet to get a big knock. With series in the bag, the skipper will have another reason to play freely and get a substantial knock under her belt.

On the bowling front, Renuka Thakur has once again led the pace attack well with the young Titas Sadhu also chipping in with the wickets.

Leg-spinner Priya Mishra has impressed in her fledgling career and would be eyeing another productive outing.

With the game being a dead rubber, India can also afford to test a few fringe players including Tanuja Kanwar

and Tejal Hasanbis. West Indies will need to pull something out of the bag to upset India. Having conceded 300 plus run in both the games, the Hayley Matthews-led side needs to improve on all fronts.

Matthews is the lone West Indies batter who has made an impact. That will need to change on Friday.

Squads:
India: Smriti Mandhana, Pratika Rawal, Harleen Deol, Harmanpreet Kaur (c), Jemimah Rodrigues, Richa Ghosh (wk), Deepti Sharma, Saima Thakor, Titas Sadhu, Renuka Thakur Singh, Priya Mishra, Uma Chetry, Minnu Mani, Tejal Hasanbis, Tanuja Kanwar.
West Indies: Hayley Matthews (c), Qiana Joseph, Rashada Williams, Deandra Dottin, Nerissa Crafton, Shemaine Campbelle (wk), Aaliyah Alleyne, Zaida James, Karishma Ramharack, Shamilia Connell, Afy Fletcher, Shabika Gajinabi, Chinelle Henry, Mandy Mangru, Ashmini Munisar.

Arjun Erigaise looking to qualify for next Candidates through World Rapid and Blitz

PTI ■ NEW YORK

Grandmaster Arjun Erigaise will have to tackle obstacles to retain his chances of becoming the first Indian to enter the 2026 Candidates' tournament when he opens his campaign at the World Rapid and Blitz chess tournament here.

Erigaise, who currently trails Fabiano Caruana of the United States in the list of players slated to qualify from 2024, will have a tall order to win the World Rapid chess championship that gets underway here.

It may be noted here that the last time an Indian won the crown here was in 2019 when Koneru Humpy triumphed and in 2017 Viswanathan Anand had defied all odds to win the



United States is easier said than done, given the proficiency of the trio in quick chess.

The participants list is a virtually who's who of the chess world and the only big name missing is D Gukesh, who withdrew after winning an exhausting world championship match against Ding Liren of China just a

couple of weeks back in Singapore.

From India, much can be expected from R Praggnanandhaa as well. He is well rested and must be looking for this event to end the year on a high note.

Apart from Erigaise and Praggnanandhaa, Raunak Sadhwani and Aravindh Chithambaram are the other two Indians to take note of in the open section.

In the women's section, Humpy will start yet again as favourite amongst the Indians. R Vaishali and Divya Deshmukh are the two emerging stars and have been doing pretty well in the last one year.

Vaishali, in fact, had taken the chess world by surprise by qualifying for the Women's Candidates in 2023.



Andy Pycroft completes 100 Tests as match referee

PTI ■ MELBOURNE

Former Zimbabwe captain Andy Pycroft on Thursday became only the fourth official in the history of men's Test cricket to complete 100 games as a match referee with the Boxing Day contest between India and Australia that began here on Thursday.

The exclusive list is led by former Sri Lanka player Ranjan Madugalle as the most experienced match referee with 225 Tests, followed by New Zealand's Jeff Crowe (125) and England's Chris Broad (123). The 68-year-old Pycroft played three Tests and 20 ODIs for Zimbabwe from 1983-1992.

'Pycroft, who has also officiated in 238 men's ODIs, 174 men's T20Is and 21 women's T20Is since 2009, said he has enjoyed every minute of the journey to 100 matches as a match referee,' the ICC said on its website.

Pycroft said touching the mark is a great honour and he is thankful to have been afforded the opportunity to officiate all over the world, 'embracing different cultures.'

'It has been a rewarding journey and I have treasured every moment of it,' he added.

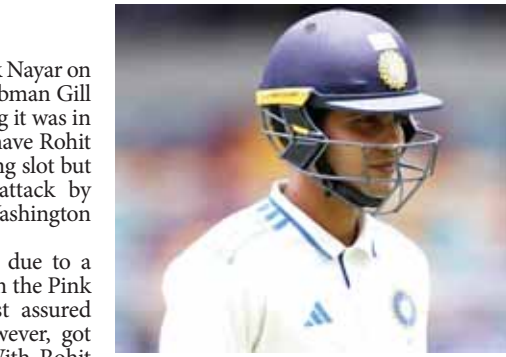
India needed Rohit to open, Washington's variation at MCG, says Nayar on axing Gill

PTI ■ MELBOURNE

India's assistant coach Abhishek Nayar on Thursday defended axing Shubman Gill from the Boxing Day Test, saying it was in team's best interest to not only have Rohit Sharma back to his usual opening slot but also add some sting to the attack by drafting in spin all-rounder Washington Sundar.

Gill, who missed the first Test due to a finger injury, scored 31 and 28 in the Pink Ball Test and looked the most assured among Indian batters. He, however, got out for a duck in Brisbane. With Rohit Sharma opening the innings and KL Rahul coming at No. 3, Gill had to make way for a third specialist all-rounder in Washington.

'Yes, Rohit will come up in the order and more likely than not, he will open the innings. That was the thought process. Unfortunately for Gill, just how things



spanned out, he had to miss out,' Nayar said at the end of the day's play.

'I just feel for a young player in a position like that, a big day, he wants to make his mark. He understands it's the team's requirement and it's unfortunate, but I wouldn't say that he's been dropped per se. It's just unfortunate that he couldn't find

his place in this game,' the former Mumbai stalwart said but the explanation lacked conviction.

He elaborately explained why playing Washington at the MCG made sense ahead of Gill.

'A lot of the decisions when they are made, and the process of it being made, the communication is always there and transparency is there. It's pretty obvious that we felt in these conditions, looking at the pitch, having Washy in the bowling attack will give us that variation, especially towards the end once the ball gets old,' he said.

'Post the 50 overs, we felt that was an area that we wanted to get better at. We felt Washy could give us that solidarity with Jaddu (Ravindra Jadeja), especially the way Travis Head and Alex Carey were getting runs lower down. So we felt having an offie in the ranks will provide us with that.'

Virat Kohli fined 20 per cent match fees for altercation with Sam Konstas

PTI ■ MELBOURNE

Virat Kohli and Australian youngster Sam Konstas were on Thursday involved in a physical altercation because of which the Indian superstar was fined 20 per cent of his match fee and handed a demerit point even though it was played down as an accidental bump by the 19-year-old debutant.

The brief showdown took place after the 10th over of the Australian innings on the opening day of the fourth Test here when the players were crossing over. Kohli and Konstas bumped shoulders while moving across the pitch in the face off that was initiated by the travelling star. Kohli was eventually charged

with breaching Level 1 of the ICC Code of Conduct by on-field umpires Joel Wilson and Michael Gough, third umpire Sharfuddoula Ibne Shahid and fourth umpire Shawn Craig.

He accepted the sanctions proposed by match referee Andy Pycroft at the end of day's play.

'Virat Kohli has been fined 20 percent of his match fee and awarded one demerit point for breaching Level 1 of the ICC Code of Conduct,' the ICC said in a statement.

'No formal hearing was needed as Kohli accepted the sanctions proposed by Match Referee Andy Pycroft,' it added.

After the physical contact, both players quickly turned around to glance at each other

and engage in a heated exchange of words before Konstas' teammate Usman Khawaja stepped in to separate them. The on-field umpires also had a word with the two and things cooled down rather quickly.

Speaking to reporters after stumps, Konstas said Kohli bumped into him but it wasn't deliberate.

'I was just doing my gloves and I think he accidentally bumped me. I think that's just cricket and can happen with tension,' said the teenager.

'I think the emotions got to both of us,' Konstas had told 'Channel 7' during the second session.

The ICC's Code of Conduct states that 'any form of inappropriate physical contact



is prohibited in cricket. Without limitation, players will breach this regulation if they deliberately, recklessly and/or negligently walk or run into or shoulder another

player or umpire.' Kohli's match fee for the game was to be Rs 15 lakh but that amount would be reduced to Rs 12 lakh owing to the fine. This is the first demerit point

Kohli has logged since 2019. Four demerit points over a period of two years lead to a suspension of one Test.

Konstas, who was batting on 27 at the time, went on to hit Jasprit Bumrah for two boundaries and a six in the next over. The teenager scored a stunning fifty on debut before Ravindra Jadeja trapped him leg before wicket.

India assistant coach Abhishek Nayar, who addressed the media in the end-of-day press conference, also brushed aside the incident as nothing big.

'When you play a game, there will be emotions but it is not as big as it seems. I wasn't aware of what happened and don't know what was said,' he said in response to queries.

Kohli criticised for his actions

Konstas might have dismissed it as routine but former Australian skipper Ricky Ponting blamed Kohli for instigating the exchange. He went to the extent of saying that Kohli could face disciplinary action for it.

'Have a look where Virat walks. Virat's walked one whole pitch over to his right and instigated that confrontation. No doubt in my mind whatsoever,' Ponting said on Channel 7 while watching the replay of the incident.

'I have no doubt that the umpires and the referee will have a good look at that. Fielders should be nowhere near the batsman at that stage. It looked to me that Konstas looked up really late, wouldn't

even know anyone is in front of him. That man on-screen there (Kohli) might have a few questions to answer,' Ponting added.

Former India head coach Ravi Shastri, who was at the helm during Kohli's captaincy, said the run-in was unnecessary.

'There is a line and you don't want to overstep that line. That's unnecessary, totally unnecessary. You don't want to see that. You know Virat is a senior player, he has been captain of the side,' he said on 'Fox Sports'.

'He will have his own explanations for this but it's something you don't want to see. One person who would be watching, his eyes locked into the proceedings is Andy Pycroft,' he added.

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