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INSIDE

WORLD 9
GERMANY'S PRESIDENT
DISSOLVES PARLIAMENT;
POLLS ON FEBRUARY 23

LUCKNOW, SATURDAY DECEMBER 28, 2024; PAGES 12 ₹3

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INCLEMENT WINTER WEATHER LASHES DELHI

RAJESH KUMAR ■ NEW DELHI

Delhi's weather took a dramatic turn on Friday, with thunderstorms, moderate to heavy rainfall lashing the city. The waterlogging that ensued threw traffic out of gear in many places. Continuous rainfall compounded the coldwave conditions gripping Delhi and its surrounding areas. The frigid weather is expected to last longer and a yellow alert has also been issued as light to moderate rain, accompanied by thunderstorms, is likely to continue on Saturday, and Sunday. With dense fog enveloping the National Capital, Delhi's Indira Gandhi International Airport (IGIA) Airport has activated low-visibility procedures to ensure smooth operations. The India Meteorological Department (IMD) has forecast shallow fog on Saturday morning, with light to moderate spells of rain in the evening. According to the IMD, the National Capital recorded its highest December rainfall in the last 15 years. The rain began on Friday around 2.30 am and continued throughout



Photo: Ranjan Dimri/The Pioneer

146 flights delayed so far

Flight-tracking platform Flightradar24 reported 146 delayed flights, three cancellations, and an average delay of nearly 30 minutes for departures and arrivals in Delhi. However, there were no major disruptions. "Low visibility procedures are in progress at Delhi airport. All flight operations are presently normal. Passengers are requested to contact the airline concerned for updated flight information," read the advisory. Despite the challenges, most flights are operating on schedule, though passengers are advised to remain vigilant about their flight status. Highlighting potential delays due to rain, Air India urged

passengers to begin their airport journey early and monitor flight updates. IndiGo advised passengers to plan ahead, especially given the possibility of intermittent rain throughout the day. "We recommend checking your flight status before heading to the airport. Safe travels!" the airline stated.

the day. The total rainfall for December stands at 42.8 mm, marking the highest rainfall this month in the last 15 years, based on data from 2009 to 2024 available on the weather department's website. Meanwhile, the all-time highest December rainfall was recorded in 1884, when the city received 134.4 mm of rain. For comparison, the city's December rainfall in 2023 was trace, while in 2022 it was 0.0 mm, 2021 saw 9.6 mm, and 2020 recorded just 1.6 mm. In 2019, Delhi recorded 33.9 mm of rainfall in December, which now stands as the second-highest in the last 15 years. Following the rain, the maximum temperature was recorded 14 degree Celsius, six notches below the normal while the minimum temperature stood at 11 degree Celsius, four degree above the normal. The gap between the maximum and

minimum reduced dramatically, leading to cold wave conditions. According to the India Meteorological Department (IMD), Delhi received 30.4 mm rainfall in the past 24 hours. According to IMD, Safdarjung reported moderate rainfall of 30.1 mm (between 8.30 am to 5.30 pm), accompanied by moderate fog, with visibility at 350 metres as of 8 am. Other stations reported light to moderate rain, with Palam seeing 31.4 mm of rainfall, Lodhi Road 34.2 mm, Pusa 32.5 mm, Ayanagar 18.1 mm, Ridge 30.8 mm, Pitampura 30.5 mm, and Narela 31 mm of rainfall. The IMD data showed that in 2023 the lowest daytime temperature drop in December was 15.9 degree Celsius. The rain caused disruptions to traffic in various parts of South, Central, and North Delhi. The highest rain was recorded at Delhi University's North Campus. Visuals shared on social media showed that waterlogging causing traffic congestion in the area as the rain continues to lash parts of the city.

Continued on page 8

GRAP Stage-III lifted

STAFF REPORTER ■ NEW DELHI

As Delhi gets some respite from toxic air and air quality improves, the Commission of Air Quality Management (CAQM) has lifted stringent pollution curbs under Stage-III of the Graded Response Action Plan (GRAP) in the national capital and surrounding areas with immediate effect. As the GRAP-III was revoked, the Commission lifted a ban on non-essential construction work and plying of BS-III petrol and BS-IV diesel four-wheelers in Delhi-NCR. However, pollution restrictions under GRAP Stage-II and I, will continue in place in the National Capital Region (NCR). Delhi's air pollution levels showed a declining trend and the 24-hour average Air Quality Index (AQI) stood at 324 at 7 pm. According to forecasts from the India Meteorological Department (IMD) and the Indian Institute of Tropical Meteorology, the air quality

situation is predicted to improve further owing to favourable conditions. "Owing to the favourable meteorological conditions and continuous rains since early morning, the AQI of Delhi has been continuously improving and has been recorded as 348 at 5:00 PM, 341 at 6:00 PM and 334 at 7:00 PM and the trend/forecast suggest the AQI levels to further go down," the CAQM said in its order. "While GRAP Stage-III is being revoked, keeping in view the winter season when weather conditions may not be always favourable and in order to ensure that the AQI levels do not slip further, citizens are requested to strictly adhere to the citizen charter under GRAP Stages II & I. The Sub-Committee, shall be keeping a close watch on the air quality scenario and review the situation from time to time for further appropriate decision depending upon the Air Quality in Delhi and forecast made by IMD/IITM," read the order. Continued on page 8

WEATHER

LUCKNOW
MAX 26.5°C (+5.0)
MIN 12.4°C (+5.0)

Controversy over Manmohan's State funeral

SAUMYA SHUKLA ■ NEW DELHI

A controversy has erupted over the location for performing the last rites of former Prime Minister Manmohan Singh following the Centre's announcement that his State funeral will be performed at Nigambodh Ghat crematorium, at 11.45 am on Saturday morning. The Congress has asked the ruling party to allot a place befitting the stature of the two-time Prime Minister. The Congress party has approached the Centre seeking a memorial for Dr Singh, the party's stalwart leader. According to sources, Congress president Mallikarjun Kharge has conveyed the party's desire to Prime Minister



World leaders condole Dr Manmohan Singh's passing

PTI ■ WASHINGTON/SRI LANKA

Leaders from across the world including, the US, Canada, France, and Sri Lanka have expressed grief over the death of former prime minister Manmohan Singh and recalled his contributions to strengthening bilateral relations. Singh, the architect of India's economic reforms, died at the All India Institute of Medical Sciences on Thursday night. He was 92. He is survived by his wife Gursharan Kaur, a history professor, and three daughters. Leaders from Afghanistan, Maldives, Mauritius, and Nepal also paid their tributes to Singh. US Secretary of State Antony Blinken called him "one of the greatest champions of the bilateral strategic partnership." "Dr Singh was one of the greatest champions of the US-India strategic partnership, and his work laid the foundation for much of what our countries have accomplished together in the past two decades," US Secretary of State Tony Blinken said. Offering condolences to the people of India for the passing of Singh, Blinken said the leadership of the former prime minister in advancing the US-India Civil Nuclear Cooperation Agreement signified a major investment in the potential of the US-India relationship.

"At home, Dr Singh will be remembered for his economic reforms that spurred India's rapid economic growth. We mourn Dr Singh's passing and will always remember his dedication to bringing the United States and India closer together," Blinken said. French President Emmanuel Macron on Friday said "India has lost a great man" and France a true friend, in the person of Dr Manmohan Singh. He had devoted his life to his country. Our thoughts are with his family and the people of India." Sri Lankan President Anura Kumara Dissanayake issued a message of condolence and called the former prime minister "a visionary leader." "On behalf of the people of Sri Lanka and myself, I extend my heartfelt condolences to the Republic of India, Dr Manmohan Singh's family, and his countless admirers worldwide," the message read. "A visionary leader, Dr Singh's influence transcended national boundaries. As Prime Minister from 2004 to 2014, his transformative policies, like the Right to Education Act and the Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Scheme, reflected his steadfast commitment to equity and inclusivity." Continued on page 8

Delhi's power bills get leaner

RAJESH KUMAR ■ NEW DELHI

In a big relief to electricity consumers, the Delhi Electricity Regulatory Commission (DERC) has reduced the Power Purchase Adjustment Cost (PPAC) imposed by the Discoms in the National Capital. The PPAC collected by BSES Rajdhani Power was 35.83, BSES Yamuna Power 38.12 and Tata Power 36.33. According to the DERC's order, PPAC will be reduced from 37.75 percent to 13.63 percent in areas under the BSES Yamuna; 35.83 percent to 18.19 percent in areas under BSES Rajdhani and 37.88 percent to 20.52 percent in Tata Power's areas from December 21, 2024 to March 20, 2025. It is estimated that 10 to 20 percent monthly electricity bill will come down after the DERC's order. According to rough calculations, a consumer in South Delhi (under BRPL) using up to 400 units of power will likely get relief of around Rs 285 in their monthly bill. Those using up to 600 units of power will likely get relief of around Rs 563 in their monthly bill. An East Delhi consumer using up to 400 units, will likely get relief of Rs 390 per month. Those using up to 600 units, will get relief of Rs 554 per month in their electricity bill. For a north Delhi consumer who uses 400 units, will likely get relief of Rs 281 per month. Those who use 600 units will likely get relief of Rs 554 per month in their electricity bill. "Presently, ongoing PPAC is 27.08 percent, which is applicable till 20/12/2024. PPAC of Q2 of FY 2024-25 to

be recovered works out to 9.44%. In view of this, the Petitioner is allowed to recover PPAC of 9.44% for 3 months beyond 20/12/2024 i.e., from 21/12/2024 to 20/03/2025," the DERC said in its order on BSES Rajdhani Private Limited. "The claim of BRPL for the additional PPAC to the extent of 9.08% citing the ad hoc addition in the preceding quarter by the Commission has not been considered in line with DERC (Business Plan) Regulations, 2023," it

read the order. The PPAC is levied as a percentage of the base tariff that includes the fixed cost and energy charges (units consumed) by the consumers. PPAC is a surcharge provided by the Delhi Electricity Regulatory Commission (DERC) to cover fluctuations in power purchase costs incurred by the discoms. These costs are generally affected by coal and fuel prices, which have recently seen substantial rises due to



increased imports and transportation expenses. Delhi's power is distributed by four discoms: BSES Yamuna Power Limited (BYPL), BSES Rajdhani Power Limited (BRPL), Tata Power Delhi Distribution Limited (Tata Power), and North Delhi Municipal Corporation (NDMC). The PPAC varies by discom. The Delhi government provides free electricity to consumers using up to 200 units per month. A fifty per cent subsidy is provided to those having monthly consumption of 201 to 400 units. Continued on page 8

MARKETS



DGCA suspends two Akasa Air directors for training lapses

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

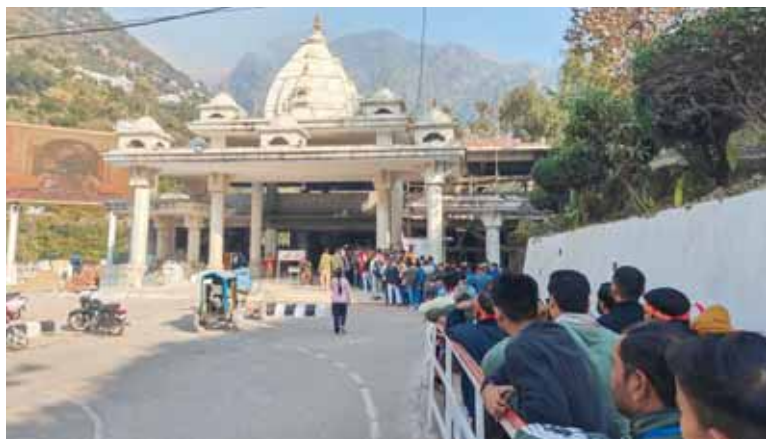
The Directorate General of Civil Aviation (DGCA) on Friday suspended Akasa Air's Director Training, and Director Operations, for six months, for lapses in pilot training. This action follows a regulatory audit in October and comes in the wake of a complaint by Akasa Air pilots which accused the senior management of favouritism and bias. The DGCA audit had found that pilots were being trained in navigation approaches on a simulator which was not certified for the procedure. The DGCA said this was in violation of its rule and issued a show cause notice to the airline. As the response was found to be unsatisfactory the regulator ordered the suspension of the two directors of Akasa Air. This is the second regulatory action against Akasa Air this week. Earlier the airline was fined Rs 10 lakh by the DGCA, for not compensating passengers who were denied boarding on a Bengaluru Pune flight in September.

Pilgrims wait in vain as Katra protests continue

MOHIT KANDHARI ■ JAMMU

Shri Mata Vaishno Devi Sangarsh Samiti extended the ongoing bandh call for another 72 hours on Friday in protest against the proposed ropeway project. The extension of the Bandh call across Katra township is bound to aggravate the hardships faced by the pilgrims. On the eve of the New Year celebrations, Mata Vaishno Devi Shrine witnesses a huge rush of pilgrims who usher in the New Year by offering prayers in the sanctum sanctorum. Due to the ongoing agitation, pilgrims are already deprived of basic amenities, refreshments and transport facilities along the Yatra trek and in the Katra township, the base camp of the cave shrine. The local shopkeepers and other service providers have been observing a complete shutdown since December 25. The Shrine board authorities have made some alternate arrangements at the Railway station and bus station to provide refreshments to the pilgrims reaching Katra via the rail/road network. Inclement weather conditions

have further compounded the miseries of pilgrims as it becomes difficult for them to trek the serpentine trek along with their luggage in the absence of pony wallahs and pithoos (men who ferry luggage, and children on their back). So far 93.60 lakh pilgrims have



Pilgrims wait in a queue at 'Darshani Deori', entryway to the main shrine of Mata Vaishno Devi temple, during the ongoing 72-hour shutdown called by Shri Mata Vaishno Devi Sangarsh Samiti to protest against the proposed ropeway project, at Katra in Reasi district of J&K

offered prayers inside the cave shrine this year. The decision to extend the bandh call was taken after several rounds of consultations by the members of the sangarsh samiti in Katra. Meanwhile, family members of the

arrested members of the Sangarsh Samiti, continue to sit on dharna along with a group of youth observing an indefinite fast amid adverse weather conditions at Sridhar Chowk Katra. The arrested members of the Sangarsh Samiti have been shifted from Katra to Udhampur jail. Interacting with the media persons, some of the family members of arrested Sangarsh Samiti leaders claimed the high-handed approach of the administration and the stubborn behavior of the Shrine Board had triggered anger among the residents of Katra. People from all segments of the society have now joined hands to further intensify their protest till the time a final decision is announced. They also accused the local MLA and Member of Parliament of ignoring their hardships and maintaining stoic silence. Last month, the Shri Mata Vaishno Devi Shrine Board announced plans to install the ropeway to facilitate access to the temple for senior citizens, children, and others who find it challenging to trek the 13-km-long path to the cave shrine.

Man crawls out from train undercarriage, video goes viral

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ BHOPAL/NEW DELHI

In a bizarre incident, a poor man reportedly travelled about 300 kms, from Itarsi to Jabalpur in Madhya Pradesh. He is said to have clung under the train's bogie, placing himself between the wheels of the Patna bound Pune Danapur Express on Thursday. The yet to be identified man was caught during a routine 'rolling test' in which personnel check the undercarriage, near the Jabalpur railway station. The staff of the Carriage and Wagon department found the man hiding under the coach. Till the filing of this report the incident was being probed by the Railway Protection Force (RPF). The RPF and railway



officials said employees were conducting a routine under-gear check of the coaches when they found the man lying in the trolley beneath the S4 coach of Danapur Express. The identity of the man was not revealed who has admitted to board the train at Itarsi but he confessed to travel in that manner since he

had no money. The video of the man coming out from under the trolley went viral on social media. The video has left the netizens perplexed, with some calling him 'Bangladeshi' and 'Rohingya', and others questioning the need to undertake such a lethal stunt for want of money. Some of them even blamed the railways saying it is still unable to provide an affordable journey for a poor man. Some others recalled that people travelling on the roof of train coaches, hanging on doors, in between the couplers, in front of the engine and in the guard carriages have been noticed, but this was a first of its kind that a man has risked genuinely to reach his destination. Continued on page 8

FAMILY OF 3 DIES IN ROAD ACCIDENT
Bijnor (PTI): A couple, who had recently reconciled after a dispute, and their six-year-old

daughter died in a road accident, police said on Friday. The incident took place on Thursday evening when Ravindra (35), his wife Sheetal (30) and their daughter Ayushi were travelling on a motorcycle from Kiratpur to Bijnor. They were going to get medicine for Ayushi who was unwell, police said. "Near the village of Budhpur Nain Singh, a van's tyre burst, causing the vehicle to lose control and collide with the bike," SHO of Kiratpur, Rakesh Kumar, said. The SHO further mentioned that the couple had faced marital issues recently. On December 19, an argument escalated to the point where Sheetal called the police, leading to Ravindra's arrest, he said.



NOTICE

In army service record No.4207397H of my son Lance Havildar Jitendra Kumar, R/o Vill. & Post Mahtavas, Tehsil Behror, Distt. Alwar (Rajasthan), my name has wrongly been mentioned as Rajesh Yadav in my son army service record. My correct name is Rajesh and I should be known and identified by this name in future.

NOTICE

I RAJANA DEVI is legally Mother of NO- 15787630M, Rank HAV (OPR) Name SANJAY KUMAR, residing at Vill- Mathura Khera, post-Kheeron, Teh- Lalganj, Distt- Raebareilly, State Uttar Pradesh Pin code 229205 do hereby emnly affirm and state on oath as follows-That i have changed my name from RAJAN DEVI to RAJANA DEVI as per Aadhar card

NOTICE

In army service record No. 4207397H of my son Lance Havildar Jitendra Kumar R/o Vill. & Post Mahtavas, Tehsil Behror, Distt. Alwar (Rajasthan), my name has wrongly been mentioned as Urmila Devi in my son army service record. My correct name is Urmila and I should be known and identified by this name in future.

NOTICE

I URMILA DAVI M/O RAJEEV KISHOR JHA (No. 15784657Y) DO AFFIRM THAT IN MY SON'S ARMY SERVICE RECORD MY NAME AND D.O.B WAS WRONGLY ENTERED AS URMILA DAVI CORRECT NAME URMILA DEVI, WRONG D.O.B. 01-07-1957 CORRECT D.O.B. 01-01-1958 FOR ALL FUTURE PURPOSE AND REF.

NOTICE

I SHASHI DEVI M/O AMIT KUMAR MISHRA (No. 15784799W) DO AFFIRM THAT IN MY SON'S ARMY SERVICE RECORD MY NAME WAS WRONGLY ENTERED AS SHASHI DEVI CORRECT NAME SHASHI MISHRA FOR ALL FUTURE REF.

NOTICE

We, Archana Singh W/o Pushpraj Singh and Pushpraj Singh S/o Raj Bahoran Singh resident of Villa No. 120, Sector-A Eldeco City, IIM Road, Lucknow hereby inform/ intimate public in general, Loss of my original allotment letter of Villa No. 120, Eldeco City, IIM Road and original chain deed, Sale deed executed on 27.05.2014 and registered at Bahi No. 1, Zild No. 6755 at page No. 335 to 402 at Serial No. 7694. Who so ever finds the same, please return to us at our address within 15 days of this notice.

आवश्यकता है

यशराज लॉ कालेज, बाघामऊ (गोमती नगर विस्तार), लखनऊ

सम्बद्ध-लखनऊ विश्वविद्यालय, लखनऊ
 प्राचार्य- योग्यता- एलएनएम 55% व नेट/पीएचडी तथा विधि महाविद्यालय में 15 वर्ष का शिक्षण अनुभव।
 एलएनएम (त्रिवर्षीय) हेतु सहायक आचार्य (पद-07)
 योग्यता- एलएनएम 55% व नेट/पीएचडी
 पी.ए.एलएनएम (पंचवर्षीय) हेतु सहायक आचार्य
 विषय- अंग्रेजी (01 पद), अर्थशास्त्र (01 पद), राजनीति विज्ञान (01 पद), इतिहास (01 पद), समाजशास्त्र (01 पद)
 योग्यता- सम्बन्धित विषय में परास्नातक 55% व नेट/पीएचडी वेलनमान सेवा एवं शर्त- सर्वजन निकाय के मानकानुसार।
 नोट- इच्छुक अभ्यर्थी आवेदन पत्र के साथ 4 फोटो, आधार कार्ड, पैन कार्ड तथा शैक्षणिक योग्यता से सम्बन्धित सरकारी सलनको सलित, विज्ञान की तिथि से 15 दिनों के अन्दर कार्यालय में जमा करें ई-मेल या पंजीकृत डाक से भेजें।
 ई-मेल- yashrajle@gmail.com
 पता- बाघामऊ, गोमतीनगर, विस्तार- 6, लखनऊ, उ०प्र०- 226010

सचिव,
 मो०-9919931333, 8303700429

Chinhat bank heist: Seventh absconding accused arrested

PNS ■ LUCKNOW

The seventh absconding accused, Mithun Kumar Bind, was arrested in the early hours from Dewa Road, in connection with his involvement in the recent bank heist, Chinhat police said on Friday. He confessed to his crime during the investigation, they added. Earlier, the police had arrested six individuals in connection with the robbery of jewellery worth crores, after breaking into 42 lockers at the Indian Overseas Bank near Matiyari trisection on Ayodhya Highway. Out of the six accused, Sunny Dayal from Munger in Bihar, was killed in a police encounter in Gazipur district, while his accomplice Vipin Verma from Sitapur was arrested the following day by the Ghazipur police. Sunny Dayal is said to have been working as a Police Mitra (Gram Raksha Dal) in Munger and was recruited during the Kanwar Yatra in Munger in 2021. In Lucknow, the police had gunned down Sovind Kumar from Munger (Bihar), while one Arvind was shot in the leg, and the other two were later apprehended. The mobile phone through which the police traced them has not been recovered as yet.

A Warrant B will be filed in Ghazipur court to interrogate the alleged mastermind of the gang, Vipin. After this, he will be taken into remand. According to Additional Deputy Commissioner of Police (East) Pankaj Kumar Singh, the police team will interrogate the four accused face to face after taking them into remand. It will be ascertained how they reached the hotel located in Takrohi, Indiranagar. The police are seeking answers to questions such as who the accomplices were and where the rest of the stolen goods were taken after the lockers were cut. This information will be gathered, and recovery will follow. Additionally, the accused will be taken to the crime scene, and the entire incident will be recreated. The robbers had entered the bank by cutting through the wall. A team has been formed to identify the jewellery. ACP, Vibhuthikhand, Radha Raman Singh said that a committee had been formed and data had been requested from the bank. "The bank will ask the customers how many pieces of jewellery they had, what their quality was. The committee will consult with the bank and collect evidence from the cus-

Joint team of police, SSB arrests Nepalese woman with 'charas' worth ₹60L

Bahraich (PTI):

A joint team of Sassastra Seema Bal (SSB) and Bahraich police in Uttar Pradesh arrested a woman near the India-Nepal border and seized 2.3 kg of 'charas' from her possession, officials said on Friday. According to officials the contraband is estimated to be worth Rs 60 lakh in the international market. Deputy Commandant of the 42nd battalion of SSB Dilip Kumar told PTI that based on a tip-off the joint team searched a woman, who is a Nepal national, at the integrated check post at Rupaidiha on Thursday evening. The woman had hidden the 'charas' in three small bags wrapped around her waist, the officer said. During interrogation the woman admitted that the consignment of drugs was given to her by a person in Nepal to smuggle it to Tehri Garhwal in Uttarakhand with the aim of earning easy money, he added. Bahraich SP Ram Nayan Singh said that the woman has been identified as Manmali Gharti (52), a resident of Rolpa district in Nepal. The SP also said that a case has been registered against the woman under the Narcotics Drugs & Psychotropic Substances Act, 1985 in Rupaidiha police station and she has been sent to jail. Acting Commandant of 42nd Battalion of the SSB Raj Ranjan said that in view of illegal movement and increasing smuggling, vigilance has been increased 24 hours on the border. He said that the soldiers are continuously conducting intensive checking campaigns. The general public is also expected to cooperate to completely curb illegal smuggling and drug trade and its movement, the officer said.



NOTICE

I MINA DEVI M/O DILIP KUMAR (No. 15774992P) DO AFFIRM THAT IN MY SON'S ARMY SERVICE RECORD MY NAME AND D.O.B WAS WRONGLY ENTERED AS MINA DEVI CORRECT NAME MEENA DEVI WRONG D.O.B. 17-01-1951 CORRECT D.O.B. 07-03-1960 VIDE AFFIDAVIT NO. IN-UP 21176687306585W BEFORE KANPUR COURTS ONLY.

NOTICE

In army service record No-4203627N of my husband Lance Nayak Abendra Singh R/O Vill. Nagla Sewa, Post Vasundhara, Tehsil & Distt- Etah (UP), my name has wrongly been mentioned as Lokesh Devi in my husband Army Service record. My correct name is Lokesh and I should be known and identified by this name in future.

NOTICE

I have changed my name ROHIT to ROHIT KUMAR S/O SONEALAL for future purpose. Add- VILLAGE & POST MOHAMMADPUR ANETHA SIRATHU KAUSHAMBI.

NOTICE

I Kameshwar Shukla resident of Sector D Kanpur Road Lucknow declare that the first original registry of my house No. D/4 Kanpur Road Yojana Lucknow is actually lost somewhere.

NOTICE

The Name of My Father Mohammad Shameem & Mother Name Arshi mentioned in my Class XIIth Marksheets and certificate is incorrect. My father's name Mohd. Shamim & Mother's Name Mahejabeen Khan is true and correct. Mohammad Arsalan S/o Mohd Shamim R/o 89/240-A, Bansmandi, Kanpur Nagar

NOTICE

The name Hariharan, as it appears in my Passport. My name is Hari Haran as entered in Aadhar and PAN Card. Hariharan and Hari Haran, both the names belong to me for all future purposes. Hari Haran S/o Sankarraj R/o 1207, A-Block, Shivalk Mittals Attalika, Shinghpur, Kalyanpur, Kanpur Nagar.

NOTICE

I have changed my name from Maulvi Asif Ali To Mohammad Asif Ali for all future purposes, Mohammad Asif Ali S/o Mustaq Ali R/o Lohia Nagar, Post Samdhan, District Kannauj 209722

NOTICE

My wife name has been wrongly entered in my Army Service Record as Esther Sharma which is wrong. Whereas in the Aadhar card it is Esther which is correct. Which should be recorded in the record. Army No- 15720557M Rank L/NK Dharmchand unit 146 EW Coy C/o 56 APO, Village and Post- Rasulpur Kandhwara, District - Ghazipur (U.P.) 233001

STF nabs member of gang for 'digital arrest' fraud

PNS ■ LUCKNOW

The Uttar Pradesh Special Task Force, Lucknow, claimed to have nabbed a member of an organised gang involved in cheating people by posing as CBI/narcotics/crime branch officers through their digital arrest on Thursday. The accused arrested was identified as Krishna Kumar (27) aka Sunil from Ghaziabad. A B'Tech dropout, he was nabbed near the Awadh Hospital intersection on Hardoi Road. The police recovered one mobile phone, six debit cards, three cheque books, two pieces of an ATM kit, a bank account kit, an internet banking security code device, two SIM cards linked to different corporate bank accounts, and WhatsApp screenshots containing information regarding the bank account kit used in the fraud, along with chats about downloading the APK file on the device with the SIM card linked to the bank account. The STF team also recovered Rs 2,040 in cash.

MAN DUPED OF OVER ₹7.69 CR

Meanwhile, cyber criminals allegedly defrauded a man of over Rs 7.69 crore under the guise of an investment opportunity in Madiaon, police said. The victim, Rajiv Ranjan Sharan (67), a resident of Sitapur Road in Madiaon, was added to a WhatsApp group in September that displayed a bank logo, they added. The group was administered by one Meera Morgan. "Meera Morgan had outlined the investment plan and group rules in the description. We were educated about Indian share market investments and given suggestions about shares. Another WhatsApp group was created on September 12, using the name of Zerodha, called Zerodha Market DD, where the admin was Geetika Anand, a market expert. She provided us with market education," Sharan was quoted as saying in his complaint by the police. He explained that both Meera Morgan and Geetika Anand encouraged him to invest, promising good profits. He was instructed to register on their website and send a screenshot after transferring the money. "Impressed by their analysis and suggestions, and based on the returns shown, I transferred money from my bank account to theirs. In total, I transferred Rs 7,69,74,429 to various bank accounts they provided. However, whenever I tried to withdraw my money, they asked for service charges, taxes, and other fees in exchange for their advice and services. I complied and transferred the amounts they requested. But despite fulfilling all their demands, I never received any money. Instead, they kept asking for more, which made it clear this was a scam. They never intended to return any money; it was all fraudulent," he said.

Man arrested for obscene remarks about deities

Lucknow (PNS): A 55-year-old man, identified as Om Prakash Gautam, was arrested by Nigoha police on Friday after a video surfaced on social media in which he allegedly made indecent and obscene comments about Hindu deities. The purported video, which went viral on Thursday, showed Gautam making disrespectful remarks about Hindu gods and goddesses to a reporter. Gautam, a resident of Mirknagar village, was also booked under Sections 299 of the Indian Penal Code (IPC) and Section 66 of the Information Technology (IT) Act by the police. According to a police press release, the video caused widespread unrest and anger among the public. A complaint was filed by Bhaveshwar Chaurasia of Nigoha at the local police station, highlighting the disturbance caused by Gautam's comments. To maintain peace and order, the local police took Gautam into custody. He was subsequently sent to judicial custody.

Indoor stadium to come up in Rajajipuram

Lucknow (PNS): An indoor stadium will be built on the premises of the Rajajipuram Mini Stadium by the end of 2025. The sports facilities will also be upgraded once the project is fully developed, Vice-Chairman of the Lucknow Development Authority Prathmesh Kumar said. The goal is to promote and foster a sporting spirit among the youth. Currently, the facility offers cricket, badminton, and table tennis. The vice-chairman mentioned that the new stadium would be fully equipped with various sporting amenities. The LDA also plans to include a gymnasium, which will feature state-of-the-art equipment, similar to the one at the city's central stadium. This will be developed through private partnership. The LDA planners, who have prepared the proposal for the stadium's development, have requested funding of Rs 50 crore. The vice-chairman assured that he would request the state government to release the funds in the public interest. He also emphasised his commitment to follow up with the government officers concerned to ensure that the money is released promptly and civil work can begin at the earliest. The authorities have clarified that there will be no sports hostel on the premises. Youths will be allowed to come and practise their chosen sports under the guidance of trained coaches, but they will return home afterward. The stadium is also expected to host regular matches. The large funding request has become necessary due to the scope of construction required. At present, only 20 per cent of the stadium has been constructed, with 80 per cent of the work still to be completed.

CNG leak triggers panic

Lucknow (PNS): A compressed natural gas (CNG) pipeline burst during the digging of a drain by workers of a construction company in Sarojininaragar on Friday. The gas leaked rapidly, triggering panic among commuters and residents. Police and fire control room were informed about the incident. Upon receiving the information, the police evacuated all the people from the area, and the construction company personnel began stopping the leakage. By the time the fire brigade arrived at the scene, the leakage had been halted. Later, the department concerned, Green Gas Limited (GGL), was informed, and engineers arrived at the scene to repair the damaged pipeline. The incident caused panic among the nearby residents, who expressed concerns that if immediate action had not been taken, a major accident could have occurred. It is reported that the construction company, engaged in the construction of the Kanpur Elevated Road, was using a JCB machine to dig a drain near Hiralal Yadav Degree College in Gauri Bazaar on Friday when the underground CNG pipeline was accidentally cut, causing the gas to leak. GIRL RAPED AT AANGANWADI Meanwhile, three boys aged six to seven years were among those booked on Friday for raping a third-year-old girl in Basti district of Uttar Pradesh, police said. The incident took place in a village in the Kalwari Police Station jurisdiction on Thursday, they said, adding that the FIR was lodged following a complaint by her mother. Harraiya Police Circle Officer Sanjay Singh said eight people were booked on Friday under sections 70 (2) (gang rape of a minor), 191 (2) (forcible violence), 115 (2) (voluntarily causing hurt) and 152 (intentionally endangering unity) of the Bharatiya Nyaya Sanhita and the POCSO Act. "The accused in the case include three minors, three women and two men," he said. He said the girl has been sent for medical examination and further legal action will be taken on the basis of the medical report. According to police, the family alleged that three boys molested the girl when she was alone at an aanganwadi on Thursday evening. When her cries drew some other children to the spot, the boys ran away, police said. According to the FIR, when the girl's mother went to the boys' parents to complain about the incident, she was beaten up. The victim's mother called up 112, prompting a police action.

एनटीपीसी NTPC Limited
 (A Govt. of India Enterprise)

NOTICE
 Registered Office Address : NTPC Bhawan, Core-7, SCOPE Complex, 7-Institutional Area, Lodhi Road, New Delhi-110 003
 Corporate Identification Number- L40101DL1975GOI007966

The applicant above named has made an application before the Central Electricity Regulatory Commission (CERC), New Delhi for determination of tariff of **Anta Gas Power Station (419.33 MW)** from 01.04.2024 to 31.03.2029.

1. The beneficiaries of the generating station are:
 a) Uttar Pradesh Power Corp. Ltd., Shakti Bhawan 14, Ashok Marg, Lucknow-226001.
 b) Tata Power Delhi Distribution Ltd., Grid Substation, Hudson Road, Kingsway Camp, Delhi-110009.
 c) BSES Rajdhani Power Ltd., BSES Bhawan, Nehru Place, New Delhi-110019.
 d) BSES Yamuna Power Ltd., Shakti Kiran Building, Karkardooma, Delhi-110092.
 e) Power Development Department, Govt. of J&K, Civil Secretariat, Srinagar.
 f) Electricity Department (Chandigarh), Union Territory of Chandigarh, Addl. Office Building, Sector-9 D, Chandigarh.
 g) Uttarakhand Power Corporation Ltd., Urja Bhawan, Kanwali Road, Dehradun-248001.
 2. Capacity of the generating station : 419.33 MW
 3. Approved capital cost of the project : Rs. 851.59 Crore
 4. Authority which has approved the Capital Cost : CERC
 5. Scheduled date of commercial operation : Not Applicable
 6. Actual date of commercial operation of station : 01.08.1990
 7. Capital cost on date of Commercial operation of Station : Not Applicable
 8. Details of tariff:

Particulars	Tariff for the previous year*	Year-wise tariff sought to be determined				
		2024-25	2025-26	2026-27	2027-28	2028-29
1. Capacity Charges (Rs. Lakh/ year)	33,623.64	23,197.15	23,843.29	27,791.22	35,690.30	42,257.60
2. Energy Charges (Rs./kwh)		12.92				

*As per Petition for truing-up of tariff for 2019-24 period for Anta Gas Power Station (419.33 MW) filed with 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 (U.P.) (P. Piyush)
 Date : 01.12.2024 Addl. General Manager (Comm.)

Leading the Power Sector

एनटीपीसी NTPC Limited
 (A Govt. of India Enterprise)

NOTICE
 Registered Office Address : NTPC Bhawan, Core-7, SCOPE Complex, 7-Institutional Area, Lodhi Road, New Delhi-110 003
 Corporate Identification Number- L40101DL1975GOI007966

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-III (210 MW)** from 01.04.2024 to 31.03.2029.

1. The beneficiaries of the generating station are:
 a) Uttar Pradesh Power Corp. Ltd. (UPPCL), Shakti Bhawan 14, Ashok Marg, Lucknow-226001.
 b) Rajasthan Urja Vikas Nigam Limited (RUVNL) (on behalf of DISCOMs of Rajasthan), Vidyt Bhawan, Janpath, Jaipur-302005.
 c) Tata Power Delhi Distribution Ltd. (TPDDL), Grid Substation, Hudson Road, Kingsway Camp, Delhi-110009.
 d) BSES Rajdhani Power Ltd. (BRPL), BSES Bhawan, Nehru Place, New Delhi-110019.
 e) BSES Yamuna Power Ltd. (BYPL), Shakti Kiran Building, Karkardooma, Delhi-110092.
 f) Haryana Power Purchase Centre (HPPC), Shakti Bhawan, Sector-VI, Panchkula, Haryana-134109.
 g) Punjab State Power Corporation Ltd. (PSPCL), The Mall, Patiala-147001
 h) Himachal Pradesh State Electricity Board Ltd. (HPSEB), Kumar Housing Complex Building-II, Vidyt Bhawan, Shimla-171004.
 i) Power Development Department (PDD-J&K), Govt. of J&K, Civil Secretariat, Srinagar.
 j) Electricity Department (Chandigarh), Union Territory of Chandigarh, Addl. Office Building, Sector-9 D, Chandigarh.
 k) Uttarakhand Power Corporation Ltd. (UPCL), Urja Bhawan, Kanwali Road, Dehradun-248001.
 2. Capacity of the generating station : 210 MW
 3. Approved capital cost of the project : Rs. 886.81 Crore
 4. Authority which has approved the Capital Cost : CERC
 5. Scheduled date of commercial operation : Not Applicable
 6. Actual date of commercial operation of station : 01.01.2007
 7. Capital cost on date of Commercial operation of Station : Not Applicable
 8. Details of tariff:

Particulars	Tariff for the previous year*	Year-wise tariff sought to be determined				
		2024-25	2025-26	2026-27	2027-28	2028-29
1. Capacity Charges (Rs. Lakh/ year)	19798.89	20197.12	20606.35	21352.10	22377.76	23285.99
2. Energy Charges (Rs./kwh)		4.36				

*As per Petition for truing-up of tariff for 2019-24 period for Feroze Gandhi Uncharh Thermal Power Station Stage-III (210 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 : 01.12.2024 Addl. General Manager (Comm.)

Leading the Power Sector

Yogi orders strict monitoring of police's infra projects

PTI ■ LUCKNOW

Uttar Pradesh Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath has stressed the importance of maintaining quality and adhering to deadlines in the construction of police lines, transit hostels, and training institutions under the home department. Chairing a meeting at his official residence on Thursday, the chief minister directed that these projects be reviewed regularly at various administrative levels to ensure progress, according to an official statement. Adityanath emphasised that a secretary-level official from the home department should conduct weekly reviews, while the additional chief secretary should conduct fortnightly reviews. He added that monitoring responsibilities should also

extend to district, range, and zonal police officers. Highlighting accountability, the chief minister ordered a monthly third-party audit by technical institutes for all projects exceeding Rs 50 crore. This audit should include on-site verification and photographic evidence submitted alongside the report, the statement said. Adityanath also underscored the need for experienced professionals in the construction process, suggesting the involvement of retired engineers or proficient professionals from reputed technical institutions, if necessary. He further directed that no changes should be made to the approved project design after work has begun, except under unavoidable circumstances and with prior approval from the authorities. For high-rise buildings, the chief minister instructed that

elevators be made mandatory and a dedicated corpus fund be established for their maintenance. Reviewing budget allocations and project progress zone-wise, Adityanath expressed his commitment to improving housing facilities for field officers. Multi-storey residential buildings are being constructed in police lines for this purpose, as per the statement. The chief minister pointed out that districts like Sambhal, Hapur, Chandauli, Auraiya, Amroha and Shamli currently lack permanent police lines, and their construction is underway to enhance operational efficiency. He also said a transit hostel with four blocks at Aligarh Police Line will be completed by April 2025. The State Firefighting Training College in Unnao and residen-

tial and non-residential facilities for the Veerangana Uda Devi Women Police Battalion in Lucknow must see accelerated progress, he directed the officials concerned. Adityanath also called for the timely completion of significant projects, including doubling the capacity of police training facilities in Moradabad, Meerut, Gorakhpur, and Sitapur. The chief minister issued similar instructions for establishing new PAC battalions in Gautam Buddha Nagar and Shamli, and for constructing forensic labs in Ayodhya and residential police training schools in Meerut and Badaun for the women PAC Battalion in Gorakhpur. He further directed the authorities to take strict action against contractors failing to meet contractual obligations, including issuing notices and blacklisting, if necessary.

Swami Vasudevanand lauds CM Yogi's efforts for Maha Kumbh

PNS ■ MAHAKUMBH NAGAR

The Shankaracharya of Jyotishpeeth, Swami Vasudevanand Saraswati, commended Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath for the "exceptional arrangements" being made for the Maha Kumbh 2025. He stated that CM Yogi's actions not only reflect his dedication to organising the Kumbh but also his commitment to advancing the state's progress. Swami Vasudevanand Saraswati remarked, "The development work being carried out in Prayagraj for the Maha Kumbh is commendable, and CM Yogi Adityanath deserves immense gratitude for his dedication to organising the festival. All saints and residents of the state thank him for his efforts to propel Uttar Pradesh forward." He also praised both Prime Minister Narendra Modi and CM Yogi for their efforts in fostering a cultural revival and

uniting people in support of Sanatan Dharma across the state and the nation. The Uttar Pradesh government is making extensive preparations to ensure that the grand and divine Maha Kumbh, beginning in January 2025, becomes a spectacular celebration of Sanatan culture. Over Rs 6,000 crore has been allocated for the initiative. From widening and beautifying roads leading to the Sangam, no part of Prayagraj has been left untouched by development projects. Acknowledging these efforts, Swami Vasudevanand Saraswati emphasised that the upcoming Kumbh festival in Prayagraj will be a monumental event. He praised the development work carried out under CM Yogi, highlighting the arrangements and the significant expansion of the area. He also appreciated the dedication of employees and officials

from various departments, extending his gratitude to CM Yogi and offering his best wishes for the continued success of the efforts. Furthermore, Swami Vasudevanand Saraswati expressed gratitude to PM Modi and CM Yogi for their roles in the construction of the Ram Temple in Ayodhya, the Vishwanath Corridor in Kashi, the Vindhya Corridor, and the development of religious sites across Uttar Pradesh and the country. He noted that under their leadership, the country is experiencing a cultural renaissance. "Both leaders are deeply devoted to Hindu culture and traditions, striving to revive Sanatan Dharma and inspire people to work towards the progress of their society, nation, and religion," he said. Swami Vasudevanand Saraswati emphasised that these efforts are yielding profound results, with follow-

ers of Sanatan Dharma becoming increasingly aware of and connected to their cultural heritage. On the topic of Sambhal, Swami Vasudevanand Saraswati advocated for the restoration of all buried and hidden temples, ensuring their benefits reach society. He also addressed the Places of Worship Act in the Supreme Court, stressing the importance of respecting and adhering to the court's decision. In reference to CM Yogi and PM Modi's slogan, "Ek Rahenge, Toh Safe Rahenge", he urged everyone to embrace unity, recognising that all are part of Indian culture and should resist efforts to divide society. Regarding the upcoming Maha Kumbh, he highlighted its global significance, stating that people from across India and around the world would gather at the Sangam to take a holy dip, receiving spiritual blessings and the fulfilment of their wishes.



SDRF and police personnel during a joint mock drill conducted as part of preparedness in case of stampede, ahead of Maha Kumbh Mela 2025, at Sangam, in Prayagraj, on Friday

Strategic initiatives for pollution-free Ganga

MAHA KUMBH 2025

PNS ■ MAHAKUMBH NAGAR

The Namami Gange Mission has devised unique and comprehensive strategies to make Maha Kumbh 2025 a grand celebration of spirituality and a benchmark for cleanliness and environmental sustainability. To maintain the purity and uninterrupted flow of the Ganga, 10 sewage treatment plants (STPs) with a combined capacity of 340 MLD are currently operational in Prayagraj, officials said. Strengthening these efforts, the Mission has approved three ambitious projects for Maha Kumbh 2025, which include the construction of additional STPs with capacities of 43 MLD at Salori, 90 MLD at Rasulabad, and 50 MLD at Naini. These projects aim not only to provide devotees with clean and pollution-free Ganga water during the festival but also to maintain the river's uninterrupted flow and long-term cleanliness, they added. In Prayagraj, unparalleled efforts are transforming the Ganga and Yamuna rivers, once heavily polluted by 81 drains, into streams of cleanliness, officials said. Through the joint efforts of the Namami Gange Mission and the UP government, 37 of these drains have been fully tapped and treated, effectively halting their contribution to pollution. Additionally, five drains have been identified as dry or non-functional, requiring no treatment, they said. As part of the preparations for Maha Kumbh 2025, the state government has allocated budgetary resources to tap 17 more drains, while the remaining 22



drains are being addressed under the leadership of the National Mission for Clean Ganga (NMCG), officials said. These initiatives are elevating the campaign for cleanliness and environmental protection to unprecedented levels, they added. The schemes launched by the Namami Gange Mission for Maha Kumbh 2025 aim to make the event clean, safe, and eco-friendly, while also preserving the purity of the Ganga and Yamuna rivers and maintaining environmental balance. By leveraging advanced technology, planned infrastructure, and active community participation, the Mission ensures the long-term integrity of these rivers. These initiatives are not only designed to make Maha Kumbh a success but also to significantly enhance the sewerage infrastructure of Prayagraj, leaving a lasting legacy for future generations, they added.

Mahakumbh Nagar area to provide accurate route information, officials said here on Friday. Over 400 signages have already been installed, with the remaining set to be completed by December 31. The Public Works Department in Prayagraj is working at full capacity, targeting the installation of 100 signages daily to ensure smooth navigation for pilgrims. With crores of devotees from India and abroad expected to visit the Sangam, special attention has been given to language inclusivity. Signages feature multiple languages, including Hindi, English, and regional Indian languages, ensuring ease of navigation for all visitors. Chief Engineer of PWD, Prayagraj, AK Dwivedi confirmed that the team is working on a war footing to meet the December 31 deadline. Additionally, 28 pontoon bridges are nearing operational readiness, with minor work remaining on a few. These bridges will also be fully functional within the next few days. The remaining two bridges will also be completed before 31, he added.

Govt focuses on pasture development to boost livestock productivity

Lucknow (pns): The Uttar Pradesh government has launched an ambitious initiative aimed at enhancing rural development and increasing livestock productivity. This programme, under the Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act (MGNREGA), focuses on the rapid development of pastures in gram panchayats across the state, officials said. The primary goal of this initiative is to ensure an ample supply of fodder for livestock in rural areas while strengthening farmers' livelihoods, they added. The Rural Development department has issued instructions to all district magistrates to identify barren, unused, or community-owned lands for the development of pastures.

These lands will be transformed into green spaces to provide adequate fodder for livestock. The programme is designed not only to enhance livestock productivity but also to strengthen the rural economy by generating new employment opportunities, officials said. Jobs created will empower local communities and increase household incomes, playing a vital role in achieving self-reliance for rural residents, they added. According to the Rural Development department, fodder availability is critical for improving livestock productivity. While previous efforts have been made in this direction, special priority is being given to pasture development this time.

'Satya Vachan', says Akhilesh on governor's remarks

Lucknow (PNS): Samajwadi Party president Akhilesh Yadav latched on to Uttar Pradesh Governor Anandiben Patel's remarks on law and order situation in the state to take a subtle jibe at the government. Interacting with reporters at the Raj Bhavan on Thursday, Patel said the law and order situation has improved in the state, but there is still time before it could be termed "100 per cent safe for women". Taking to social media, Yadav on Thursday evening shared a news clip headline of the governor's remarks with the caption: "Satya Vachan (true statement)". During her interaction with the press, the governor also said that she hopes a day would come when women would debate in Parliament while their husbands would wait for them at home after preparing a meal. "The fact is that before the BJP came to power in Uttar Pradesh, it was difficult for women to venture out after 5 pm. The situation was in stark contrast to Gujarat where women move freely even at midnight. "Now the situation in Uttar Pradesh is much improved on the law and order front too. But if you ask me if the state is 100 per cent safe, I would say there is still some work to do," Patel said.

Manmohan Singh will be remembered as one of India's finest PMs: Akhilesh

PNS ■ LUCKNOW

Samajwadi Party president Akhilesh Yadav on Friday said former prime minister Dr Manmohan Singh will always be remembered as one of India's finest prime ministers, adding that he worked quietly yet profoundly for the country's progress. Speaking to reporters here, Samajwadi Party president Akhilesh Yadav said Singh's decisions both as finance minister and prime minister were instrumental in strengthening India's economy. "Many of the advancements we see today are because of the reforms he introduced. His bold moves in economic and market policies laid the foundation for India to stand as an equal on the global stage," Samajwadi Party president Akhilesh Yadav said. Singh, 92, passed away Thursday evening in Delhi. He served as India's prime minister from 2004 to 2014. Samajwadi Party president Akhilesh Yadav praised Singh's unique combination of knowledge and practicality, calling him both a brilliant economist and a thoughtful leader. "He was known for speaking less, but his decisions spoke volumes about his wisdom and foresight. His tenure was marked by transformative changes across sectors, and these changes resonate even today," Samajwadi Party president Akhilesh Yadav



Indian flag flying at half-mast atop Vidhan Bhawan in Lucknow during the seven-day state mourning following the demise of former PM Manmohan Singh

added. Reflecting on Singh's legacy, Samajwadi Party president Akhilesh Yadav described him as the prime minister who worked quietly yet profoundly to bring about significant progress in the nation. "The entire country mourns his loss. People are revisiting his speeches and recalling his impactful decisions. He will forever be remembered as one of India's finest Prime Ministers," he said.

The former Uttar Pradesh chief minister further said, "While Dr Manmohan Singh has now entered the pages of history, his contributions will live on. He will always be celebrated as a leader who prioritised the nation's welfare and worked with unmatched dedication." **RLD LEADERS PAY TRIBUTE** Rashtriya Lok Dal leaders paid tribute to former prime minister Dr Manmohan Singh at the state office of the party in

Lucknow on Friday. Senior leaders, including Anil Dubey and national secretary Anupam Mishra, were present. The party officials and workers paid tribute to Dr Singh by observing two minutes of silence. Mishra said that pre-scheduled programmes in all the districts of the state to celebrate the birthday of Rashtriya Lok Dal's national president and Union Minister of State (Independent Charge) Chaudhary Jayant Singh had been cancelled. RLD national secretary Anupam Mishra said that the country has lost not only a politician but also a great economist. "The death of former PM Dr. Manmohan Singh is an irreparable loss to the country. The former prime minister, who gave a new direction to the Indian economy through economic reforms, will always be generously remembered for his remarkable contribution in the history of Indian politics," he said. Remembering the former prime minister in the condolence meeting, senior leader Anil Dubey said that Dr Manmohan Singh was a pioneer of developmental politics and governance. "He selflessly devoted his entire life to the service of the country and countrymen. Today he is no longer among us, but his ideals and thoughts will always inspire us," Dubey said.

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Regional Office: Lucknow Aryavart Bhawan 569/20/K/1 Sneh Nagar VIP Road Opp Awadh Hospital Alambagh Lucknow			
Possession Notice Under Rule-8(1) (for Imovable Properties)			
Whereas, the undersigned being the Authorized officer of ARYAVART BANK, under the Securitization and Reconstruction of Financial Assets and Enforcement of Securities Interest Act, 2002 and in exercise of powers conferred under section 13(12) read with rule 3 of the securities interest (Enforcement) Rules, 2002 issued a Demand notice in the account mentioned hereunder on the dates mentioned before the name calling upon the borrower and guarantor to repay the amount mentioned in the notices along with interest within 60 days from the date of receipts said notices. The borrower/legal heirs of borrower and guarantor having failed to repay the amount, notices are hereby given to the Borrower/legal Heirs of borrower and guarantor in particular and the public in general that the undersigned has taken the possession of the properties described here below in exercise of power conferred on him under sub-section 13(4) of the Act read with Rule 8 of the said Rules on the dates mentioned against each property. The borrower/legal Heirs of borrower in particular and the public in general are hereby cautioned not to deal with the property. Any dealing with the under noted property will be subject to the charge of ARYAVART BANK for the amount with interest and other charges etc. thereon. The Borrower's/Guarantors attention is invited to provisions of sub-section (8) of Section 13 of the Act, in respect of time available, to redeem the secured assets Details of Properties whose possession has been taken are as follows:-			
Name & Address of the Borrowers/Guarantors/Branch	Description of the properties	Am't. due as per demand notice	Date of Possession
Borrower & Mortgagor: Shri Dinesh Kumar alias Dinesh Kumar Bhartiya S/o Shri Sharad Prasad, Salempur, Patnara, Pargana - Kakori, Lucknow-227107	Residential Property: Plot No.7, Part of Land Kharsa No. 580, Salempur Patnara, Pargana-Kakori, Tehsil & District-Lucknow, TITLE HOLDER- Shri Dinesh Kumar S/o Shri Sharad Prasad. Details of Property As Per Sale Deed Dated 12.10.2012, Boundaries: East: House of Darshan Pal, West: Rasta 14' Wide, North: House of Kallu, South: Part of Plot No. 7 Area: 46.468 Sqm.	Rs. 9,80,097.30 and interest thereon	19.09.2024 23.12.2024
Guarantor: 1. Shri Pram Das S/o Shri Durga Prasad, Village- Sarosa Bharosa, Kakori Mod, Mohan Road, Lucknow-227107			
2. Shri Ram Chandra Gupta S/o Shri Ram Gupta, Kakori Mod, Mohan Road, Post-Kakori, Pin-227107 Branch : Khushhalganj			
Borrower & Mortgagor: Smt. Neelam Awasthi W/o Shri. Ajay Kumar Awasthi, Janakpuri, Sarojaini Nagar, Amausi, Lucknow-226008	Residential Property: House bearing Municipal No. HPU/KU-1674 Part. Hanuman Puri, Built upon a residential Part carved upon part of Kharsa no. 1674, Min, Situated at village Amausi, Ward-Sarojaini Nagar, Pargana- Binjaur, Tehsil- Sarojaini Nagar, Lucknow, TITLE HOLDER- Smt. Neelam Awasthi W/o Shri. Ajay Kumar Awasthi, Details of Property As Per Sale Deed Dated 25.01.2016, Boundaries: East: Rasta 15 Feet wide, West: Bhukhand Ramroop Singh, North: Araje Vikereta, South: House Kamlesh Kumar Singh Area: 92.936 Sq.mt.	Rs. 6,57,897.54 and interest thereon	30.09.2024 23.12.2024
Co-Borrower: Shri Ajay Kumar Awasthi S/o Shri Prem Narayan Awasthi, Janakpuri, Sarojaini Nagar, Amausi, Lucknow-226008			
Guarantor: 1. Shri Meenu Kumar Gupta S/o Shri Kishore Gupta, Hanuman Puri Behind, New Public School, Sarojaini Nagar Lucknow-226008.			
2. Shri Umesh Kumar S/o Shri Raja Ram Dwivedi, 111, Gauri Bazar, Sarojaini Nagar, Amausi Lucknow-226008. Branch : Gauri Bazar			
Mortgagor & Guarantor: Smt. Renu Devi W/o Late Ashok Kumar, Indian Public School, E-4/748, Vinay Khand Gornli Nagar Lucknow-226010	Residential Property: S/S-3/347, Sector-0, Mansarovar, Kanpur Road Yojana, District-Lucknow, TITLE HOLDER- Smt. Renu Devi W/o Late Ashok Kumar, Details of Property As Per Sale Deed Dated 16.06.2013, Boundaries: East: Plot No. 3/368, West: 6 Mts Wide Road, North: Plot No. 3/348, South: Scheme Boundary Area: 39.95 Sq.mt.	Rs. 7,39,935.40 and interest thereon	30.09.2024 23.12.2024
Borrower: Shri Vijay Yadav S/o Shri Mahesh Prasad Yadav, B-2399, Uday Hospital Indira Nagar Lucknow-226016			
Guarantor: Shri Ravi Prakash Srivastava S/o Shri S.N. Srivastava, B-1723, Indira Nagar Near Shastri Market Lucknow-226016. Branch : Chandan			
Date : 28.12.2024	Place : Lucknow	Authorised Officer	

Naqvi: Preparations for Maha Kumbh going on at fast pace



PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ PRAYAGRAJ

Former union minister Mukhtar Abbas Naqvi reached Prayagraj on Friday. He targeted Akhilesh Yadav over his post on X. Akhilesh had questioned the preparations for Maha Kumbh. Naqvi said, "If Akhilesh Yadav takes a dip in Maha Kumbh once, all his negativity will be washed away." Naqvi said, "Preparations for Maha Kumbh are going on at a fast pace. All the work will be completed on time. The whole world is watching Maha Kumbh. The Yogi government is engaged in making it grand and divine. This time Maha Kumbh will show the grand and divine image of India to the world." He said all necessary arrangements are being made by the Yogi government for the security of the event. On the occasion the former union minister condoled the death of former Prime Minister Manmohan Singh. He said that everyone knows the development in the country under the leadership of the former prime minister. Manmohan Singh was a strong pillar to take the successful journey of self-reliant India forward, he further added.

FOUR ARRESTED: The Prayagraj Police on Friday arrested four members of a

gang of cyber thugs accused of cheating people in the name of booking cottages, tents, hotels, tent city, lodges, flats etc. in Maha Kumbh. The arrested cyber criminals identified as residents of Nalanda, Varanasi, Azamgarh etc have confessed to online fraud. DCP City Abhishek Bharti that these things were cheating people using social media platforms. Crores of people are to come to Prayagraj for Maha Kumbh, in such a situation, booking has started from now. This gang was taking advantage of this. They used to mislead the people by creating fake websites for booking cottages/tents/hotels etc. in Maha Kumbh and showing discounts on them and committed cyber fraud online. The DCP said that the accused told the police during interrogation that they were cheating pilgrims in a planned manner by luring them with cheap bookings. They used to prepare exact copies of the hotels' websites and sent links to people. The arrested thugs were identified as Pankaj Kumar of Nalanda, Bihar, Yash Choubey, of Varanasi, Ankit Kumar Gupta of Varanasi and Aman Kumar of Azamgarh. Meanwhile, police arrested Jaka, nephew of slain mafia Atiq Ahmed on Thursday night. A car has also been

CM to participate in Dharma Dhvaj programme of 3 Ani Akharas in Prayagraj today

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ PRAYAGRAJ

Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath will visit the Mahakumbh area of Prayagraj on Saturday to participate in the Dharma Dhvaj programme of the three Ani Akharas (Nirvani Ani, Nirmohi Ani and Digambar Ani) and will also establish the Dharma Dhvaj. He will also visit the camp of Nath sect and also worship the Paduka here. Mela officer Vijay Kiran Anand reached the camp of those three Akharas on Friday, talked to the office-bearers and took information about the facilities. The Dharma Dhvaj of these Akharas is to be established by the chief minister. In view of this programme to be

held in Sector-20, the Mela officers and office-bearers of the Akhara have completed preparations. He will reach these Akharas of the Mela area at 10:30 am and is expected to stay in the Mahakumbh Mela area for about four hours. After participating in the Dharma Dhvaj programme, the chief minister will hold talks related to Maha Kumbh with the representatives of 13 Akharas in their camp. Around 1 pm, he will hold a meeting with the officers in the Mela Authority office. After this, he can also inspect the Mela area, Prayagraj Information Officer PN Dwivedi said. President of Nirmohi Ani Akhara Mahant Rajendra Das said we have completed our preparations.

aged to flee asking for time to fulfil the demand. Later, a non-bailable warrant was issued against Jaka. The complaint said that on July 15, 2023, when the victim went to the accused's house to get the mobile back, Jaka called Mohammad Vaish and Rashid alias Neelu there. As soon as he asked for the mobile, they allegedly started beating him. He was released after giving a 10-day deadline to fulfil the demands. DCP Nagar Abhishek Bharti said on being tipped off by an informer the police arrested him from Mariadih, Dhoomanganj on Thursday night.

received from his possession. Puramufiti police is interrogating the accused to gather information about his other accomplices. Property dealer Sabir Hussain of Jafri Colony, Dhoomanganj, had lodged a report at Puramufiti police station in which it was said that on July 6, 2023, he was going to show a plot to a customer when Jaka, Mohammad Vaish, Muzammil and Shakeel of Mariadih, reached there and allegedly threatened him to leave the plot and snatched his mobile. Along with this, extortion of ₹10 lakh was allegedly demanded by Jaka for plotting in this area. The victim man-

Rich tribute paid to Manmohan Singh

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ VARANASI

Rich tribute was paid to former Prime Minister Dr Manmohan Singh. Expressing their condolences, outgoing state secretary of Uttar Pradesh Congress Committee (UPCC) Fasahat Hussain Babu, state general secretary of Congress (Minority Cell) Hasan Mehndi Kabban said with the death of Manmohan Singh, the country has lost a precious star. They said the entire country is saddened by the demise of former prime minister. In a press release, they said Dr Manmohan Singh was known as a thinker and scholar. "During the economic crisis in 1991, as the Union Finance Minister, Manmohan Singh created a new identity for India at the global stage carrying the nation on the path of liberalisation", they said. Recalling his contribution, the Congress leaders said Land

Former PM's contribution remembered

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ KANPUR

The members of "Just for Environment" paid homage to former Prime Minister of India, Dr Manmohan Singh remembering his immense contribution to the country. "He was a reformer who not only brought an economic revolution in 90s to open up India's economy and take care of economic crisis but also initiated large number of path-breaking initiatives viz. right to information, right to education and MNREGA etc. He was the architect who drew the roadmap of India's economic reform and pulled it back from the brink when even its gold reserve was pledged", said Prof Narendra Mohan, patron of the organisation. Paying homage to former Prime Minister, Anita Agrawal, president, remembered him as a gentleman politician. His simplicity and



The members of 'Just for Environment' on Friday paying homage to former prime minister Dr Manmohan Singh

politeness will always remain an example, she added. The other members of organisation Dr Jahar Singh, Jitendra Singh, Kavya Agrawal, Shruti Shukla, Anushka Kanodia, Sveccha Singh and Archana Sharma also paid floral tributes to the departed soul.

Acquisition Act, Forest Rights Act, MNREGA, Right to Information, National Food Security Act, all these schemes

are the gift of Dr Manmohan Singh." The country has suffered a great loss in the form of Manmohan Singh.

Along with a great economist, the country has lost a rare precious diamond, a precious star", they added.

MYUVA an important initiative to make youth self-reliant: DM

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ VARANASI

A divisional workshop under Mukhyamantri Yuva Udyam Vikas Abhiyan (MYUVA) was organised in two sessions in the Commissioner's auditorium here on Thursday. District Magistrate S Rajalingam was present as the chief guest while Chief Development Officer (CDO) Himanshu Nagpal and Joint Commissioner (Industries) Umesh Kumar Singh as the special guests. Apart from them, Deputy Commissioners (Industries) of Varanasi, Ghazipur and Chandauli, District Industries Centre officers and employees, Deputy Commissioner (NRLM, Jaunpur), City

Mission Manager (NULM), District Lead Manager, Bank Coordinator and potential beneficiaries of the scheme participated. The DM said MYUVA is an important initiative to make the youth self-reliant and set up new enterprises. "This scheme provides an opportunity to the youth to realise their dreams and contribute to nation building. India's vast market provides a golden opportunity for the youth to progress economically", he said calling upon the participants present in the workshop to take full advantage of it. CDO Himanshu Nagpal said, "The aim of this workshop is to make the youth aware of the nuances of the scheme and motivate them for entrepreneurship. We

are committed to provide all possible help to the youth." Joint Commissioner Industries said, "The government is committed to make the youth entrepreneurs and the MYUVA is an important step in this direction. We will provide all possible help to the youth in setting up and making their enterprises successful." Deputy Commissioner, District Industry Promotion and Entrepreneurship Development Center said, "Our aim is to encourage the youth for entrepreneurship and provide them all necessary help. We will help the youth in setting up their enterprises in collaboration with the Samadhan Samiti. Youth between 21 to 40 years of age who have passed minimum eighth standard and have

received recognised skill training are eligible for this scheme." The workshop was also addressed by Deputy Commissioner NRLM, Varanasi. The stakeholders who attended the workshop found it to be a very useful. The main objective of the workshop was to increase awareness about MYUVA and make the potential beneficiaries aware of its benefits. During it the main features and objectives of MYUVA, financial assistance and other benefits available under the scheme, application process and necessary documents, challenges faced in setting up and running the enterprise and their solutions, success stories and inspirational examples were told by the technical expert of Samadhan Samiti.

Man found hanging from tree

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ KANPUR

A middle-aged man was found hanging from a tree in Hardeopurva village of Jalalabad in Kannauj on Friday morning. Police rushed to spot and probed the issue. The identity of the deceased could not be ascertained. Police have recovered a railway ticket from West Bengal to Delhi from his pocket. When villagers were going to work in the field on Friday morning, they saw a man hanging from a tree in a garden. On their information, Kotwali in charge Alok Dubey rushed to spot. Police and forensic team carried out a probe and brought the body down. Police also made a futile attempt to ascertain identity of the deceased by calling people from nearby villages and sent the body to mortuary. Dubey said the deceased was above 50 years of age and it is apprehended that after killing, the body was hanged from the tree. On the basis of autopsy report, further action will be initiated in the matter, he said.

On the other hand, middle-aged man was found dead under mys-

terious circumstances in front of his house in a village under Shivrajpur police station area on Friday morning. Police rushed to the spot and carried out probe. ADCP Brijendra Dwivedi along with other officers and police force rushed to spot and carried out investigations. Station Officer (SO) Arvind Kumar Sisaudia said the body had been sent for autopsy. On the complaint of brother of the deceased, an FIR had been lo-

ACCIDENT: A cyclist, returning from Gauri Kund Mahotsav, was fatally knocked down by a speeding bike near Shobhan Hospital in Sheoli Kotwali police station area of Kanpur Dehat on Thursday night. Seriously injured, his kin took him to a private hospital in Kanpur where he succumbed to his injury during treatment. Police sent the body for autopsy. Hargovind Kamal, a native of Sargaon Durauli, Ghatampur Kotwali, had been living with his sister Guddi and brother-in-law Vimal in Bairi Basti Kotwali of Sheoli, Kanpur Dehat, with family members for a long time. His son Vishal (13), a student of class VII, had gone

to see the ongoing Gauri Kund Mahotsav. On Thursday night when he returning home on the bicycle, the speeding bike hit him due to which he was caused seriously injured. People present there caught hold of the bike-rider and handed him over to the police. On hearing about the incident, kin also rushed to spot and took the injured Vishal to Kanpur for treatment where he succumbed to his injury during treatment. When the body reached village, mother Soni fell unconscious while his sister Kajol burst into tears. Police sent the body for autopsy. Kotwali in charge, Sheoli, Harmit Singh said on an FIR had been lodged in this connection on the complaint of father of the deceased and a probe was on in the matter.

CENTENARY CELEBRATIONS: The Communist Party of India organised centenary celebrations at Comrade Ajay Ghosh auditorium here on Thursday. Addressing the audience, party general secretary Comrade D Raja acknowledged the party's 100-year journey since its inception in Kanpur.

Increase loan-deposit ratio: CDO

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ VARANASI

A meeting of the District and Coordination Committee was held in the Collectorate auditorium here on Thursday under the chairmanship of Chief Development Officer (CDO) Himanshu Nagpal in which, along with stopping the salary of 3 fisheries inspectors of Fisheries department for getting very less applications for Fishermen Credit Card (KCC), the CDO directed to give adverse entry to the Deputy CVO of Animal Husbandry department for not being able to give proper information about the departmental schemes and participating in the meeting without adequate information and preparation. Nagpal directed the meeting to increase the loan-deposit ratio in the financial year 2024-25. Reserve Bank of India (RBI) official JS Kalra said banks whose loan deposit ratio is less than 60 per cent should make efforts

to increase it by making a strategy. An achievement of 98 per cent was registered in the Annual Loan Scheme 2024-25 till September 2024. Along with 100 per cent target fulfillment under the Mukhya Mantri Gramodyog Rojgar Yojana, banks achieved 96 per cent in doing CCL of self-help groups as per the annual target. The CDO directed the officers concerned to immediately dispose of the pending applications of Mukhya Mantri Yuva Swarajgar Yojana, Ek Janpad Ek Utpadan Yojana, Rashtriya Gramin Ajeevika Mission schemes. The last date for premium deduction of Pradhan Mantri Fasal Bima Yojana in Rabi 2024 season is December 31. There was also extensive discussion on Digital KCC. The meeting was conducted by Avinash Agarwal, Lead District Manager (LDM), in which JS Kalra of RBI, various bank district coordinators including government department heads were present.

CMO: 40 AAMs ready for NQAS certification

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ VARANASI

Chief Medical Officer (CMO) Dr Sandeep Chaudhary said 40 Ayushman Arogya Mandirs (AAMs) of the district are ready for National Quality Assurance Standards (NQAS) certification and there is a target to get 150 Ayushman Arogya Mandirs certified by December 2025. The CMO said here on Thursday that medical and health facilities are being continuously expanded and strengthened at the community level in Varanasi, the parliamentary constituency of the Prime Minister. Keeping in mind 'Arogya Paramam Dhanam', he said the reach of better health services is being increased in the community through Ayushman Arogya Mandirs being operated near home. Programme Nodal Officer Dr YB Pathak said Ayushman Arogya

Mandirs are given NQAS certificates for better performance on seven standards set by the Government of India such as care in pregnancy and child birth, neonatal and infant health services, childhood and adolescent health services, family planning, management of communicable diseases, management of simple illnesses, including minor elements and management of noncommunicable diseases (NCDs). Divisional Quality Assurance Consultant Dr Tanveer Siddiqui said that currently 95 Ayushman Arogya Mandirs have been certified for NQAS by preparing data and details on Saksham portal and have been sent to state level and from state level to national level. "Out of 101 Arogya Mandirs in Varanasi district, 95 have passed the revalidation of NQAS certification. A target has been set to certify 150 facilities by December 2025, out of

which 19 facilities have already been certified", he said, adding that revalidation of 14 urban primary health centres (UPHCs) has been done, out of which data of 12 centres has been sent to the Government of India. Apart from this, 12 community health centres (CHCs), including five urban CHCs and seven rural CHCs, whose marks are above 70 per cent, have been sent to the state government for certification. "If we talk about the district hospital Lal Bahadur Shastri Joint Hospital and District Womens Hospital, their marks are also above 70 per cent, the details of which have been sent to the state government. The data and details of 40 facilities have been sent to the Government of India, out of which they have given the date of visit of three facilities in the coming month. The date of visit of the remaining units will also be given by the Government of India soon", he said.

Stress on adopting healthy lifestyle

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ VARANASI

A medical seminar was organised by the Rajbhasha department on 'Lifestyle Diseases' at Banaras Locomotive Works (BLW) Officers' Club here on Friday. The objective of this programme was to make women, employees and officers aware of health and to discuss measures to prevent lifestyle diseases. The programme was presided over by vice-chairperson of BLW Women's Welfare Organisation Gauri Srivastava. Secretary of WWO Shweta Singh conducted and organised the seminar. The programme started in the afternoon with the welcome address of Chief Rajbhasha Officer and Chief Design Engineer (Diesel Loco) Praveen Kumar. He underlined the importance of such seminars and emphasised the need to adopt a healthy lifestyle. Principal Chief Medical Officer (PCMO) of BLW Dr Devesh Kumar gave a detailed lecture on 'Lifestyle Diseases'. In his lecture, he mainly highlighted the causes, symptoms and preventive measures of major diseases like obesity, high blood pressure, diabetes, heart dis-

ease, cancer and respiratory diseases. Dr Kumar said lifestyle-related diseases are increasing rapidly and balanced diet, regular exercise, mental stress management and health checkup are essential to prevent them. He also shared important information about thyroid, mental illness, indigestion and other diseases. After the lecture, a suggestion and doubt resolution session was organised. In this session, members, employees and officers of BLW WWO asked their questions related to health. Dr Kumar resolved all the questions and gave practical tips to adopt a healthy lifestyle. At the end of the programme, WWO joint secretary Richa Karidhal proposed the vote of thanks. On the occasion WWO Anupriya Singh, Honey Verma, Chitra Singh, Poonam Singh, Chitra Agarwal, Priyanka Prasad, Meenakshi Sharma, Shweta Srivastava, Hansa Dharmendra Kumar, Archana Tiwari and other officers and members of WWO were present. The seminar was also attended by Senior Rajbhasha Officer (SRO) Dr Sanjay Singh and Public Relations Officer (PRO) Rajesh Kumar.

Criminal arrested

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ KANPUR

Under the ongoing 'Operation Langra', Mahoba police arrested a notorious criminal during an encounter on Thursday night. Police arrested him when he was planning to commit a crime near Kariya Pathwa village. During the exchange of fire, the criminal sustained bullet injury in his leg and was taken to the district hospital for treatment. Police recovered a country-made pistol, three live cartridges, ₹13,000 cash and a bike related to two theft incidents from his possession. In view of increase in theft cases in the city during the past one month, police teams had been deputed on the directives of Superintendent of Police (SP) Palash Bansal. Late on Thursday night, on a tip off Kotwali incharge Arjun Singh reached the spot near Kariya Pathwa village and found the criminal standing there on a bike without a number plate. During exchange of fire, the criminal identified as Raju Ahirwar of Fatehpur Bajaria, fell on the ground and was arrested. ASP Vandana Singh said nine cases, including under the Gangsters Act, are lodged against him.

Emphasis laid on integration of technology in education

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ VARANASI

A two-day international conference on 'Revival of Higher Education: Synthesis of Heritage and Progress' concluded at Inter-University Centre for Teacher Education (IUETE), Banaras Hindu University (BHU) organised on its 11th foundation day in association with Gujarat Vidyapeeth, Ahmedabad (Gujarat) here on Thursday. The chief guest of the closing session, Prof Ramkumar Singh, Binod Bihari Mahto Koyalanchal University, Dhanbad, said the education system should be based on state, situation, source and person (SSSP) unless the National Education Policy-2020 is implemented, it will be difficult to achieve its goals. Special guest of the closing session, Prof JBG Tilak, former Vice Chancellor, NIEPA, New Delhi, that we can learn a lot from our ancient university tradition, only then autonomy can come and it can reach the people. While chairing the closing session, Director of IUETE Prof PN Singh said we need to connect with our roots. "We have to educate our children in mother tongue. Teachers have to work as good mentors", he said. Prof Mahesh Narayan Dixit proposed the vote of thanks. In the closing session, an MoU was signed



The concluding function of a conference being held at IUETE in Varanasi

on research and educational exchange between IUETE and Binod Bihari Mahto Koyalanchal University, Dhanbad. The coordinator of the programme Dr Vinod Kumar Singh presented the report while the speakers were introduced by Dr Gyanendra Singh and it was conducted by Dr Kushagri Singh. Mangalacharan was presented by Dr Raja Pathak. More than 150 people, including the academic and non-academic staff of the centre, were present. The second day started with one offline and three online sessions. These sessions were chaired and co-chaired by Prof JN Balia, Central University of Jammu, Prof Rameshdhar Dwivedi, UP College, Varanasi, Prof E Ram

Ganesh, Bharatidasan University, Tamil Nadu, Prof P Vishwanand, Mahatma Gandhi Institute, Mauritius, Prof Ramakant Mohalik, RIE, Bhubaneswar, and Prof Meenakshi Singh and Dr Pankaj Singh (both from BHU). In these four sessions, a total of 48 participants presented their research papers and articles. The three speakers in the plenary session were Prof Pawan Kumar Sharma, Chaudhary Charan Singh University, Meerut, Prof JV Madhusudan, Hyderabad University, Hyderabad, and Prof Neelima Bhagwati, Emeritus Professor, Gauhati University, Assam. This session was chaired by Prof AC Pandey, Director, IUAC, New Delhi. Prof Pawan Kumar

Sharma explained in detail the importance of National Education Policy-2020 and said our ancient education was based on 64 arts, 18 Vedas and ancient knowledge, due to which qualitative production was possible and India became a 'golden bird' by its export. "We should again take the same education in our mother tongue, only then we can develop by the year 2047", he said. The second speaker of the session was Prof JV Madhusudan emphasised on the integration of technology in education so that the goal of NEP-2020 can be achieved. Prof Neelima Bhagwati emphasised on the need for mental health. She said even in our ancient tradition, mental health was kept at the centre of education. "By implementing it in our education system, one can remain mentally healthy", she said. A panel discussion session was organised which was chaired by Prof Neelima Bhagwati and panellists were Prof JN Balia, Dr Bhanu Pratap Pritam, Maulana Azad National Urdu University and Dr Suprabha Dey (Amity University, Lucknow). They shared their views on various issues related to 'Pedagogy and curriculum reform of 21st century higher education'. The participants also asked the scholars questions after the panel discus-

sion. Earlier, the conference began with the inauguration and viewing of the book fair and photo gallery. In the inaugural session, a book titled 'Basic Elements of Indian Astronomy' and the conference abstract, MOOC portal, Prama E-Journal were released. The chief guest of the inaugural session was Prof Amit Patra, Director, IIT-BHU. He said today's students learn more from peer learning and their own experience than from the classroom. "The criterion for success is not students getting good marks but the development of their decision making ability", he said. The two special guests of the session were Prof AC Pandey, Director, IUAC, New Delhi, and Prof Neelima Bhagwati, Emeritus Professor, Gauhati University, Assam. In the presidential address, Padma Shri Prof JS Rajput mentioned the objectives of BHU established by Mahamana. He said this IUETE established in the lap of BHU will also help in fulfilling the ideals and objectives of education of Mahamana. IUETE Director Prof Prem Narayan Singh welcomed the guests and said today there is a need for sustainable development. The theme of the conference was established by Prof Ashish Srivastava. He said education is a natural process and not mechanical in which the child develops himself.

PM Modi leads nation in paying tribute to Manmohan Singh

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

President Droupadi Murmu, Vice President Jagdeep Dhanekar and Prime Minister Narendra Modi were among the top dignitaries who paid homage to former prime minister Manmohan Singh at his residence here on Friday.

Several leaders cutting across party lines, including Union ministers and Congress leaders Sonia Gandhi, Mallikarjun Kharge and Rahul Gandhi, also paid their tributes to the former two-term prime minister who died on Thursday night.

President Murmu and Vice President Dhanekar visited the residence of Singh and paid their last respects to him and met his wife and other family members.

Prime Minister Modi, who also laid a wreath, described his predecessor's death as a big loss to the nation, asserting that his commitment to the people and for the country's development would always be respected.

In a video message, Modi recalled Singh's life journey after his family migrated to India following Partition and noted that he left everything behind but his numerous achievements since then were no mean feat.

Singh, the architect of India's economic reforms and a consensus builder in the rough world of politics, died at AIIMS, Delhi, late on Thursday. He was 92. He is



survived by his wife and three daughters.

The Union cabinet at its meeting held under Prime Minister Modi also condoled Singh's passing and hailed him as an eminent statesman and a distinguished leader who left an imprint on national life.

During a meeting chaired by Modi, the cabinet observed a two-minute silence in honour of the departed soul and adopted a Condolence Resolution in the memory of Singh. "Dr Manmohan Singh has left his imprint on our national life. In his passing away, the Nation has lost an eminent statesman, renowned economist and a distinguished leader," the resolution read.

The government has announced a seven-day State mourning as a mark of respect to the former prime minister.

Draped in the Tricolour,

Singh's body was brought to his 3, Motilal Nehru Road, residence that served as his retirement abode for the last over 10 years ever since he relinquished charge as prime minister.

Several leaders paid their last respects to the former prime minister in the presence of his wife Gursharan Kaur and other family members.

Singh would be cremated on Saturday and his final journey will commence from the AICC headquarters at 9.30 am on Saturday, Congress general secretary K C Venugopal said.

Modi said Singh's life would always serve as a lesson for the future generations on how someone can rise above deprivation and struggles to attain the heights of success.

Noting that he served in various capacities in the government, the prime minister said Singh put the country on a

new economic path as finance minister in the government headed by P V Narasimha Rao.

"As prime minister, his contribution to the country's development and progress will always be remembered," he added.

Union ministers Amit Shah and Rajnath Singh, and BJP president J P Nadda also paid their tributes to Singh.

Tamil Nadu Chief Minister M K Stalin, Andhra Pradesh Chief Minister N Chandrababu Naidu, Himachal Pradesh Chief Minister Sukhwinder Singh Sukhu and Telangana Chief Minister Revanth Reddy also came to Delhi to pay their last respects to the former prime minister.

Delhi Chief Minister Atishi, former Delhi chief minister Arvind Kejriwal and former Uttar Pradesh chief minister Akhilesh Yadav also paid their last respects to Singh.

Born to Gurmukh Singh and Amrit Kaur on September 26, 1932 in Gah village of the Punjab province of undivided India (now Pakistan), Singh passed his matriculation examination in 1948. His family migrated to Amritsar after Partition in 1948 after living shortly in Haldwani.

Singh completed his intermediate and graduation in economics from the Hindu College here before moving out of the city to pursue higher studies in Panjab University's Hoshiarpur campus.

His academic career took him from Punjab to the University of Cambridge, UK, where he earned a First Class Honours degree in Economics. Singh followed this with a DPhil in Economics from Nuffield College of Oxford University.

Singh's half-brother Surjit Singh Kohli said the former prime minister had deep affection for his grandmother, who raised him following his mother's death when he was very young.

After migrating to India, the Singh family settled in a small rented house in Amritsar till he graduated.

His passing also witnessed people from various fields sharing their anecdotes about him. The social media was flooded with pictures that people posted along with the former prime minister and shared their memories with fondness and nostalgia.

Uttar Pradesh minister Asim Arun, who served as Singh's close protection officer for nearly three years during his tenure as a Special Protection Group (SPG) officer, shared his experiences and insights into Singh's personality, emphasising his simple lifestyle and connection with the common man.

One anecdote Arun shared reflected Singh's simplicity - his attachment to his personal car, a modest Maruti Suzuki 800. Despite having a fleet of high-security vehicles, including a luxurious BMW for official travel, Singh would often express his preference for the modest car.

Foreign envoys remember former PM

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

Envoys of several countries, including Russia, China and the US, on Friday expressed condolences over the passing away of Manmohan Singh, describing the former prime minister as an "outstanding leader" and hailing his commitment to the progress of India.

In a social media post, the French Embassy in India said his leadership "bolstered India's global standing and strengthened bonds with France".

"It is a moment of poignant sorrow and grief for India and for Russia. Dr Manmohan Singh's contribution to our bilateral ties was immeasurable. His suave demeanour was always endearing as an economist and his commitment to the progress of India," Russian envoy to India, Denis Alipov, said in a social media post. "Our thoughts and prayers are with the family of Dr Manmohan Singh and the Indian people," he added.

US ambassador Eric Garcetti remembered Singh as a leader "who set in motion a historic chapter in US-India relations". "Remembering the selfless contributions of our dear friend and former prime minister, Dr Manmohan Singh, who set in motion an historic chapter in US-India relations. His dedication to India's growth and prosperity continues to inspire us. Grateful for his leadership

and vision," the US envoy said in a social media post.

The civil nuclear deal signed during Singh's prime ministership changed India's overall engagement with the US as it paved the way for building the bonds of a strategic partnership, especially in areas of high-technology and defence.

Expressing condolences in a post, Chinese envoy Xu Feihong said, "Deeply saddened by the passing of former Indian Prime Minister Dr Manmohan Singh, an outstanding leader who is widely revered by the Indian people. Heartfelt condolences to his family and loved ones."

Many embassies in India also put out posts on social media along with photographs while remembering Singh.

"Deepest condolences to the family and friends of former Prime Minister of India, Dr Manmohan Singh. A statesman admired worldwide, he leaves behind a legacy of compassion and progress. His leadership bolstered India's global standing and strengthened bonds with France," the French Embassy posted.

The Embassy of Iran said Singh played a key role in fostering historic ties between the two countries. "The Embassy of Iran in Delhi extends its heartfelt condolences to the government and people of India on the demise of Dr Manmohan Singh. He was a highly respected leader, who played key role in fostering Iran-India historic ties," it said in a social media post.

RSS condoles former Prime Minister's passing

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS) chief Mohan Bhagwat and general secretary Dattatreya Hosabale on Friday condoled the passing of former prime minister Manmohan Singh, saying his contributions to Bharat will always be remembered.

"The entire nation is extremely saddened by the demise of former prime minister of Bharat and senior leader of the country Dr Sardar Manmohan Singh. Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh expresses its deepest condolences to his family and countless loved ones and admirers," they said in a joint statement.

Singh, despite coming from a humble background, adorned the highest post in the country, the statement said. "Renowned economist Dr Singh's contributions to Bharat will always be remembered and cherished. We pray the almighty to grant 'sagati' to the departed soul," they said in the statement.

RSS joint general secretary Alok Kumar later paid floral tribute to the mortal remains of Singh at his residence on 3, Motilal Nehru Road, the sprawling bungalow in Lutyens' Delhi that served as his retirement abode for over 10 years.

Singh, the architect of India's economic reforms, passed away on Thursday night at Delhi's All India Institute of Medical Sciences (AIIMS). He was 92.

Celebrities remember Manomahan as 'visionary' and 'great financial reformer, statesman'

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

Several celebrities on Friday condoled the death of former Prime Minister Manmohan Singh remembering him as a "visionary" and a "great financial reformer and statesman."

Rajinikanth, Kamal Haasan, Sunny Deol, Chiranjeevi, Manoj Bajpayee and other film stars were among the celebrities who paid their tributes to the former prime minister who died here on Thursday at the age of 92.

In a social media post, actor-politician Haasan said the nation has lost "one of its finest sons". "India has lost

one of its most eminent statesmen and scholars. The passing of Dr. Manmohan Singh marks the end of an era in Indian polity. A man of quiet dignity, he reshaped the nation through his visionary economic and social policies. "Few have influenced the nation's trajectory with such far-reaching impact. His policies, both as Finance Minister and Prime Minister, empowered millions, strengthening the fabric of Indian democracy and uplifting the most vulnerable," Haasan posted.

Rajinikanth was asked about Singh's demise at the Chennai airport and he said, "He was a great human being. Great financial reformer and states-

man." Chiranjeevi said he is anguished by the passing away of Singh, who was a "highly educated, most graceful, soft spoken and humble leader". "His visionary and game changing contributions as the finance minister and then his highly successful tenure as the 13th Prime Minister of India for two successive terms will remain etched in history," he said.

The actor said he was privileged and fortunate to have served as member of parliament and minister of state for tourism during Singh's second tenure as the Prime Minister. "I fondly cherish my interac-

tions with him and the inspiration and wisdom I got from him forever. It is a tremendous loss to our country. My deepest condolences to his family and each of his numerous admirers," he added.

Sunny Deol also hailed Singh for playing a pivotal role in shaping India's economic liberalisation. "His wisdom, integrity & contributions to the nation's growth will always be remembered. My heartfelt condolences. #RIPDrManmohanSingh," he said in a social media post.

Bajpayee said, "Saddened by the passing of our former Prime Minister. A statesman whose contributions in every aspect of our nation's growth

will always be remembered. My heartfelt condolences to his family. #RIPDrManmohanSingh." Anil Kapoor recalled that he once met the former PM who left "an indelible impression" on the actor. "He was a man of unparalleled humility and wisdom. His extraordinary contributions will forever be remembered. May his soul rest in peace," he said.

Diljit Dosanjh shared a photo of Singh on his Instagram Stories and captioned it, "Oh Waheguru". Anushka Sharma wrote on Instagram Stories, "Rest in peace Dr Manmohan Singh ji." Sharing a photo of Singh on Instagram, Allu Arjun said,

"His leadership and dedication to the nation will always be remembered. Rest in peace sir." Veteran actor Anupam Kher, who played the role of the former Prime Minister in the 2019 film "The Accidental Prime Minister" based on the memoir of Singh's former media advisor Sanjay Baru, said he is deeply saddened by his demise.

"Having studied him for more than a year for the movie, I felt that I actually spent that much time with him. He was inherently a good man. Personally completely honest, great economist and a very

humble person. Some can say may be not an astute politician! My heartfelt condolences to his family," he said in a social media post.

Kajol said, "Tributes to Dr. Manmohan Singh Ji, a distinguished leader who served India with dedication & wisdom. May his legacy continue to inspire future generations." Sanjay Dutt posted, "Deeply saddened by the loss of Dr. Manmohan Singh Ji. His contributions to India will never be forgotten." Riteish Deshmukh called Singh one of India's "finest Prime Ministers". "The man who propelled India's economic growth. He epitomised

dignity and humility. We will forever be indebted to his legacy. May his soul rest in eternal glory. Thank you Shri Manmohan Singh ji," he said.

Filmmakers Zoya Akhtar, Imtiaz Ali, actors Arjun Kapoor, Bhumi Pednekar, Vijay Varma, Ali Fazel, Samantha Ruth Prabhu, Shefali Shah, Ayushmann Khurrana, Randeev Hooda, Parineeti Chopra, Nawazuddin Siddiqui and Sonam Kapoor Ahuja also condoled Singh's death.

The team behind superstar Salman Khan's upcoming "Sikandar" has postponed the release of film's teaser till Saturday in the wake of Singh's death.

Issued more than one million nonimmigrant visas for second year in row: US mission in India

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

The US mission in India on Friday said it issued more than one million nonimmigrant visas for the second year in a row, including a record number of visitor visas, underscoring the huge demand of Indians for travel to the US.

Washington is also working to formally establish a US-based to renew H-1B visas in that country in 2025 that is expected to benefit a significant number of Indians.

In the past four years, visitor numbers from India have increased by five times, and more than two million Indians travelled to the US in the first 11 months of 2024, a 26 per cent increase over the same period in 2023, it said.

Over five million Indians already have a nonimmigrant visa to visit the US and each day the mission issues thousands more, the embassy said. "The US mission to India issued more than one million nonimmigrant visas for the second year in a row, including a record number of visitor visas, underscoring the huge demand of Indians for travel to the United States for tourism, business, and education," it said in a readout.

The embassy noted that the State Department completed a successful pilot programme to renew H-1B visas in the US States this year. This allowed many specialty occupation workers from India to renew their visas without leaving the US.

"This pilot program streamlined the renewal process for thousands of applicants, and the Department of State is working to formally establish a US-based renewal program in 2025," it said.

The US mission to India issued tens of thousands of



immigrant visas, facilitating legal family reunification and the migration of skilled professionals, according to the readout.

These immigrant visa holders became permanent residents upon their arrival, adding to the already rich and sizable Indian diaspora community in the US, it said.

The US mission to India also provided more than 24,000 passports and other consular services to American citizens living and travelling in India, it noted.

A new version of the Smart Traveler Enrollment Program (STEP) debuted in 2024, making it easier for the embassy and consulates to contact American citizens during emergencies and send them safety and security alerts, the embassy added.

It said increase in processing of thousands of interview waiver-eligible nonimmigrant visa applications each week made it quicker and easier than ever for Indians to renew their nonimmigrant visas.

"By streamlining operations and utilizing global consular resources, the US mission has been able to redirect its own resources to focus on in-person interviews, reducing wait times for all applicants," it said.

The mission also provided details about visas issued to Indian students. "More Indian students than ever before now

have U.S. Student visas. In 2024, India became the top sender of international students for the first time since the 2008/2009 academic year with more than 331,000 students overall studying in the US," it said.

It further added that India also remained the largest sender of international graduate students in the US for the second year.

Indian graduate student numbers increased by 19 per cent to reach almost 200,000 students, according to the details. "Many exchange visitors will now be able to remain in the United States and not need to return home for two years after completing their programmes in the US, offering them more opportunities to further their careers and education," the embassy said.

"The removal of India from the Exchange Visitors Skills List has provided greater flexibility for these Indian J-1 nonimmigrant visa holders," it said.

The US mission said it remains dedicated to fostering strong bilateral relations and providing exceptional consular services.

"These achievements over the past year are a testament to the hard work and dedication of the Mission's staff and the enduring partnership between the United States and India," it said.

SC expresses concern over condition of farmer leader Dallewal

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

The Supreme Court on Friday expressed concern over the condition of farmer leader Jagjit Singh Dallewal, who is on an indefinite hunger strike, and directed the Punjab Government to ensure he was given medical assistance. A vacation bench of Justices Surya Kant and Sudhanshu Dhulia issued a notice to the Punjab government on a contempt petition against its chief secretary and the director general of police (DGP) for non-compliance of an order directing medical aid to Dallewal.

"If there is a law and order situation, you have to deal with it with iron hands. Somebody's life is at stake. You need to take

it seriously. Medical aid has to be given and the impression is that you are not following it," the bench said. The top court directed the State Government to file a compliance report by December 28, when it would again hear the matter and ordered the Punjab chief secretary and the DGP to virtually remain present during the hearing.

During the hearing, Punjab Advocate General (AG) Gurminder Singh submitted a delegation of eight cabinet ministers along with the Punjab DGP visited the protest site to convince Dallewal to move to a hospital but the farmers resisted it. "We have provided everything on site. If there is physical jostling, we cannot take that risk," he added.



The bench however responded, "We have serious doubts about those farmers, those who are not conscious and aware and concerned about his life." The AG said the State Government was "very earnestly" following up on the issue. When the bench wondered if the Centre could offer assistance to the

State Government, Solicitor General Tushar Mehta said its interference might lead to complications. "Few people cannot keep him (Dallewal) hostage. One man's life is in danger. The State Government can take measures," said Mehta.

The Punjab AG informed the bench when the Ministers' delegation went to meet Dallewal on December 24, he gave a letter addressed to the Prime Minister. "He says, if some dialogue is opened up, only then he is willing to cooperate with medical assistance," Singh said.

Mehta said Dallewal's admission in a hospital should be the top priority. Dallewal has been on an indefinite fast at the Khanauri border since November 26 to press the Centre to accept the farmers'

demands, including a legal guarantee of minimum support price for crops.

On December 20, the top court left it to the Punjab government officials and doctors to decide on the hospitalisation of Dallewal. The court had said 70-year-old Dallewal could be moved to the makeshift hospital setup within 700 metre of the protest site at Khanauri border between Punjab and Haryana.

The bench on December 19 referred to civil rights activist Irom Sharmila continuing her protest for more than a decade under medical supervision and asked the Punjab government to convince Dallewal for a health examination. It had pulled up the state for not running medical tests on Dallewal.

Gurugram cyber police arrests two criminals cheating in name of loan recovery

STAFF REPORTER ■ GURUGRAM

The Gurugram cyber police arrested two cyber criminals who allegedly used to cheat people in the name of recovering loans taken through a Chinese app by threatening and morphing their photos.

Four mobile phones with SIM cards were recovered from his possession, police said on Friday.

According to the police, they have been identified as Kapil of Charkhi Dabri and Himanshu of Hisar. The team of Cybercrime East police station arrested the accused, Kapil, from U-Block DLF Phase-2, Gurugram and Himanshu from Rajiv Nagar Sector-13, Gurugram, on Thursday.

The police team took further action against the accused and registered a case under



loan recovery," Priyanshu Diwan, ACP (cybercrime), said.

Himanshu used to do loan recovery work in the name of applications like Cash Fish Plus, Bajaj Broking, Cash Me, My Cash in Cash, Flexi Loan, Rich Cash Pro, U-loan, Flash Wallet, HD Loan Bazaar, Family Loan, Pokket Me, kredit Bee, Fair money, Finshell pay, HD Loan Bazaar, Money View etc.

Similarly, the Gurugram cyber police had also arrested a cyber fraudster in the previous month, who allegedly used to cheat people in the name of recovering loans taken through Chinese loan apps by threatening them.

During police inquiry, it was revealed that the accused used to get the names and mobile numbers of people through the Telegram app to recover the loan taken from Chinese apps.

England link emerges in Khalistan terror case: Police detain two aides in Pilibhit encounter

BISWAJEET BANERJEE ■ PILIBHIT

A chilling international connection has surfaced in the case of three Khalistan Zindabad Force (KZF) terrorists who were killed in a police encounter in Pilibhit. Local police investigations revealed that a call from England played a crucial role in arranging the terrorists' stay in Purnapur, where they were hosted with the help of local accomplices.

The incident has led to the detention of two individuals—Jaspal Sunny, a resident of Gajraula Japatti village, and his associate Deepak—whose involvement came to light through CCTV footage obtained from Harji Hotel, where the terrorists were lodged. The police have also registered cases against the

two aides and the three deceased terrorists for using fake Aadhar cards to secure accommodations.

According to police sources, Jaspal received a call from England on Friday evening from a man named Sidhu, believed to be his friend. Sidhu instructed Jaspal to assist three individuals arriving in Purnapur. Acting on this request, Jaspal, accompanied by Deepak, traveled to Purnapur, where they met the three terrorists and took them to a dhaba for dinner before arranging their stay at Harji Hotel.

The terrorists were checked into Room 105 of the hotel using fake Aadhar cards, allegedly sent from England by Sidhu. The police have since sealed the room and initiated a detailed investigation into the case.



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PAPER WITH PASSION

A silent crusader

Dr Manmohan Singh a reluctant politician yet a resilient leader and a gentleman is no more but his legacy lives on

The man with the vision and selfless dedication to the nation, Dr Manmohan Singh is no more. Dr Singh passed away on December 26, 2024, at the age of 92. Dr Singh, a towering figure in Indian politics and economics, breathed his last at the All India Institute of Medical Sciences. His demise marks the end of an era defined by humility, intellect and steadfast dedication to nation-building. Dr Manmohan Singh's contributions to India's economic and political landscape are unparalleled. Widely regarded as the architect of India's 1991 economic reforms, Singh's tenure as Finance Minister under Prime Minister PV Narasimha Rao was transformative. At a time when the Indian economy teetered on the brink of bankruptcy, Singh introduced a series of bold measures that liberalised the economy, dismantled the license raj and opened the doors to foreign investment. These reforms not only rescued India from an economic crisis but also set the stage for decades of robust growth and development. During his tenure,

Singh's policies prioritised the devaluation of the rupee, moderation of taxes, privatisation of public sector enterprises and encouragement of Foreign Direct Investment (FDI). These initiatives catalysed India's transition into a globally integrated economy and solidified his reputation as one of the nation's most accomplished economists.

Known as a reluctant politician, Dr Singh's foray into politics was driven by a profound sense of duty rather than ambition. When he assumed the role of Prime Minister in 2004, heading the Congress-led United Progressive Alliance (UPA) government, he brought the same commitment and vision that had defined his career as an economist. Serving two consecutive terms until 2014, Singh's leadership was marked by both humility and resolve. One of the most defining moments of his tenure was the Indo-US nuclear deal in 2008, a landmark agreement that underscored his courage and conviction. Despite staunch opposition from the Left Front, which led to their withdrawal of support, Singh's government survived a vote of confidence, thanks to the support of the Samajwadi Party. The deal elevated India's status on the global stage and symbolised his unyielding dedication to the nation's strategic interests. Dr Singh was often described as a 'gentleman leader,' a man of integrity who preferred dialogue over confrontation. His humility was legendary, yet he was resolute when it came to principles. Throughout his career, he commanded respect across party lines, not just for his intellect but for his moral rectitude. His tenure as Prime Minister may have been criticised for perceived passivity, but his calm demeanour and quiet determination left an indelible mark on Indian governance. A seven-day period of mourning is a fitting tribute by the nation to a great visionary. His last rites will be conducted with full state honours. While his absence leaves a void, his contributions to India's progress and his example of selfless service will continue to inspire generations. Om Shanti.



Dr Manmohan Singh

Why RSS chief's push for large families is out of step



K S TOMAR

By advocating outdated solutions to demographic trends, Bhagwat's vision risks deepening societal divisions and ignoring the socio-economic realities of today

Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS) chief Mohan Bhagwat's recent appeal for larger families, framed as a response to perceived demographic challenges, reveals a worldview rooted in traditionalism. This perspective clashes with the progressive social, cultural, and economic ethos of modern India. While presented as a solution to counter declining population trends, Bhagwat's remarks have ignited debates over their communal undertones, potential to deepen gender inequality, and disconnection from contemporary realities. Bhagwat's remarks are part of a larger discourse on demographic imbalances, often aimed at minority communities. This rhetoric fosters fear, undermines social harmony, and contradicts India's pluralistic traditions. Today's youth prioritise quality of life over larger families, influenced by rising living costs, career aspirations, and financial stability. Bhagwat's appeal appears disconnected from these realities, highlighting a gap between traditionalist agendas and contemporary Indian values.

The RSS chief's observations clash with India's family planning efforts from the late 1960s and 1970s when the emphasis was on small families. Even former Prime Minister Indira Gandhi, during her tenure, highlighted the dangers of unchecked population growth, stressing the need for planned families. Bhagwat's outdated stance ignores this historical context and the progress India has made in population stabilisation through education, healthcare, and women's empowerment. Bhagwat's proposal for families to have more children is based on the argument that declining fertility rates threaten the survival and dominance of certain communities. This narrative, often accompanied by alarmist rhetoric about population imbalances, underscores divisive politics. Although demographic trends warrant attention, his suggested solution disregards socio-economic realities and entrenches regressive norms. Interestingly, Andhra Pradesh



Chief Minister N Chandrababu Naidu has echoed similar sentiments, advocating for larger families in his state.

However, such approaches seem out of step with modern India's aspirations. India is not experiencing a population decline but rather a slowdown in growth.

According to the National Family Health Survey-5 (NFHS-5), the Total Fertility Rate (TFR) has dropped to 2.0, below the replacement level of 2.1. This trend reflects advancements in education, healthcare, and women's autonomy. While policymakers globally view such developments as markers of progress, Bhagwat's remarks frame this demographic shift as a cultural and religious issue, perpetuating communal narratives that risk deepening societal divisions.

Bhagwat's outdated stance ignores this historical context and the progress India has made in population stabilisation through education, healthcare, and women's empowerment. The RSS's vision aligns with traditional family structures, where women are expected to prioritise domestic roles.

By advocating for larger families, Bhagwat inadvertently reinforces these outdated norms, perpetuating cycles of

dependency and limiting women's agency.

Central to Bhagwat's argument is a patriarchal notion that reduces women to their reproductive roles. His call for more children disregards women's aspirations, autonomy, and wellbeing, placing an undue burden on them.

Resource Constraints

With a population exceeding 1.4 billion, India faces severe resource constraints, including food insecurity, water scarcity, and unemployment. Increasing family sizes would exacerbate these issues, placing further strain on public services and natural resources. India's youth population, often hailed as a demographic dividend, grapples with high unemployment rates.

The Centre for Monitoring Indian Economy (CMIE) reports that unemployment among those aged 15-29 exceeds 20 per cent. Without job creation, additional population growth risks turning this dividend into a liability. India is among the countries most vulnerable to climate change. Global policymakers advocate for sustainable development, making Bhagwat's vision seem misaligned with contemporary priorities.

Cultural and Ethical Disconnect
India's ethos is rooted in diversity, balance, and individual

choice. Bhagwat's remarks dismiss these values, echoing authoritarian tendencies that clash with Indian democracy. Family planning decisions are deeply personal and should not be influenced by socio-political agendas.

Intervening in such choices undermines personal freedoms and contradicts the principles of modern India. In a country where maternal mortality remains a concern and reproductive healthcare is uneven, urging women to have more children intensifies existing vulnerabilities. Instead of alarmist rhetoric, India's leadership should focus on forward-looking policies to address demographic concerns constructively: Improved access to education, particularly for girls, is key to stabilising population growth. Educated women are more likely to make informed reproductive choices, contributing to sustainable demographics and enhancing Healthcare. Investing in maternal and child healthcare can reduce mortality rates and improve quality of life.

Policies empowering the youth and enhancing employability can transform India's demographic potential into an asset. (Writer is a senior political analyst and strategic affairs columnist; views are personal)



BHAGWAT'S
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EMPOWERMENT

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

MANMOHAN SINGH PASSES AWAY

Madam — The sad demise of former PM Dr Manmohan Singh is an irreplaceable loss to the nation. Singh will be remembered as the statesman who saved the Indian economy from going over the edge. When he took over as finance minister in the minority government of Narasimha Rao in 1991, the Indian economy was very close to sovereign default. Foreign exchange reserves were barely enough to cover a month of imports, and the country had to suffer the ignominy of having to ship its gold reserves to England.

All of that would change with the famous 1991 Budget which Manmohan Singh presented, and the industrial deregulation that accompanied the Budget. Hailed as an architect of India's economic liberalisation, he served as Prime Minister from 2004 to 2014. During his tenure, he spearheaded transformative policies that shaped India's modern economic landscape. His leadership saw India achieve its highest GDP growth rates, and his role in the Indo-US nuclear deal significantly enhanced India's global stature. India is on its way to becoming the third-largest economy in the world in a couple of years, and the seeds of India's growth story were sown during the economic reforms. More than three decades later, there is as big a consensus for reforms in India as there was opposition to it when the process started.

N Sadhasiva Reddy | Bengaluru

DIPLOMATIC CHALLENGE FOR INDIA

Madam — A formal request by Bangladesh to India to extradite former Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina, who fled to India after she was ousted by mass student-led protests, poses a severe diplomatic challenge for India. Dhaka has chosen her path, and it does not seem to be interested in normalising ties with India; hence this extradition path. The extradition request and the political developments around Hasina's asylum in India have the potential to influence India-Bangladesh relations significantly, and it requires deft diplomatic handling by both nations. Hasina's presence

ICC fines Virat Kohli



Virat Kohli found himself in an awkward situation when he was in the midst of a controversy over an altercation with Australian debutant Sam Konstas. It was a lucky escape for Virat Kohli on day 1 of the fourth test at Melbourne, which otherwise would have ended as a typical 'Boxing' Day episode. The 19-year-old teenager has not spared the Indian bowlers, including Jasprit

Bumrah, in his attacking 60 runs, which was a treat to watch. It was an intentional act captured in-camera when Kohli appeared to be dashed against Konstas in the middle while walking across, which sparked an encounter. Watching this, the Aussie legend Ricky Ponting and England's Michael Vaughan were quick to voice their opinions, calling for ICC action.

Kohli has been slapped with a fine of 20 per cent of his match fee and given one demerit point by the ICC as well. This is not the expected behaviour from a batter who played 121 tests, 295 ODIs, and 125 T20s. If Kohli was baffled by Konstas belligerence, he should have proved his worth as a batter in the middle rather than engaged himself with the intimidating tactics, which can be construed as cheap for all his calibre.

A P Thiruvadi | Chennai

in India and her public statements against the interim government have strained relations between the two countries, which have further been worsened by the persecution of Hindus and other minorities in Bangladesh.

India is examining the request on legal grounds, but India can refuse extradition, citing political nature or justice-related concerns, but ultimately it is going to be for purely political reasons. The ball is firmly in India's court, and if India sends her back, we would seal her fate as she is bound to face the death penalty in Dhaka, and if it rejects this request, then we should be ready for more hostility from our neighbour, and our ties would go from bad to worse. Whatever India chose to do will have long-term ramifications on this whole region.

Bal Govind | Noida

EMPOWERING RURAL ECONOMY

Madam — The government is committed to revitalising the rural economy through cooperation, recently inaugurating 10,000 Multipurpose Primary Agricultural Credit

Societies (PACS). These societies not only generate employment but also ensure optimal resource availability and connect farmers' produce to international markets, aligning with the vision of "Prosperity through Cooperation."

PACS, as the cornerstone of the cooperative three-tier structure, play a pivotal role in rural upliftment by addressing needs like credit, fertilisers, storage, and water management. The government aims to establish 2 lakh PACS in five years, strengthening rural infrastructure and promoting unity, harmony, and self-reliance. To revive dormant PACS and establish new ones, a detailed Standard Operating Procedure (SOP) has been developed, targeting the setup of PACS in 15,000 villages. These societies are evolving into hubs of multifaceted services, including digital amenities like ticket bookings and financial inclusion via RuPay Kisan Credit Cards and micro-ATMs.

R K Jain | Barwani

Send your feedback to: letterstopioneer@gmail.com

PICTALK



Tourists enjoy paragliding after fresh snowfall, in Solang valley in Manali

PTI

Homeschooling: Affordable and holistic education option



RACHNA LAKHPATRI

Homeschooling is transforming its image from an unconventional option to a widely accepted educational route as many parents opt for this affordable choice

With the rising costs of living, an increasing number of parents are reevaluating the conventional approach to education. An increasing number of families nationwide are viewing homeschooling as a legitimate and empowering option compared to traditional education systems.

The choice is influenced not only by financial considerations but also by a commitment to nurture the child in a manner that aligns with their unique needs and the family's values. For many years, traditional educational institutions have been the cornerstone of childhood learning. However, nowadays, an ever-growing number of parents are questioning whether the significant expenses associated with private education, or even the costs of public schooling, truly justify the investment. The homeschooling movement presents a compelling argument: education can occur beyond the confines of traditional classrooms. The main factor driving this change is the expense involved. Education, particularly in private schools, often



presents a challenging list of costs: tuition, uniforms, transportation, extracurriculars, and supplies. Homeschooling greatly alleviates these financial burdens. Parents now have the opportunity to invest in essential resources such as top-notch educational materials, online courses, or tailored coaching—all designed to cater to their child's unique needs.

Moreover, homeschooling encourages families to tap into their creativity and resourcefulness. Libraries, free online resources, and community programmes provide abundant learning opportunities with minimal or no expense. In a time filled with numerous digital resources, parents have the ability to craft a curriculum that is both cost-effective and thorough. In addition to reducing expenses, there are numerous

other factors contributing to the rising popularity of homeschooling. Parents hold the view that homeschooling can significantly enhance a child's personal and academic development. In contrast to conventional educational institutions, homeschooling offers remarkable flexibility, allowing lessons to align with a child's interests, learning pace, and preferred methods of engagement.

A student passionate about science, for instance, can dedicate additional time to experiments and practical activities, while those with a flair for the arts can unleash their creativity free from the limitations of a rigid schedule. Another key factor is the importance of comprehensive development. Homeschooling transcends traditional textbooks and offers genuine, real-world learning experiences. Cooking transforms into a blend of maths and chemistry; gardening embodies principles of biology and sustainability; a visit to the museum or park imparts lessons in history and ecology.

These activities, along with practical knowledge, foster

family connections—something that seems rare in today's world. Certainly, homeschooling comes with its drawbacks. Concerns have been voiced by critics regarding socialisation and the stress it imposes on parents. Nevertheless, families who choose to homeschool have found innovative ways to address these issues, including forming co-op groups, engaging in community sports, and coordinating group field trips.

This signifies a movement towards appreciating cost-effectiveness, adaptability, and personal expression in education—a tendency expected to expand as households adjust to financial circumstances. Ultimately, homeschooling transcends being merely an educational option; it embodies a declaration of empowerment. For parents aiming to reshape education in a way that resonates with their values, this journey offers not just information but a profoundly rewarding experience for both themselves and their children.

(The writer is a motivator and a freelance writer; views are personal)



FIRST COLUMN

HUNGER FOR POWER

Lure for power is a universal phenomenon but in the capital, it is at next level



APS MALHOTRA

I have come to seek your support and valuable vote, as I have decided to stand for re-election, declared the bespectacled, heavy-set, middle-aged man—dressed in an off-white safari suit—rather pompously, as he stood with folded hands at the door of my house, surrounded by a bevy of churches and churches, who suitably nodded their head in unison. “Vote for which re-election?” I muttered under my breath, irritated at the uncalled-for intrusion into my privacy on a rather lazy Sunday morning. “I am the President” he replied sheepishly, maybe taken aback at my nonchalant reply. “I had decided not to stand for this year’s election due to increased professional and personal commitments—actually I had desired to give someone younger a chance to bear the responsibility, and take a backseat— but had to relent under the immense pressure from fellow residents, who want my leadership for a further period of three years” he continued, his voice a cocktail of benevolence and beneficence for his ‘supporters’, and the seasoned politician’s chicanery. “But isn’t Mrs. Draupadi Murmu the President?” I retorted, further trying to pull his leg. “Malhotra jee, I am the President of our Resident Welfare Association (RWA) for the past several years,” he said, flabbergasted, a tad angry and certainly deeply offended at my failure to recognize him, and worse, acknowledge his self-perceived exalted status. Although I had recognised him the moment he pressed the doorbell of my house, and I opened the front door to face him,



my innate aversion to people who like to throw their weight around and flaunt uncalled-for appellations came forth with all its bitterness.

Nonetheless, realizing that the man was getting increasingly exasperated at my manoeuvrings, I salvaged the situation by promising to cast my vote in his favour and profusely apologized to him for my failure to identify his ‘Excellency’, with the pretext that my better half is the face of our family for outside interactions, while I busy myself in mundane things, like reading and writing. Not too surprisingly, denizens of my beloved Dilli, sitting on the centre of power since the dawn of history, have a deeply ingrained fascination for posts and titles— which proliferate dime a dozen— and take a macho and perverse pride in flaunting them, with the same exuberance with which a child displays his or her toy, albeit not with the same innocence.

This fact is borne out in the form of roadside boards and car number plates, which often bear vague titles— such as ‘Secretary, Youth Media Cell, ABC party, B-block, Village XYZ’. A carryforward from the era of the Mughals and British imperialists, this is a desperate shot to seek the much-desired VIP status, at least in the circle one operates in. Thus, it is not unknown to find members of RWAs who run virtual fiefdoms in their associations, maybe as recompense for the voluntary service rendered in serving the community. The perks could include a free car wash and laundry facility, use of funds near the residence where the self-styled Maharajas live, et al.

One can only speculate as to what would happen if this maniac lure of titles and appellations invaded the next, and perhaps the last bastion of community living, the home. Then, it would be no surprise to see name boards outside individual residences read like this: 1/103, Beverly Park: APS Malhotra, President; Sonia Malhotra Vice President; Dr. Mehak Malhotra, Secretary (in absentia). In families with matriarchal tendencies, the designations could be reversed. Well, worth a thought!

(The author is a freelance writer; views are personal)

India must stand firm against Sheikh Hasina’s extradition



HIRANMAY KARLEKAR

India faces a pivotal decision as it considers Bangladesh’s request to extradite Sheikh Hasina, former Prime Minister and a steadfast ally



Sheikh Hasina must not be sent back to Bangladesh in response to the note verbale received from that country’s interim government calling for her extradition. Dhaka’s move has followed the issue of an arrest warrant by Bangladesh’s International Crimes Tribunal (ICT) against her and a number of her former ministers, advisers, military and civil officials. The allegation? “Crimes against humanity and genocide”. There are two broad reasons why India should not send her back. As prime minister of Bangladesh, she has been a steadfast friend of India whereas other heads of that country’s government, except her father, Sheikh Mujibur Rahman, have tended to be unfriendly. Second, she will, by no means, receive a fair trial in Bangladesh and perhaps even be lynched, given the intense hostility of the current rulers of Bangladesh harbour towards her.

There will be solid legal basis for India’s stand. Article 8 (1) (a) of the ‘Treaty Between the Republic of India and the People’s Republic of Bangladesh Relating to Extradition’, says that a person may not be extradited if “he satisfies the Requested State that it would, having regard to all the circumstances, be unjust or oppressive to extradite him” because, in the words of Article 8 (1) (A) (iii), the accusations against him “have not been made in good faith in the interests of justice.” Besides Article 8 (2) reads, “A person who has been convicted of an extradition offence may not be extradited therefor unless he was sentenced to imprisonment or other form of detention for a period of four months or more.” Sheikh Hasina has yet to be sentenced to any period of imprisonment or detention. Also, she can very well claim that it would be “unjust or oppressive” to extradite her because the accusation against her had not been made in “good faith in the interest of justice”, and are a result of pure vindictiveness. That she would be justified in saying so becomes clear on considering the diatribes unleashed against her by the advisers of the interim government and the relentless persecution, including involving in hundreds of false cases, of



SHEIKH HASINA HAS YET TO BE SENTENCED TO ANY PERIOD OF IMPRISONMENT OR DETENTION. ALSO, SHE CAN VERY WELL CLAIM THAT IT WOULD BE “UNJUST OR OPPRESSIVE” TO EXTRADITE HER BECAUSE THE ACCUSATION AGAINST HER HAD NOT BEEN MADE IN “GOOD FAITH IN THE INTEREST OF JUSTICE”, AND ARE A RESULT OF PURE VINDICTIVENESS.

Awami League’s leaders and ministers in the party’s government. According to a report in The Daily Star carried under the headline, “No option but to succeed: Yunus” on August 18, 2024, Chief Adviser Muhammad Yunus had said during a “Meet and Greet” session with foreign diplomats in Dhaka, “In their efforts to stay in power, the Sheikh Hasina dictatorship destroyed every institution of the country. Judiciary was broken. Democratic rights were suppressed through a brutal decade-and-a-half long crackdown. Elections were rigged blatantly. Generations of young people grew up without exercising their voting rights. Banks were robbed with full political patronisation. And the state coffers were plundered by abusing power.”

Referring to a proposed Awami League rally on November 10, 2024, Muhammad Yunus’ press secretary, Shafiqul Alam, had written in a Facebook post on November 9, “The Awami League in its current form is a fascist party. There is no way this fascist party will be allowed to hold protests in Bangladesh. Anyone who would try to hold rally, gathering and processions by taking orders from the mass murderer and dictator Sheikh Hasina will face full force of the law enforcing agencies.” Leaders of the Anti-Discrimination Students Movement (ADSM), formed on July 1, 2024, to carry the students’ struggle forward, and Jatiya Nagarik Committee (National Citizens Committee), formed on 8 September, 2024, to consolidate the movement’s message and political goals, have spoken in a similar strident and denunciatory vein.

According to a report by Ashibul Islam Rifat in the Dhaka Tribune (23 October, 2024) appearing

under the headline “Nahid: Awami League will never be allowed back into politics in our lifetime,” Md Nahid Islam, an ADSM leader who is now adviser, in charge of information and broadcasting and other ministries, said at a discussion, that the Awami League’s return to politics in the manner and ideology it previously adhered to would be tantamount to “a betrayal to the martyrs of the uprising. And certainly, as long as we are alive, we will not allow this to happen.” Leaders of political parties like the Bangladesh Nationalist Party and the Bangladesh Jamaat-e-Islami (Jamaat) have also denounced the Awami League.

One can argue that the ICT, and any other court where Sheikh Hasina and other accused may be tried, will ignore such vituperations and pronounce its judgement on the basis of the evidence and arguments placed before it. A horse would guffaw on hearing this. The judiciary has been brought to heel through forced resignations and dismissals. The process began as early as August 10, 2024, when chief justice Obaidul Hassan of the Supreme Court and five judges of the appellate division, resigned as hundreds of students affiliated to the ADSM gathered on the court premises demanding that they quit, and threatened to besiege their residences if they did not. On October 16, the new chief justice, Syed Rezaat Ahmed, sent 12 High Court judges, appointed during the Sheikh Hasina-led Awami League rule, on leave following a demonstration in the court premises by adherents of the ADSM led by Hasnat Abdullah and Sarjis Alam. According to a report in Bangladesh’s The Business Standard on October 16 itself, announcing the plan, Hasnat

Abdullah, had written in a Facebook post on October 15, “In demand of the resignation of the fascist judges of the Awami League, we will besiege the High Court tomorrow (Wednesday) at 11am.”

The ICT itself was reconstituted on October 15, 2024, with Justice Md Golam Mortuza Majumder from the High Court Division of Bangladesh Supreme Court as its new chairman, and Justice Md Shafiul Alam Mahmud and retired District and Sessions Judge Md Mohitul Haque Enam Chowdhury as members of the panel.

The result is a pliant judiciary and the use of the justice system to persecute not only those associated with the Awami League but civil society activists, writers, journalists and human rights activists. A shocking example is the levelling of a false murder charge against a highly-respected senior advocate of Bangladesh’s Supreme Court, ZI Khan Panna. Referring to the case, The Daily Star wrote in an editorial titled “This weaponisation of legal cases must stop” and published on October 21, 2024, “Over the two months and a half since August 5, we have published multiple reports and editorials on the indiscriminate filing of such murder cases without any evidence, mostly implicating the leaders, activists, and suspected supporters of the Awami League regime. Even journalists and rights activists were not spared. In many cases, fabricated FIRs were filed. There were also instances of the names of accused in cases predating August 5 being replaced. This is nothing but a weaponisation of the legal process for harassment and political vendettas.” Will Sheikh Hasina get justice in such a situation?

(The author is Consulting Editor, The Pioneer. The views expressed are personal)

Unlocking economic potential: Bridging the gender gap in public procurement

In India, strides in gender budgeting and supportive policies are fostering greater opportunities for women entrepreneurs

How much of the goods and services purchased by government departments and public sector enterprises come from women-owned businesses? This crucial question is rarely asked, and it underscores the need for gender-responsive procurement policies in India and across South Asia. With government procurement “accounting for an average of 12 per cent of gross domestic product (GDP) in OECD countries, and up to 30 per cent of GDP in many developing countries,” the untapped economic potential for women entrepreneurs to contribute as suppliers of solutions to governments is immense. Yet, globally, women-owned enterprises still win only 1 per cent of this significant public

procurement market. WECConnect International is actively working to bridge this gap. Our efforts are making headway, especially in countries such as India, where policy frameworks are beginning to reflect a greater emphasis on gender inclusivity. The central government has increasingly prioritised women-centric policies, evident from the substantial rise in gender budget allocations, which is another way to support women and girls in addition to buying their products and services. For example, in 2013-14, Rs 97,134 crore was earmarked for women’s welfare and empowerment. By 2024-25, this figure had reached Rs 3.27 lakh crore, marking a 19 per cent increase over the actual gender budget expendi-



ELIZABETH A VAZQUEZ

ture of 2023-24 and a 218.8 per cent increase since 2013-14. For 2024, the Gender Budget accounts for 6.5 per cent of the Union Budget, the highest since the Gender Budget Statement was introduced in 2005-06. The Statement serves as a vital tool for ministries reviewing programmes from a gender perspective to ensure that more resources are being allo-

cated to benefit women and girls. In the last year (2023-24), the actual expenditure on gender budgeting was 16 per cent higher (Rs 2.75 lakh crore) than the total budgeted amount (Rs 2.38 lakh crore). The Indian government’s Public Procurement Policy for Micro and Small Enterprises (MSEs) Order, 2018, exempts this progress. The policy mandates that every central ministry, department, and PSU must procure at least 25 per cent of their needs from MSEs, with 3 per cent specifically reserved for women-owned micro and small enterprises. There has been progress since the mandated 3 per cent procurement target for women-owned MSEs was introduced in 2018. Public procurement from these enter-

prises has risen from almost zero in 2017-18 to 1.8 per cent in 2023-24. The number of women-owned (owned and controlled by women having the minimum financial interest of 51 per cent of the capital and with women constituting at least 51 per cent of generated employment) MSEs benefiting from public procurement grew from 1,410 (accounting for Rs 232.56 crore) to 21,128 (Rs 3056.4 crore) in six years. While the evidence is encouraging, there are still gaps and

challenges that, if addressed, could help India achieve a more gender-inclusive public procurement ecosystem. For example, there is currently no independent body to resolve complaints in the procurement system, leaving unhappy bidders with only two options: filing complaints directly with the purchasing entity or taking them to arbitration or court as outlined in the General Financial Rules (GFR) 2017. Generally, there is a pressing need for transparency, well-defined processes, and a robust mechanism for addressing grievances in tender and procurement procedures so that women-owned businesses receive constructive feedback if their bids are unsuccessful. This would enable them to

refine their future proposals and compete more effectively. Such measures would help mitigate biases in tendering and procurement processes that disproportionately disadvantage women-owned enterprises. The government could also pass procurement legislation to standardise bidding processes using a central law that sets national standards and state laws that fit specific needs, with the central government providing comprehensive oversight. Public authorities could also sensitise officials on the need to counteract gender biases that may influence the design of procurement processes. A strong starting point would be to appoint more women to oversee public procurement in government departments.

Public procurement from women-owned enterprises in India over the past six years has grown at an average annual growth rate of 70.5 per cent, while the number of beneficiary women entrepreneurs has increased at an average annual rate of 77 per cent because the baseline was close to zero. In 2023-24, total public procurement in India reached Rs 1.70 lakh crore, highlighting a growing opportunity for women to engage with the expanding public procurement market in the world’s fastest-growing economy. (The writer is CEO and Co-Founder of WECConnect International. With inputs from Erosan Alagaretnam, Regional Director for South Asia, WECConnect International. Views are personal)



DSE mourns passing of Dr Singh

STAFF REPORTER ■ NEW DELHI

In the corridors of the Delhi School of Economics (DSE), where ideas often find shape and future leaders are quietly moulded, the memories of former prime minister Manmohan Singh remain deeply etched. Long before he became the architect of India's economic liberalisation and later, its prime minister, Singh was a professor at the DSE, nurturing minds with the clarity and grace that would go on to define his public life.

The DSE community is in mourning following the demise of Singh, who breathed his last at the All India Institute of Medical Sciences (AIIMS) here on Thursday at the age of 92. The institution remembers him not just as a celebrated economist and statesman but as one of its own -- a mentor, a colleague and an honorary professor.

"The DSE fraternity is saddened at the passing away of former prime minister and a highly-distinguished DSE fraternity member, Dr Manmohan Singh. He served as a professor

at the Delhi School of Economics from 1969 to 1971. "In 1971, he left the DSE only to work as an advisor to the Ministry of Foreign Trade and the chief economic advisor to the Ministry of Finance and in various other senior positions, such as the finance minister and later, as the prime minister. He was the chief architect of the 1991 reforms that set our economy on a fast growth path. As the prime minister, he positioned India as an important player in the emerging geopolitical order," Ram Singh, director of the DSE said.

Reflecting on his memories of the former prime minister, his former colleague and a member of the Centre for Development Economics, Om Prakash, said, "I had the proud privilege of being a colleague of Professor Manmohan Singh at the DSE in the early 1970s. I found him to be an extremely helpful and kind man, always willing to help his younger colleagues."

"Even after he left the department, he was always available to help you in whichever way he could," he added.

Dr Singh's impact on Indian economy reflected in his books



TN RAGHUNATHA ■ MUMBAI

An academician par excellence and a man of letters, late Prime Minister Dr Manmohan Singh was a voracious reader of books. When he was the Governor of Reserve Bank of India (RBI) in the 1980s, he would step out of the RBI during lunch hour and would take rounds of book shops in Mumbai's downtown Fort area -- especially Strand Book Stall.

The Strand Book Stall, which remained a favourite destination for thousands of book lovers from across Mumbai and the country, was one of the favourite places that Dr Singh would visit during his lunch hours and evenings looking for books. The Strand Book Stall --- housed in Dhannur Building off the Sir Pherozshah Mehta Road -- sold outstanding rare books from each and every

field so much so that it had been frequented by Presidents and Prime Ministers, film stars, writers, journalists, sportsmen, business personalities and commoners during the seventy years of its existence. The shop closed down in February 2018, nine years after the famous shop owner T N Shanbhag passed away in 2009.

"Dr Manmohan Singh loved books. I have seen Dr Manmohan Singh at Strand Book Stall many times during lunch hour. He would quietly walk into these book stores and search for books. He invested a good bit of money on books," Old timer Raj Suri, who used to publish Mumbai tour guides and also run Wheeler's book stores at Churchgate Railway station, recalled.

"When it came to simplicity and humility, there was one else who could match him. He held such top posts like that of RBI

Governor, Deputy Chairman of Planning Commission, Finance Secretary, Finance Minister and Prime Minister at different points in time. Even though he was the RBI Governor, I have seen him converse with the book stall owner Shanbhag in such a humble manner. I have also seen Dr Singh visit Modern Book Stores in Fort," Suri said.

A world-renowned economist, he had an in-depth knowledge of the manner in which had progressed in the field of economy. As the Finance Minister and other key posts like the RBI Governor, Deputy Chairman of Planning Commission, Finance Secretary, Dr Singh steered the country through the difficult times.

As much as he was a reader, Dr. Manmohan Singh -- who used to teach at Panjab University and the Delhi School of Economics, before entering poli-

tics -- was a prolific author. His five-volume series, "Changing India" published in 2019 reflects his view of India's economic and political journey.

In his landmark work "A Decade of Economic Reforms" published in 2004, Dr Singh wrote about the economic changes implemented during his tenure as Finance Minister and later as Prime Minister. He dwelt upon how liberalisation contributed to an unprecedented growth in the country. In his another important book India's Economic Reforms: An Agenda for the Future, published in 2006, Dr Singh wrote about the economic policies that shaped modern India and discussed future challenges and opportunities for growth. In this book, he wrote about the importance of public-private partnerships and strengthening of institutional frameworks.

National drug cartel busted by Delhi Police, kingpin arrested

STAFF REPORTER ■ NEW DELHI

The Delhi Police has arrested three men, including the kingpin, and claimed to have busted a nationwide narco syndicate involved in the manufacturing and distribution of banned narcotic drugs and psychotropic substances.

Police said the accused were manufacturing and distributing Alprazolam tablets and Triprolidine Hydrochloride and Codeine Phosphate syrup across the country.

Tablets and syrup worth approximately Rs 1 crore were recovered and machines used in the preparation of Triprolidine hydrochloride and Codeine Phosphate syrup including packaging materials were seized from their possession, they said.

The accused were identified as Samaludden alias Sadik (28), a resident of Agra; Mohammad Gulzar (34), a resident of Narela; and Salman (28), a resident of Bagpat in Uttar Pradesh, the police said. According to the police, the accused have connections with various distribution channels extending into Haryana, Delhi and Uttarakhand, indicating a complex inter-state operation.

"The entire syndicate was unearthed after a tip-off which was received on December 25," Special Commissioner of Police (Crime Branch) Devesh Chandra Srivastava said. The officer further said the tip-off led to the arrest of the three accused who were in possession of 1.80 lakh tablets of Alprazolam tablets and

9,000 bottles of Triprolidine Hydrochloride and Codeine Phosphate Syrup.

He further said Samaludden, the kingpin of the syndicate, who also possess the degree of B.Pharm and Salman planned to set up a factory to manufacture the Codeine-based syrup and habit-forming drugs like Alprazolam and Tramadol. "Sadiq has also a social media account in the name of Sandeep Saini. In that profile DP, he put the picture of medicine so that he can get customers through social media, without being identified. He had set up the factory in Bawana with the help of Salman and Gulzar," said the Special CP.

He further said Gulzar, a graphics designer, also registered a firm under the name Abheshifa pharmaceutical marketing company and he is the main associate of Salman and Sadik.

"He worked as the supervisor of illegal factory setup. He also designed the label of recovered medicines and also helped Sadik and Salman to get the labels printed illegally," he added.

The officer further said they were using forged manufacturing licence and batch numbers. Even the address and QR code mentioned on the recovered syrup were forged. They used a forged brand name. They were also planning to set up their own fake medicine manufacturing plant. For that purpose, they had purchased the machine and printed packaging material in bulk. "Further investigation is underway," said the Special CP.

Man crawls out from train undercarriage, video goes viral

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Meanwhile, a railway official said it is not possible to man each and every train operation, "our system is quite porous on the stations and also along the tracks but thanks to the alert railway ground staff who on time saved the life of this man.

However, late on Friday evening a senior railway official of the Railway Board said that the man was mentally challenged and had entered the wheels under a stationary train. "It is not possible to travel on the axle point where the wheel moves," the official said.

DU approves PhD in Hindu Studies

STAFF REPORTER ■ NEW DELHI

Delhi University's Academic Council has approved a proposal of the Governing Body of the Centre for Hindu Studies to start PhD in Hindu Studies from the academic session 2025-2026 instead of 2024-2025 were accepted and approved by the Academic Council. The decision to reserve additional seats for single girl students in postgraduate programmes has also been approved by the AC.

Under this, one seat in each programme will be reserved for single girl students under the supernumerary quota.

Delhi BJP hails HC MoU order, criticises Kejriwal over delays

STAFF REPORTER ■ NEW DELHI

The Delhi BJP on Friday welcomed the High Court decision mandating the Delhi Government Health Department to sign a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) with the

Union Health Ministry by January 5 next year.

While sharing the news, South Delhi BJP MP Ramvir Singh Bidhuri said, "The Delhi High Court has directed the Arvind Kejriwal government to ensure that the MoU between Delhi's

Health Department and the Union Government Health Ministry is signed by January 5, 2025, regardless of the imposition of the model code of conduct." Bidhuri announced that the path is now clear for the construction of hospitals, labs, and other facilities

under the Ayushman Bharat Health Infrastructure Mission (PM-ABHIM) in Delhi while thanking Prime Minister Narendra Modi for allocating Rs 2,406 crore under the scheme for upgrading health infrastructure in Delhi.

World leaders condole Dr Manmohan Singh's passing

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"A tireless advocate of international collaboration, he forged lasting alliances, contributed to coalitions like BRICS, and showcased remarkable diplomacy through achievements such as the Indo-US nuclear agreement," the message said. "His humility, intellect, and dedication to public service will forever inspire future generations. May his soul find peace and be united with the divine!"

China also paid tributes to Singh saying that he made a "positive contribution" to the development of India-China relations recalling a key agreement signed between the two countries during his tenure to address the vexed boundary issue. Singh has made a positive contribution to the development of India-China relations, Chinese Foreign Ministry spokesperson Mao Ning told a media briefing in Beijing. Former Canadian Prime Minister Stephen Harper said he was saddened to learn of the passing of his former colleague, Prime Minister Manmohan Singh. "He was an

individual of exceptional intelligence, integrity, and wisdom. Lauren and I wish to convey our condolences to all his family and friends," he said.

Former Prime Minister of Nepal Pushpa Kamal Dahal 'Prachanda' said in a post on X, "Deeply saddened by the demise of Dr Manmohan Singh, a visionary leader and an extraordinary statesman. My heartfelt condolences to his family and the people of India. His legacy will inspire generations."

Former Maldivian President Mohamed Nasheed wrote X that he found the former Prime Minister as a "benevolent father figure" and a good friend of Maldives. "So sad to hear Manmohan Singh has passed. I always found him a delight to work with and like a benevolent father figure. He was a good friend of the Maldives," Nasheed said. Former President of Sri Lanka Mahinda Rajapaksa called him a "visionary economist and the architect of India's economic liberalisation."

"Deeply saddened by the passing of former Indian Prime Minister Dr.

Manmohan Singh. A visionary economist and the architect of India's economic liberalization, his contributions shaped a new era for India. My heartfelt condolences to his family, friends, and the people of Afghanistan," Karzai profoundly mourned Singh's passing and expressed his deepest condolences. "India has lost one of its most illustrious sons. Calling him an "unwavering ally and friend to the people of Afghanistan," Karzai

profoundly mourned Singh's passing and expressed his deepest condolences. "India has lost one of its most illustrious sons. Dr Manmohan Singh was an unwavering ally and friend to the people of Afghanistan. I profoundly mourn his passing and extend my deepest condolences to his family, the government, and the people of India. May his soul find eternal peace," Karzai said. Government sources said a seven-day national mourning will be observed and that Singh's last rites will be conducted with full state honours. Malaysian Prime Minister Anwar Ibrahim wrote a heartfelt message on X

for his "honoured and cherished friend."

"The weight of grief bears down on me at the news of the passing of my honoured and cherished friend: Dr Manmohan Singh. Obituaries, essays and books a plenty there will surely be about this great man, celebrating him as the architect of India's economic reforms. As Prime Minister, Dr Manmohan Singh was the midwife of India's emergence as one of the world's economic giants," he posted on X.

"...The praise that will follow in the days ahead will be truly well-deserved. Dr Manmohan Singh, slightly awkward as a politician but undeniably upright, steadfast and resolute as a statesman, leaves behind a legacy that will inspire generations to come." "To me, he will be all that and much more. Not many people know this, and it is time that I share it with Malaysians: during the years of my incarceration, he extended a kindness that he didn't have to... He offered scholarships for my children, particularly my son, Ihsan. Although I had declined the gracious offer, such a gesture undoubtedly

showed his extraordinary humanity and generosity, demonstrative, as the Bard would have it, of a man so full of "the milk of human kindness," Ibrahim posted.

"In those dark days, as I navigated the labyrinth of imprisonment, he stood by me as a true friend. Such acts of quiet magnanimity defined him, and they will remain etched in my heart forever. Goodbye, my mitra, my bhai, Manmohan," he posted. Former Prime Minister of Mauritius Pravind Jugnauth conveyed his condolences. "Saddened by the demise of former PM Manmohan Singh. His vision has not only allowed India to foster enhanced progress, he also had a keen interest in the advancement of friendly countries, including Mauritius. Our prayers are directed towards his family and all those bereaved," Jugnauth posted on X. Singh, who steered the country for 10 years from 2004-2014 and helped set up India's economic framework as finance minister before that, was a renowned name in global financial and economic sectors.

Controversy erupts over State funeral venue

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According to the Delhi Traffic Police, restrictions and diversion near the Ring road and Lutyens Delhi will be in place from 9 am in the morning till 2 pm in the afternoon. Further, with the movement of VVIPs including Prime Minister Modi, routes will be blocked in Central Delhi for 10 to 15 minutes, said sources.

Multi-layered security arrangements include deployment of the Special Protection Group (SPG) and local police to ensure the law and order situation remains under control. It is not yet confirmed if the mortal remains will be available for public viewing. The Delhi Traffic Police has also made adequate arrangements to ensure that the general public does not face any inconvenience due to the route. It advised the public to plan their journey in advance and follow the directions of the Traffic Police.

Delhi's power bills get leaner

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Meanwhile, addressing a press conference, Delhi Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) leader Virendra Sachdeva said that the Delhi Power Secretary has declared a more than 50 per cent reduction in PPAC charges (Power Purchase Adjustment Cost), which had been arbitrarily imposed on electricity bills by the Arvind Kejriwal government in collusion with private power companies.

Sachdeva said the PPAC was 38.12 per cent for BYPL, 35.83 per cent for BRPL and 36.33 per cent for TPDDL which will reduce to 13.62 per cent, 18.19 per cent, and 20.52 per cent, respectively. Sachdeva claimed that due to BJP's efforts, the massive PPAC charges on electricity bills have been reduced by 50%, providing significant relief to consumers.

Sachdeva noted that before the May 2024 Lok Sabha elections, BJP had raised the issue of unethical financial burden imposed on Delhi residents through PPAC. Since the elections, the party organisation and newly elected MPs have actively worked on this issue.

In July 2024, BJP raised the matter publicly and submitted a memorandum to Lieutenant Governor Vinay Kumar Saxena through senior party leaders. Demonstrations were held at the state level and in all 14 organisational districts, and

the media revisited the issue in early October. In early December, a delegation from Laghu Bharati met BJP leaders, after which the party again opposed the demand from private electricity companies like BSES Yamuna Power Limited to increase PPAC before the Lieutenant Governor.

On Thursday, a delegation from 32 industrial areas led by BJP spokesperson and Delhi Manufacturers Association President Dr. Anil Gupta met Saxena. In the presence of the Lieutenant Governor, the Delhi Energy Secretary announced reductions of 50% to 60% in PPAC charges in electricity bills for various companies.

Meanwhile, Chief Minister Atishi, who also holds the Power portfolio, stated that this was made possible due to the honest, people-centric governance of the Aam Aadmi Party. "It is only through proper management of the power supply chain and pre-planning that the Delhi Government has been able to achieve this," Atishi said. She further pointed out that neighbouring cities such as Noida and Gurgaon not only have high tariffs but also experience frequent power cuts during summer. "In Delhi, on the other hand, people enjoy 24-hour power supply and, in many cases, zero electricity bills due to our policies," she asserted.

Inclement Winter Weather Lashes Delhi

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Heavy rains in the city also reduced visibility, especially on the Delhi-Gurgaon route and near the airport, with vehicles driving cautiously using headlights amidst the downpour.

According to the Municipal Corporation of Delhi, water logging have been reported in Dwarka, Nilothi, Kashmiri Gate, Surajmal Vihar, Dilshad Garden, East of Kailash, Mundka, Chhatarpur while Public Works Department say several low lying areas witnessed water logging for a short period.

Meanwhile, residents of Delhi and NCR reported a significant increase in the cold severity following the downpour, which disrupted morning activities, led to

traffic congestion and brought a wintry gloom over the city. Weather department officials said an active western disturbance and its interaction with easterly winds were causing light to moderate rainfall and thunderstorms over northwest and central India, including the NCR areas of Delhi. The air quality index of Delhi stood at 353 in the very poor category despite moderate rainfall throughout the day. The high AQI is attributed to pollution from the transport sector.

In its bulletin, the IMD said parts of Northwest and Central India saw the mercury dropping below zero degree Celsius, and received light to moderate rain/thunderstorms with hail storms on Friday. The IMD in its weather forecast, issued warnings of

hailstorms with thunderstorms across Southeast Himachal Pradesh, Punjab, Haryana, Chandigarh, Vidarbha, Madhya Pradesh, Maharashtra, Marathwada and Gujarat, Rajasthan, and Uttar Pradesh on Friday. Madhya Pradesh could face similar conditions for two days. A yellow alert has been issued for lightning and thunderstorms in the region.

According to a statement by the IMD, a western disturbance is likely to interact with lower-level easterly winds over the Central parts of India, resulting in significant moisture feeding from both the Arabian Sea and the Bay of Bengal, particularly in the next two days. Under the influence of

these systems, scattered to fairly widespread rainfall and snowfall are expected over the western Himalayan region in the next year.

The weather department advised that strong wind/hail may damage plantation, horticulture and standing crops. There is a possibility that thunderstorms with hail may damage the standing crops. The IMD advised farmers to keep the harvested produce in safer places or cover the produce with tarpaulin sheets in the fields. "Use hail nets to protect orchards and vegetable plants in Himachal Pradesh, Uttarakhand, Punjab, Haryana, West Uttar Pradesh, East Rajasthan, Madhya Pradesh, Vidarbha, Madhya Maharashtra, Marathwada and Gujrat region. In

Himachal Pradesh and Uttarakhand, in case of heavy snowfall, shake the trees to remove snow immediately from the branches," it said.

The IMD further predicted a fresh western disturbance likely to affect western Himalayan region from 1st January, 2025. According to IMD, Kargil in Jand K recorded -13.1 degrees while Leh in Ladakh logged -12.2 degrees and Himachal's Kalpa registered -1.1 degrees. The minimum temperatures improved slightly at most places in Kashmir as a western disturbance is likely to impact the region on Friday, bringing light snowfall over a few higher reaches. Under the influence of the western disturbance, light rain is possible over the plains of Jammu and light snow over

the higher reaches of the Chenab Valley and Pir Panjal range, the IMD said. Intense cold wave-like conditions are prevailing across Kashmir, as the minimum temperatures continue to settle several degrees below freezing due to dry weather. Both the minimum and maximum temperatures have been staying below normal for this time of the season.

Meanwhile, 157 roads remained blocked in the Himachal Pradesh owing to the snowfall witnessed on December 23. Tabo in the Lahaul and Spiti district was the coldest place in Himachal Pradesh, recording a night temperature of minus 10.6 degrees Celsius, while Una was the hottest during the day with a high of 23.6 degrees Celsius.

GRAP Stage-III lifted

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Stage-III entails a ban on non-essential construction work in the private sector. Classes up to Class 5 are required to shift to hybrid mode under Stage-III. Parents and students have the option to choose online education wherever available. Under Stage-III, the use of BS-III petrol and BS-IV diesel cars (four-wheelers) is restricted in Delhi and nearby NCR districts. It also bans non-essential diesel-operated medium goods vehicles with BS-IV or older standards in Delhi. Persons with disabilities are exempt. Under GRAP Stage-II, measures such as mechanised sweeping of roads, use of anti-smog guns, and sprinkling water daily, will be

taken to tackle dust with focused attention on identified air pollution hotspots. Power suppliers need to ensure uninterrupted supply so that the use of diesel generator sets can be minimised. Alerts will be issued through newspapers, television, and radio to advise people about air pollution levels. Ban on the use of coal and firewood will still be in place in Delhi NCR, including the use of tandoors at restaurants and hotels. Use of diesel generator sets will also not be allowed except for emergency and essential services under GRAP-II. All construction and demolition sites and industrial units which have specific closure orders against them are also not allowed to resume operations.

China defends plan to build dam over Brahmaputra River in Tibet; says will not affect lower reaches

PTI ■ BEIJING

China on Friday defended its plan to build the world's largest dam on the Brahmaputra River in Tibet saying that the project will not affect riparian states and safety issues have been addressed through decades of studies.

Chinese Foreign Ministry spokesperson, Mao Ning played down apprehensions over the massive project estimated to cost around USD 137 billion being built in the ecologically fragile Himalayan region located along a tectonic plate boundary where earthquakes occur frequently. She said China has carried out in-depth studies for decades and taken safeguard measures.

China has always been responsible for the development of cross-border rivers, Mao told a media briefing here a question on the concerns related to the dam. She said the hydropower development in Tibet has been studied in an in-depth way for decades and safeguard measures have been taken for the security of the project and ecological and environmental protection.

The project will not affect lower reaches, she said.

China will continue to maintain communication with countries in the lower reaches through existing channels and step up international cooperation on disaster prevention and relief for the benefit of the people by the river, she said.

China on Wednesday approved the construction of the world's largest dam, stated to be the planet's biggest infra project on the Brahmaputra River in Tibet close to the Indian border, raising concerns in riparian states - India and Bangladesh.

The hydropower project is to be built in the lower reaches of the Yarlung Zangbo River, the Tibetan name for the Brahmaputra, an official statement here said.

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.

Mao said China's hydropower development in the lower reaches of the Yarlung Zangbo River aims to speed up the develop-

ment of clean energy and respond to climate change and extreme hydrological disasters. 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 questions, 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.

China sanctions 7 companies over US military assistance to Taiwan

AP ■ BEIJING

The Chinese government placed sanctions on seven companies on Friday in response to recent US announcements of military sales and aid to Taiwan, the self-governing island that China claims as part of its territory.

The sanctions also come in response to the recent approval of the US government's annual defence spending bill, which a Chinese Foreign Ministry statement said "includes multiple negative sections on China."

China objects to American military assistance for Taiwan and often imposes sanctions on related companies after a sale or aid package is announced. The sanctions generally have a limited impact, because

American defence companies don't sell arms or other military goods to China. The US is the main supplier of weapons to Taiwan for its defence.

The seven companies being sanctioned are Insitu Inc., Hudson Technologies Co., Saronic Technologies, Inc., Raytheon Canada, Raytheon Australia, Aerkomm Inc. and Oceanering International Inc., the Foreign Ministry statement said. It said that "relevant senior executives" of the companies are also sanctioned, without naming any.

Any assets they have in China will be frozen, and organisations and individuals in China are prohibited from engaging in any activity with them, it said.

US President Joe Biden last week authorised up to USD 571 million in Defence Department material and services and mil-

itary education and training for Taiwan. Separately, the Defence Department announced that USD 295 million in military sales had been approved.

The US defence bill boosts military spending to USD 895 billion and directs resources toward a more confrontational approach to China. It establishes a fund that could be used to send military resources to Taiwan in much the same way that the US has backed Ukraine. It also expands a ban on US military purchases of Chinese products ranging from drone technology to garlic for military commissaries.

Zhang Xiaogang, a Chinese Defence Ministry spokesperson, said earlier this week that the US is hyping up the "so-called" threat from China to justify increased military spending.

"US military spending has topped the world and keeps increasing every year," he said at a press conference. "This fully exposes the belligerent nature of the US and its obsession with hegemony and expansion."

The Foreign Ministry statement said the US moves violate agreements between the two countries on Taiwan, interfere in China's domestic affairs and undermine the nation's sovereignty and territorial integrity.

Taiwan's government said earlier this month that China had sent dozens of ships into nearby seas to practice a blockade of the island, a move that Taiwan said undermined peace and stability and disrupted international shipping and trade. China has not confirmed or commented on the reported military activity.

Germany's president dissolves parliament, sets national election for Feb 23

AP ■ FRANKFURT

German President Frank-Walter Steinmeier on Friday ordered parliament dissolved and set new elections for February 23 in the wake of the collapse of Chancellor Olaf Scholz's coalition, saying it was the only way to give the country a stable government capable of tackling its problems.

Scholz lost a confidence vote on December 16 and leads a minority government after his unpopular and notoriously rancorous three-party coalition collapsed on November 6 when he fired his finance minister in a dispute over how to revitalise Germany's stagnant economy.

Steinmeier said he made the decision because it was clear after consultation with party leaders that there was no agreement among Germany's political parties on a majority for a new government in the current parliament.

"It is precisely in difficult times

like these that stability requires a government capable of taking action and a reliable majority in parliament," he said as he made the announcement in Berlin.

"Therefore I am convinced that for the good of our country new elections are the right way."

Since the post-World War II constitution doesn't allow the Bundestag to dissolve itself, it was up to Steinmeier to decide whether to dissolve parliament and call an election. He had 21 days to make that decision.

Once parliament is dissolved, the election must be held within 60 days. Leaders of several major parties agreed earlier on the election date of February 23, seven months earlier than originally planned.

Steinmeier warned about outside interference in the poll, saying it is "a danger to democracy, whether it is covert, as was evidently the case recently in the Romanian elections, or

open and blatant, as is currently being practiced particularly intensively on platform X."

A top Romanian court annulled the first round of the country's presidential election, days after allegations emerged that Russia ran a coordinated online campaign to promote the far-right outsider who won the first round.

The campaign is already well underway. Polls show Scholz's party trailing the conservative opposition Union bloc led by Friedrich Merz. Vice Chancellor Robert Habeck of the environmentalist Greens, the remaining partner in Scholz's government, is also bidding for the top job — though his party is further back. If recent polls hold up, the likely next government would be led by Merz as chancellor in coalition with at least one other party.

Key issues include immigration, how to get the sluggish economy going, and how best

to aid Ukraine in its struggle against Russia.

The populist, anti-immigration Alternative for Germany, or AfD, which is polling strongly, has nominated Alice Weidel as its candidate for chancellor but has no chance of taking the job because other parties refuse to work with it.

Germany's electoral system traditionally produces coalitions, and polls show no party anywhere near an absolute majority on its own. The election is expected to be followed by weeks of negotiations to form a new government.

It's only the fourth time that the Bundestag has been dissolved ahead of schedule under Germany's post-World War II constitution. It happened under Chancellor Willy Brandt in 1972, Helmut Kohl in 1982 and Gerhard Schroeder in 2005.

Schroeder used the confidence vote to engineer an early election narrowly won by centre-right challenger Angela Merkel.

UK HONOURS LEGACY OF INDIA'S 'RELUCTANT PRIME MINISTER'

PTI ■ LONDON

India's "reluctant prime minister" and the "architect of economic reforms" is how sections of the UK media have been honouring the legacy of Dr Manmohan Singh, the former prime minister who passed away aged 92 in New Delhi on Thursday.

British High Commissioner to India Lindy Cameron took to social media to pay tribute to "a great Prime Minister, Finance Minister and global statesman who advanced India's interests through bold economic reforms and played a key role in putting India in its rightful place on the world stage and stabilising the global economy after the financial crisis."

"The UK will always be proud of his invaluable partnership with three UK Prime Ministers, and proud of him as an alumnus of two of our great universities. My thoughts and wishes are with his family and the people of India," she said.

Singh's tenure overlapped with Labour prime ministers Tony Blair and Gordon Brown and Conservative David Cameron, who later wrote in his memoir that he "got on well" with this "saintly man" who was robust on the threats India faced.

"On a later visit he told me that another terrorist attack like that in Mumbai in July 2011, and India would have to take military action against Pakistan," notes the former UK PM in 'For the Record', published in 2019.

Manoj Ladwa, founder and chairman of UK-based policy and events platform India Global Forum (IGF), described the former PM as a "towering statesman and visionary economist."

"His transformative reforms in the 1990s not only shaped India's future but also helped spark my own commitment to fostering stronger UK-India ties. As an alumnus of Oxford and Cambridge, he symbolised the deep cultural and academic connections between our nations. His legacy will inspire generations," he said.

"The Guardian" newspaper referenced Singh's "trademark sky-blue turbans and home-spun white kurta pyjamas" in its



obituary.

"Singh, called India's 'reluctant prime minister' due to his shyness and preference for being behind the scenes, was considered an unlikely choice to lead the world's biggest democracy. But when Congress leader Sonia Gandhi led her party to a surprise victory in 2004, she turned to Singh to be prime minister," the newspaper notes.

"He served a rare full two terms as prime minister in India's tumultuous politics and is credited with spurring the rapid economic growth that lifted tens of millions of Indians from poverty," it adds.

The BBC, in its obituary, hailed Singh as one of India's longest-serving prime ministers who was considered the "architect of key liberalising economic reforms, as premier from 2004-2014 and before that as finance minister."

"In his maiden speech as finance minister he famously quoted Victor Hugo, saying that 'no power on Earth can stop an idea whose time has come'.

That served as a launchpad for an ambi-

tionous and unprecedented economic reform programme: he cut taxes, devalued the rupee, privatised state-run companies and encouraged foreign investment. The economy revived, industry picked up, inflation was checked and growth rates remained consistently high in the 1990s," reads the report.

In January last year, Singh was honoured with a Lifetime Achievement Award by the National Indian Students and Alumni Union (NISAU) UK during their annual India-UK Achievers Honours in London.

"The India-UK relationship is indeed especially defined by our educational partnership. The founding fathers of our nation, Mahatma Gandhi, Jawaharlal Nehru, Dr B.R. Ambedkar, Sardar Patel and many others studied in the UK and went on to become great leaders, leaving a legacy which continues to inspire India and the world. Over the years countless Indian students have had the opportunity to study in the UK," Singh said in his acceptance message at the time.

Aviation experts say Russia's air defence fire likely caused Azerbaijan plane crash

AP ■ BAKU

Aviation experts said Thursday that Russian air defence fire was likely responsible for the Azerbaijan plane crash the day before that killed 38 people and left all 29 survivors injured.

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 still 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 km (2 miles) from Aktau. Cellphone footage circulating online appeared to show the aircraft making a steep descent before crashing into the ground and exploding in a fireball.

Other footage showed a part of its fuselage ripped away from the wings and the rest of the aircraft lying upside down on the grass.

Azerbaijan mourned the crash victims with national flags at half-staff across on Thursday. Traffic stopped at noon, and sirens sounded from ships and trains as it observed a nationwide moment of silence.

Speaking at a news conference Wednesday, 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 the pilots diverted to Aktau after a bird strike led to an emergency on board.

Authorities in Azerbaijan,

As the official crash investigation started, some experts pointed out that holes seen in the plane's tail section could indicate that it could have come under fire from Russian air defence systems fending off a Ukrainian drone attack.

Ukrainian drones had previously attacked Grozny, the capital of the Russian republic of Chechnya, and other regions in the country's North Caucasus. An

99% bracket," he said.

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-defence system."

Osprey provides analysis for carriers still flying into Russia after Western airlines halted their flights during the war.

Osprey CEO Andrew Nicholson said that the company had issued more than 200 alerts regarding drone attacks and air defence systems in Russia during the war.

"This incident is a stark reminder of why we do what we do," Nicholson posted online. "It is painful to know that despite our efforts, lives were lost in a way that could have been avoided."

Yan Matveyev, an independent Russian military expert, noted that images of the crashed plane's tail reveal the damage compatible with shrapnel from a small surface-to-air missile, such as the Pantsyr-S1 air defence system.

"It looks like the tail section of the plane was damaged by some missile fragments," he said.

Matveyev added that it remains unclear why the pilots decided to fly hundreds of miles east across the Caspian Sea instead of trying to land at a closer airport in Russia after the plane was hit.

"Perhaps some of the plane's systems kept working for some time and the crew believed that they could make it and land normally," Matveyev said, adding that the crew could also have faced restrictions on landing at another venue in Russia.



Kazakhstan and Russia were tight-lipped about a possible cause of the crash but a lawmaker in Azerbaijan blamed Moscow.

Rasim Musabekov told the Azerbaijani news agency Turan that the plane was fired on while in the skies over Grozny and urged Russia to offer an official apology.

"Those who did this must face criminal charges," Musabekov was quoted by Turan as saying, adding that compensations to the victims should also be paid.

"If it doesn't happen, relations will be affected."

official in Chechnya said another drone attack on the region was fended off on Wednesday, although federal authorities didn't report it.

Mark Zee of OPSGroup, which monitors the world's airspace and airports for risks, said that the analysis of the images of fragments of the crashed plane indicate that it was almost certainly hit by a surface-to-air missile, or SAM.

"Much more to investigate, but at high level we'd put the probability of it being a SAM attack on the aircraft at being well into the 90-

China probes personal disputes after mass killings; many fear further infringement on freedoms

AP ■ BANGKOK

The order came from the top. China's leader Xi Jinping wants the recent spree of mass killings that shocked the country not to happen again. He ordered local governments to prevent future "extreme cases".

The attacks, where drivers mow down people on foot or knife-wielding assailants stab multiple victims, are not new in China. But the latest surge drew attention.

Local officials were quick to vow to examine all sorts of personal disputes that could trigger aggression, from marital troubles to disagreements over inheritance.

However, the increasing reach into people's private lives raises concerns at a time when the Chinese state has already tight-

ened its grip over all social and political aspects in the East Asian nation.

Revenge on Society Crimes: This is how people in China label these attacks.

In November alone, three took place: A man struck people at an elementary school in Hunan province, wounding 30, after suffering investment losses. A student who failed his examination stabbed and killed eight at a vocational school in the city of Yixing. The most victims, 35 people, resulted from a man mowing down a crowd in the southern city of Zhuhai, supposedly upset over his divorce.

While pinpointing the exact motive of such attacks can be difficult, there is an overwhelming feeling of being pressured within Chinese soci-

ety, experts say.

"On the surface, it seems like there are individual factors, but we see there's a common link," Wu Qiang, a former political science professor, said. "This link is, in my personal opinion, every person has a feeling of injustice. They feel deeply that this society is very unfair and they can't bear it anymore."

Since 2015, Chinese police have targeted human rights lawyers and non-profit advocacy groups, jailing many, while keeping tight surveillance on others, effectively destroying the civil society that had been active from the early 2000s to 2010s.

Wu was fired from Tsinghua University after conducting fieldwork during the 2014 Occupy protests in Hong

Kong. He says police officers have been regularly stationed outside his home in Beijing since last year.

Keeping a tight lid on the killings: A decade ago, media outlets could report an incident as it developed and even share a suspect's name. Nowadays, it's rarely possible. During the 24 hours before the death toll was released in the Zhuhai slaying, state censors were quick to remove any videos of the incident and eyewitness accounts shared online. In the case of the Hunan elementary school attack, authorities shared the number of the wounded only after the court sentencing, nearly a month later.

A tally of violent attacks can be documented in other countries; notably, the US had 38

mass killings so far this year, according to an Associated Press database. But in China, a lack of public data makes it hard to decipher mass killing trends.

"From 2000 to 2010, there was a lot of discussions, including how do we help these people by making structural changes to reduce these risks, but now there's not," said Rose Luqui, a well-known former journalist with state-owned Phoenix Television and an associate professor at Hong Kong Baptist University.

Luqui believes the government may be enforcing censorship thinking it will prevent copycats from imitating such crimes.

"Things will only become more and more strict," she predicted. For the Chinese state,

"the only method to deal with it is to strengthen control."

Officials vow to ferret out hidden risks: After the Zhuhai attack, Xi called on all local governments "to strengthen prevention and control of risks at the source, strictly prevent extreme cases from occurring, and to resolve conflicts and disputes in a timely manner," according to the official Xinhua news agency.

The AP found at least a dozen local government notices, from small towns to big cities, announcing actions in response.

In eastern Anhui province, a ruling Communist Party leader inspected a middle school, a local police station, and even the warehouse of a chemical factory where he urged the workers to "ferret

out any hidden risks." He said they must "thoroughly and meticulously investigate and resolve conflicts and disputes," including in families, marriages and neighbourhoods.

Police and prosecutors issued similar statements.

The Ministry of Justice promised to curtail conflicts by looking into squabbles over inheritance, housing, land and unpaid wages.

However, many expressed worry over how such disputes will be detected.

"I think we're at the beginning of a vicious cycle," said Lynette Ong, a professor at the University of Toronto and author of "Outsourcing Repression: Everyday State Power in Contemporary China." "If you nip the conflict in its bud, you'd imagine the

system then would impose a lot of pressure... on schools, enterprises and factories."

The new announcements reminded Ong of China's strict policies during the COVID-19 pandemic. Neighbourhood committees, the lowest rung of government, set up fences and barriers in front of buildings to control entry and exit and broke into homes in extreme cases to disinfect the apartments of people who had caught the virus.

Eventually, people protested en masse.

"If we see non-sensible measures being introduced, you'll be met by resistance and anger and grievances from the people, and it's going to feed into this vicious cycle where more extreme measures are going to be brought," she said.

India Inc. hails former PM Dr Manmohan Singh as architect of economic reforms

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

Billionaire Gautam Adani, Tata Sons Chairman N Chandrasekaran and business tycoon Anil Ambani led India Inc. in paying tributes to former Prime Minister Manmohan Singh, describing him the architect of economic reforms and one of the tallest leaders. Singh, who opened up the economy as finance minister and served as prime minister for two consecutive terms, died on Thursday at the age of 92.



Manmohan Singh, one of the stalwarts who envisioned a new, liberalised India that is taking its rightful place in the world," he said in a statement. "Dr Singh will always be remembered for his visionary thinking and deep insights while always being humble and upholding his personal values," Chandrasekaran said. His inspiring leadership earned him respect across the world, he added. Aditya Birla Group Chairman Kumar Mangalam Birla said with Singh's demise the nation has lost one of its tallest leaders and finest economists.

"His most defining contribution -- the epochal 91 reforms spurred a multi-decadal economic boom and more importantly reshaped the calculus of possibilities for India and Indians," Birla said in a statement. He further said, "Over several decades in public life, his intellect, wisdom, and humility stood as exemplars, leaving an indelible mark on the nation's conscience." Singh's extraordinary rise from humble beginnings to the Prime Minister's office epitomises the boundless potential of India and serves as an inspiration for

generations of Indians, Birla added. Indian industry, economy, and entrepreneurs in particular, owe a debt of gratitude to the liberalisation reforms that were ushered in the early 90s under Manmohan Singh's leadership, Bharti Enterprises Founder and Chairman Sunil Mittal said. Mittal further said that as a Prime Minister, Finance Minister and an economist, Singh finds his place among India's tallest leaders. "I am deeply saddened by the passing away of Dr Manmohan Singh. As a

Prime Minister, Finance Minister and an economist he finds his place among India's tallest leaders.

Indian industry, economy and especially entrepreneurs owe a debt of gratitude to the liberalisation reforms that were ushered in the early 90s under his leadership," Mittal said.

Infosys founder Narayana Murthy described Manmohan Singh as a gentleman, a scholar, and a value-based politician.

"His leading the economic reforms, under the guidance of Sri Narasimha Rao, is what laid a strong and durable foundation for the acceleration of India's economic growth.

Therefore, every Indian should be extremely grateful to this extraordinary individual for enhancing the prosperity of our country," Murthy said.

Reliance Group head Anil Ambani said the former prime minister's life was a testament to humility, wisdom and service to India.

"As the Guru Granth Sahib says, 'Nanak Naam Chardi Kala, Tere Bhane Sarbat Da Bhala' - 'With the Divine Name comes eternal optimism; by You will, may there be well-being for all."

Legendary figure in automotive sector: PM Modi condoles Osamu Suzuki's demise



PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

Condoling the demise of global automotive industry legend Osamu Suzuki, Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Friday said he had a profound affection for India and his collaboration with Maruti revolutionised the Indian automobile market. Osamu Suzuki, the man who took a risk and bet on India when no one else believed in having a viable automobile company in the country, has died at the age of 94, according to information shared by Japan's Suzuki Motor Corporation on Friday. He passed away on December 25 due to malignant lymphoma, it said. "Deeply saddened by the

passing of Mr. Osamu Suzuki, a legendary figure in the global automotive industry. His visionary work reshaped global perceptions of mobility. Under his leadership, Suzuki Motor Corporation became a global powerhouse, successfully navigating challenges, driving innovation and expansion," Modi said in a social media post.

Suzuki had a profound affection for India and his collaboration with Maruti revolutionised the Indian automobile market, the prime minister said.

"I cherish fond memories of my numerous interactions with Mr. Suzuki and deeply admire his pragmatic and humble approach. He led by example, exemplifying hard work, meticulous attention

to detail and an unwavering commitment to quality. Heartfelt condolences to his family, colleagues and countless admirers," Modi said.

Suzuki, who took the risk of partnering with the then Indian government to form a joint venture, Maruti Udyog Ltd, in 1981 - at a time when India was still a closed economy under a licence regime - is widely regarded as the man who spurred the automotive industry in the country. Maruti Udyog Ltd later on became Maruti Suzuki India Ltd subsequent to the government completing its exit in 2007 with Suzuki Motor Corporation holding a majority stake. Osamu Suzuki was the director and honorary chairman of Maruti Suzuki India Ltd.

NBCC bags ₹368.75 Crore worth of projects, Including ₹300 Crore Varanasi commercial complex



PTI ■ NEW DELHI

State-owned NBCC has bagged a Rs 300-crore contract to develop a commercial complex in Varanasi, Uttar Pradesh. In a regulatory filing on Friday, the company said it has secured a Rs 300-crore order for "development of Jawaharlar Nehru Commercial Complex (JLCC), Englishya Lines, Varanasi on self-sustainable model". The company got the

contract from Varanasi Development Authority. NBCC secured another work order worth Rs 24.38 crore to construct Mehta Family School of Data Science and Artificial Intelligence including internal EIC, firefighting, fire alarm, lifts, audio visual system, CCTV and BMS installation and development works at IIT Roorkee, Uttarakhand. The company bagged another work order worth Rs 44.37 crore from Power Grid Corporation to construct and furnish 500-bed multi-storey "Vishram Sadan" at AIIMS Gorakhpur in Uttar Pradesh. In total, NBCC said it has secured the work order in normal course of business amounting Rs 368.75 crore. NBCC is into Project Management Consultancy (PMC), Engineering, Procurement and Construction (EPC) and real estate businesses.

Rupee falls further 23 paise to hit fresh record low of 85.50 against US dollar

PTI ■ MUMBAI

The rupee fell steepest in almost two years to hit its lifetime intraday low of 85.80 before a suspected central bank intervention helped recover some of its losses and settled 23 paise lower at a record low of 85.50 (provisional) against the US dollar on Friday due to a strong greenback amid increased month-end demand from banks and importers. According to analysts, the Reserve Bank's stance to hold on to its dollar payments in short-term forward contracts added to the shortage of greenback, with importers rushing to meet their month-end payment obligations. Despite robust sentiment in domestic equity markets, the rupee was weighed down by sustained outflow of foreign funds and rising crude oil prices, they added. At the interbank foreign exchange, the rupee opened



weak at 85.31 and plunged 53 paise to the lowest-ever intraday level of 85.80. The unit finally ended the session at 85.50 (provisional) against the greenback, losing 23 paise from its previous closing level of 85.27. The rupee's earlier sharpest one-day fall of 68 paise was recorded on February 2, 2023. The domestic unit has been hitting new lows almost every day in the past couple of weeks. It had plunged 12 paise to 85.27 against the dollar on Thursday after declining 13 paise in the previous two sessions. "The central bank holds USD 21 billion in short-

side forward contracts set to mature in December and January. Market speculation suggests that the RBI has refrained from rolling over these maturing forwards, leading to a scarcity of dollars and an oversupply of rupees. "Moreover, dollar liquidity in the market remains very low, amplifying the upward momentum in the pair. This imbalance has propelled the USD-INR pair towards 85.8075 levels," said Amit Pabari, MD of CR Forex Advisors. According to Anuj Choudhary - Research Analyst at Mirae Asset Sharekhan, the rupee hit a record low on dollar demand from importers towards the end of the month and outflows from foreign investors (FIIs).

"Rising US treasury yields and crude oil prices also weighed on the rupee," he said and projected the USD-INR spot price in a range of Rs 85.30 to Rs 85.85, saying

traders may take cues from goods trade balance data from the US. Meanwhile, the dollar index, which gauges the greenback's strength against a basket of six currencies, was trading higher by 0.04 per cent at 107.94, while the 10-year benchmark US Treasury yield rose 0.76 per cent, hitting its seven-month high level of 4.61 per cent. Brent crude, the global oil benchmark, rose 0.15 per cent to USD 73.37 per barrel in futures trade. In the domestic equity market, the 30-share BSE Sensex settled 226.59 points or 0.29 per cent higher at 78,699.07 points, while Nifty went up 63.20 points, or 0.27 per cent to close at 23,813.40 points.

Foreign Institutional Investors (FIIs) were net sellers in the capital markets on Thursday, as they offloaded shares worth Rs 2,376.67 crore, according to exchange data.

RBI permits prepaid payment instruments holders to make UPI payments via third-party apps

PTI ■ MUMBAI

The Reserve Bank on Friday allowed prepaid payment instruments holders to make and receive UPI payments through third-party mobile applications.

It has been decided to enable Unified Payments Interface (UPI) payments from/to full-KYC prepaid payment instruments (PPIs) through third-party UPI applications, the central bank said in circular. "A PPI issuer shall enable holders of only its full-KYC PPIs to make UPI payments by linking its customer PPIs to its UPI handle. UPI transactions from PPI on the issuer's application shall be authenticated using the customer's existing PPI credentials," it said. Such a transaction will, thus, be pre-approved before it reaches the UPI system. A PPI issuer, in its capacity as a payment system providers, should not on-board customers of any bank or any other PPI issuer, the



RBI said. The RBI's decision is aimed at providing more flexibility to holders of PPIs such as gift cards, metro rail cards, and digital wallets, among others. Currently, UPI payments from/to a bank account can be carried out using the UPI application of that bank or of any third-party application provider. However, UPI payments from/to a PPI can only be carried out using the mobile application provided by the PPI issuer. UPI is an instant real-time payment system developed by National Payments Corporation of India to facilitate inter-bank transactions through mobile phones.

NCLT directs initiation of insolvency proceedings against Hero Electric

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

The National Company Law Tribunal (NCLT) has directed initiation of insolvency proceedings against Hero Electric after admitting a plea filed by Metro Tyres, an operational creditor claiming a default of Rs 1.85 crore.

As per provisions of the Insolvency & Bankruptcy Code (IBC), NCLT has appointed Bhooresh Gupta as Interim Resolution Professional to run the company after suspending the board of Hero Electric. The Delhi-based bench of



NCLT rejected the contentions of Hero Electric of a pre-existing dispute with the operational creditor saying that it was "not just a

moonshine or feeble legal argument". The objections raised by Hero Electric are not found "tenable in law" and have

been duly negated by Metro Tyres, which had supplied tyres and tubes to the company.

"In the facts and circumstances of the instant case, we are of the view that the corporate debtor has not been able to raise a plausible contention regarding the pre-existence of 'dispute' between the parties. Hence, the present petition filed under Section 9 of the IBC, 2016 ought to be admitted," it said.

Besides, a two-member bench in its 16-page order passed on December 20, declared a moratorium, protecting the company from decree or

order of any court, tribunal or arbitration panel and ban on transferring, encumbering, alienating or disposing of its assets.

Hero Electric had approached Metro Tyres, for the purchase of cycle tyres and tubes. Pursuant to that it supplied goods to Hero Electric and in lieu of that various invoices were raised from August 9, 2022 to December 3, 2022 amounting to Rs 3.69 crore out of which Rs 4.27 lakh was paid.

However, Rs 1.85 crore was due on Hero Electric, and Metro Tyres submitted that despite its several requests,

the payment was denied by Hero Electric taking a 'moonshine defence' stating that in 90/90x10 tyre and 90/90x12 tyre supplied by it, there was issue of 'tread separation', 'bubbles' and 'air leakage'. It further contended that Hero Electric had never raised any quality issue or any sort of dispute in any manner and this was evident from the Balance Confirmation Letters by the corporate debtor. The insolvency tribunal also observed that Hero Electric had not raised any dispute over the quality of goods until nine months after the supply. "It is amply clear from the

records that the corporate debtor (Hero Electric) being the purchaser of goods never raised any quality issue or any sort of dispute in any manner whatsoever as per their own inspection/quality control policies immediately after the receipt of the goods and continued to purchase goods," said NCLT.

Hero Electric itself has declared in the user manual/warranty policy for its products that "tyres/tubes" are not covered under its warranty and the original manufacturer is liable for all or any claim for tyres and tubes.

Govt issues allocation order to Hindalco Industries for coal mine in Odisha

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

The government on Friday said it has issued allocation order for a coal mine in Odisha to Aditya Birla Group firm Hindalco Industries Ltd. The government issued the vesting order for the Meenakshi coal mine that has a peak rating capacity of 12 million tonnes per annum (MTPA). This follows the signing of the agreement for development and production of coal mine last month. The Meenakshi coal mine, a fully explored block, has geological reserves of 285.23 million tonnes (MT). The block is likely to generate an annual revenue of Rs 1,152.84 crore, based on its peak rated capacity (PRC), the coal ministry said in a statement. With an estimated capital investment of Rs 1,800 crore, the mine will significantly augment domestic coal production and contribute to strengthening energy security, it said. The development of the block is likely to provide employment to about 16,224 individuals, contributing to the economic growth in the region. "This initiative marks a significant step toward boosting the nation's coal production capacity, supporting economic development, and creating sustainable employment opportunities," the statement added.

Air India to see progress on key initiatives in 2025, working towards profitability: CEO Wilson

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

Air India will see progress on various key initiatives, including refitting of wide body and narrow body planes, in 2025 as well as tighten practices and processes to ultimately become profitable, the airline's chief Campbell Wilson said on Friday. After taking over the loss-making Air India from the government in January 2022, Tata Group has been working on an ambitious transformation plan to turn around the airline, which recently also placed orders for 100 more aircraft. In his message to the staff on Friday, Wilson said 2024 saw the



realisation of some of the most significant milestones, including the completion of the mergers of Air India Express and AirAsia India, and Vistara with Air India that "position us as the fourth largest business, by revenue, in the Tata group". Air India group operates 300 aircraft across both brands, flying over 60 million customers annually to more

than 100 destinations in India and around the world. While describing 2024 as a transformative year for Air India and Indian aviation in many ways, Wilson said 2025 will see progress on many more key initiatives of the airline such as refitting wide body and remaining narrow body aircraft with new seats and services. Further, Air India's service standards will be elevated, raising the bar on what we consider 'good', and more consistently delivering to those new expectations, he added. Refitting of narrow body aircraft has commenced while that of legacy wide body planes is expected to start in

2025. Wilson, the CEO and MD of Air India, also emphasised the airline will strengthen and tighten its practices and processes so that "we are not just consistent, we are also efficient and, ultimately, profitable". In the 2023-24 fiscal, Air India trimmed its losses to Rs 4,444.10 crore from Rs 11,387.96 crore in 2022-23. Its turnover rose 23.69 per cent to Rs 38,812 crore in the last financial year compared to the year-ago period. Earlier this month, Air India placed an order for 100 more Airbus planes comprising 10 wide body A350s and 90 narrow body A320s. The total order books is 570.

Sebi clarifies rules on change in control for investment advisers, research analysts, KRAs

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

Markets watchdog Sebi on Friday clarified the rules for transfer and transmission of shareholding among immediate relatives for investment advisers, research analysts, and know your client (KYC) registration agencies (KRAs). The move aims to streamline regulatory compliance and protect investor interests while ensuring transparency in the functioning of these intermediaries. With regards to transfer among immediate relatives, Sebi, in its circular, clarified that transferring shares among immediate relatives



will not constitute a "change in control". Immediate relatives include spouses, parents, siblings, and children. On transmission of shareholding, the regulator said transmission of shares, whether to immediate relatives or others, will also not result in a change in control for unlisted body

corporate intermediaries. In the case of proprietary firms, any transfer or inheritance of ownership will be considered a change in control. Legal heirs are required to seek Sebi's prior approval and obtain fresh registration in their name. For partnerships with more than two partners, transfer of ownership among partners will not be treated as a change in control. However, if a partner passes away and the partnership deed allows legal heirs to join, the firm will be reconstituted without requiring fresh registration. Induction of a new partner will require Sebi's approval.



Sculpting the Soul



At India Habitat Centre, Delhi, *The Forces of Imagination* brings sculpture to life, blending emotion, creativity and innovation, says **SAKSHI PRIYA**

Sculpture is a unique form of art that speaks to us not just through its visual appeal but also through its form, texture, and the materials used. At *The Forces of Imagination*, a groundbreaking sculpture exhibition at the India Habitat Centre, this powerful medium was brought to life in all its glory. The event, curated by the renowned art critic *Nanak Ganguly* and organised by *Chawla Art Gallery* in collaboration with the *Delhi Art Society* and *Calcutta Sculptors*, featured over 100 sculptures from 14 talented artists, each pushing the boundaries of creativity.

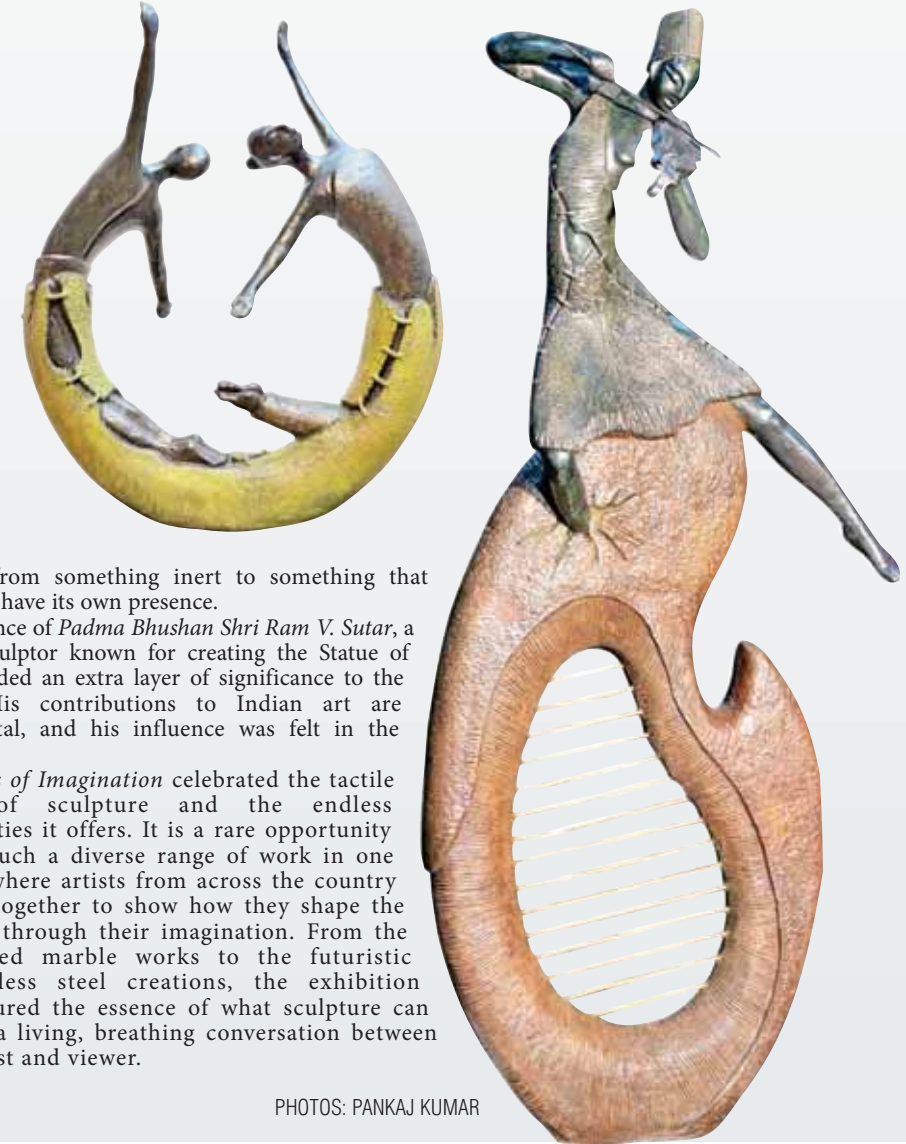
Upon entering the gallery, the diversity of the works was immediately apparent. There was a remarkable blend of traditional craftsmanship and contemporary innovation. The sculptures, created from materials such as bronze, marble, stainless steel, aluminum and wood, each told its own story. Whether they were smooth, polished surfaces or raw, textured designs, every piece invited a deeper engagement, requiring the viewer to physically move around and truly immerse themselves in the art.

One of the highlights of the exhibition was *Vibhor Sogani's* stainless steel sculptures. These works, with their sleek and shiny surfaces, caught the light in a way that made them appear to change shape depending on the viewer's perspective. They felt alive and fluid, showcasing the artist's ability to push the limits of sculpture into a modern, dynamic realm. In contrast, *Neeraj Gupta's* marble sculptures had a classic feel, with intricate details

and deep narratives embedded in the stone. His works spoke of tradition while being distinctly contemporary, highlighting how timeless materials can still feel relevant in today's art world.

The exhibition successfully created a space for both established sculptors and emerging talents. It was a platform where seasoned masters such as *Tapas Sarkar* and *Ratan Krishna Saha*, alongside fresh voices from the *Calcutta Sculptors* collective, could showcase their work. The diversity in styles and techniques was fascinating, each piece added a new layer to the conversation, whether through form, medium, or theme.

This blending of generations and styles made for an incredibly engaging experience. The curation of the exhibition was impeccable, with each sculpture given ample space to stand on its own while also contributing to the overall dialogue of the show. The lighting in the gallery was carefully considered, casting shadows and highlighting the unique textures of each piece. As you moved through the space, you could feel the transformation of the



material from something inert to something that seemed to have its own presence. The presence of *Padma Bhushan Shri Ram V. Sutar*, a master sculptor known for creating the *Statue of Unity*, added an extra layer of significance to the event. His contributions to Indian art are monumental, and his influence was felt in the exhibition.

The Forces of Imagination celebrated the tactile power of sculpture and the endless possibilities it offers. It is a rare opportunity to see such a diverse range of work in one place, where artists from across the country come together to show how they shape the world through their imagination. From the detailed marble works to the futuristic stainless steel creations, the exhibition captured the essence of what sculpture can be: a living, breathing conversation between artist and viewer.

PHOTOS: PANKAJ KUMAR



WHERE DRAMA MEETS REALITY

THE *BHARATMUNI RANG UTSAV* CELEBRATED THE POWER OF THEATRE TO REFLECT LIFE'S COMPLEX EMOTIONS, WRITES **SAKSHI PRIYA**

Theatre has always had a unique power to bring stories to life, creating a shared space where emotions and experiences are felt deeply by both performers and audiences. The *Bharatmuni Rang Utsav*, a celebration of Indian theatre, truly captured this essence, offering a powerful display of storytelling. Each performance brought something distinct to the stage, reminding us of the magic of theatre and its ability to touch hearts.

The festival opened with three exceptional plays that set the tone for the days ahead. *Asmanjasa Babu*, written by *Satyajit Ray* and directed by *Utpal Jha*, explored moral dilemmas with nuance and depth. This was followed by *Aakhiri Hila*, written by *Munshi Premchand* and directed by *Durga Sharma*, which brought to life the poignant storytelling of one of India's literary legends. Concluding the evening was *Dhundh*, written and directed by *Amul Sagar*, a

gripping narrative that left the audience spellbound. Day two continued the festival's momentum with even more captivating performances. The acting was extraordinary, with each performer immersing themselves in their roles. *Intzar*, written by *Saadat Hasan Manto* and directed by *Amar Sah*, brought emotional depth through minimalistic dialogue and a raw, honest performance that made the audience feel the weight of existential despair. The voices, full of passion and subtlety, reached every corner of the room, ensuring that no emotion went unnoticed. *Purush, The God of Few Inches*, written and directed by *Shuddho Banerjee*, saw a remarkable solo performance that explored masculinity's evolving nature, engaging the audience with its sharp, reflective narrative. *Qissa Aadmi Ka*, written and directed by *Abdus Salam Ansari*, brought humour and thought-provoking commentary on societal norms, with the actors delivering their lines with

impeccable timing and depth, making the satire both enjoyable and insightful. The final day was just as memorable. *Trishna* beautifully weaved themes of reincarnation and devotion, while *Marnoprant* and *Digdarshak* explored grief and the mentor-disciple relationship with deep emotional resonance. *Trishna* stood out for its poetic exploration of devotion and longing, while *Marnoprant* powerfully addressed complex emotions surrounding loss and relationships. *Digdarshak* concluded the event with a thought-provoking meditation on the sacrifices art demands. In the end, the *Bharatmuni Rang Utsav* reminded us of the power of theatre to reflect life's complexities, emotions and stories. It was a reminder that, beyond the performances, it's the shared experience of theatre that connects us all, sparking conversations and inspiring change.

PHOTOS: PANKAJ KUMAR

The Power of Her Canvas

By **TEAM VIVA**
Women's art has long been a space of untold stories, silent rebellions and vibrant expressions of identity. *Vama: Showcasing Women Artists from Delhi* at the *Shridharani Gallery*, *Triveni Kala Sangam*, brings these narratives to the forefront, presenting a captivating display of works by 20 distinguished women artists from the city. Through this exhibition, *Sahitya Kala Parishad* not only honours their talent but also creates a platform for the celebration of women's creativity and their powerful voices in the art world.

The artworks on display offer a striking diversity of mediums and perspectives. *Nilanjana Nandy's This Side-That Side* stands as a poignant exploration of division and alienation, using grid-like spaces to depict the fragmentation of identity. *Aditi Aggarwal's Dream 6 and 7* offers a surreal reflection on memory and change, encapsulating a personal journey through unsettling yet evocative imagery. Both works underscore how women's art often bridges personal experience with universal themes,



offering viewers a chance to engage deeply with complex emotions. Meanwhile, *Angelica Basak's Breathe series* uses ceramic sculptures to embody the delicate balance between chaos and tranquility, while *Rashmi Khurana's* mixed-media works delve into the power of tactile surfaces to evoke profound human emotions. *Shampa Sircar's Mayura Series* incorporates the peacock and lotus to symbolise the interconnectedness of life and spiritual growth. From the global themes explored in *Durga Kainthola's Travelogue Diaries* to *Richa Navani's* geometric abstractions addressing gender and ecology, *Vama* stands as a vibrant celebration of the depth, diversity and power of women's artistic expression.

This exhibition is not only an artistic experience but a reminder of the essential role women play in shaping the cultural landscape. It encourages reflection on the ever-evolving role of women in art and society, offering a dynamic space for dialogue and empowerment.

PHOTOS: PANKAJ KUMAR



Empowering Women through Skill Development

By **ABHI SINGHAL**, the Hyatt Centric in New Delhi saw the 26th anniversary of the *International Women Polytechnic (IWP) Academy* with the grand celebration of "*Meraki 2024*," an annual festival dedicated to empowering women through financial independence. The event featured various cultural performances including various fashion shows, dances, and dramas, showcasing the creativity and talent of women by different branches of IWP. The annual event was graced by *Kamaljeet Sehrawat*, Member of Parliament, Lok Sabha, as the chief

guest. *Sehrawat*, in her speech, said, "If we want to take our country forward, there is only one mantra: skill development." The event showcased the dedication to women's education. Students from IWP's Delhi branches showcased an impressive array of ethnic, Indo-western, and Western attire. What made the show particularly unique was that these students not only designed the clothes but were also deeply involved in every aspect of the creation process starting from fabric selection to stitching and embroidery. This hands-on



experience was a testament to the academy's commitment to providing practical skills that empower women in real-world settings. The festival culminated in an award ceremony, where students were recognised for their achievements in various categories, further boosting their morale. *Meraki 2024* delivered a powerful message: empowering women through skill development is crucial for shaping a self-reliant and developed India, aligning with the country's vision for a prosperous future by 2047.

India collapse after Jaiswal's terrible run-out on day two of the fourth Test

PTI ■ MELBOURNE

A familiar collapse unfolded after Yashviji Jaiswal's inexplicable run-out as India stared down the barrel at 164/5 against a menacing Australia on day two of the fourth Test here on Friday. Jaiswal, who was quite fluent during his 118-ball stay that yielded 82 runs, was way short of his crease after a mix-up with Virat Kohli (36) while attempting a quick single, handing Australia the breakthrough that could prove decisive. India are still 310 runs behind Australia's first innings score of 474 and would need another 111 runs to avoid a follow-on that should never have been a consideration on a placid batting track. It was 153 for 2 at one stage and in four overs, another three wickets fell with Gautam Gambhir's plan of sending a night watchman in Akash Deep turning out to be one of the many poor calls that the head coach has taken in this game. In a space of barely five minutes,

cricket showed its fickle nature as Jaiswal pushed towards mid-on and called for a quick single with an assured Kohli (36) at the other end. Kohli took a step and half before retreating. Pat Cummins swooped the ball and threw at the striker's end with a frustrated Jaiswal seen telling his idol "my call". This moment will be one for posterity as Kohli looked down and perhaps felt that he could have at least said a loud "No" to allow Jaiswal to sprint back. The run-out broke his concentration and for the first time after 85 balls, he poked a delivery bowled in the corridor of uncertainty and it was the end. Scott Boland repeated the dismissal that has been a norm for quite a while now. Akash Deep didn't have the technique to survive and the day ended in Australia's favour just like it started. The Jaiswal-Kohli pair had added 102 runs and looked comfortable just like they did in the Perth second innings. The ball hardly did anything after Rohit Sharma (3) played a poor shot and KL



Rahul got a ripper from Pat Cummins. Jaiswal was in regal form, as he cut, pulled, drove and lofted the

Australian bowlers stamping his authority as the next megastar of Indian batting. Kohli, at the other end, endured

boos for Thursday's run-in with debutant Sam Konstas and battled his demons. This was after Steve Smith's 34th

Test hundred ensured a very good total for hosts. Starting the day at 311 for 6, Smith added 112 and 44 runs with Cummins (49) and Mitchell Starc (15) respectively, leaving the visitors searching for back-up plans. Jasprit Bumrah (4/99 in 28.4 overs) was once again brilliant despite the first spell thrashing from Konstas but Mohammed Siraj's ordinary showing (0/122 in 23 overs) was the primary reason for batters not being under any pressure. Smith, who was unbeaten overnight on 68 off 111 balls, took another 56 deliveries in the second morning to complete a Test ton which placed him on even keel with the legendary Sunil Gavaskar (34). The century came with a push drive through the vacant cover region and celebrations were pretty muted with a just vigorous head nod for his teammates in the dug-out. Smith, who had a torrid run till the second Test of this series, played both days in contrasting styles. On Thursday, he was ready

to be patient and waited for deliveries at the expense of looking ugly. On Friday, the same batter was walking down the track to force the bowlers to alter their length. He was ready to pull and hook, getting two sixes off Bumrah and Siraj respectively. Despite a significant drop in temperature and some nip in the air, Indians failed to make use of the semi-new Kookaburra, with lines going all awry and length being short enough to be punished. Cummins was allowed to settle down and hit seven boundaries. The Indian ploy of playing two spinners backfired with Ravindra Jadeja (3/78 in 22 overs) and Washington Sundar (1/49 in 15 overs) never looking penetrative. For a change, Siraj didn't try and sledge an in-form batter, something that he did in Adelaide with some disastrous results. But that didn't soften the Australian supporters, who constantly booed him and Kohli as and when the ball went to them.



India whitewash West Indies 3-0

PTI ■ VADODARA

Senior off-spinner Deepti Sharma did the star turn with career-best figures of 6/31 before doing her bit with the bat as India completed a 3-0 whitewash of the West Indies with a five-wicket victory in the final Women's ODI here on Friday. Having bowled out West Indies for 162 after Deepti's superlative performance and pacer Renuka Singh's (4/29) excellent show with the new ball, India recovered after a top-order wobble to reach the target of 163 in 28.2 overs. India were in a spot of bother at 73/4 but Deepti (39 not out in 48 balls) used all her experience to see the team through with plenty of overs remaining. S w a s h b u c k l i n g wicketkeeper-batter Richa Ghosh was unbeaten on an 11-ball 23 when the winning runs were scored. Skipper Harmanpreet Kaur, who eased nerves with two boundaries after last match centurion Harleen Deol's (1) dismissal left India at 23/2, blazed away to a 22-ball 32 before getting bowled by Afy Fletcher. During her breezy knock, Kaur smashed seven boundaries and looked good for a big one before getting dismissed. In-form opener Smriti Mandhana (4) departed early as Ashmini Munisar

completed a strange one-handed catch after appearing to have misjudged what should actually have been a straightforward catch off the bowling of Aaliyah Alleyne. Enjoying a good run of form in recent times, vice-captain Mandhana did not get to the pitch of the ball on the day and paid the price. One-down batter Deol followed suit, nicking for a Deandra Dottin delivery way outside off-stump and got a faint edge that was taken by wicketkeeper Shemaine Campbelle. Middle-order batter Jemimah Rodrigues chipped in with 29 off 45 balls. Earlier, Renuka Thakur tormented West Indies with a fiery opening spell before Deepti got into the act to bowl out the visitors cheaply. Thakur and Deepti were relentless with the ball, taking all 10 wickets between them. Thakur's accurate line and length dismantled the top order, while Deepti deceived the West Indies batters with flight and guile, recording her third ODI five-wicket haul and second six-wicket performance. West Indies fought back with a 97-run partnership between Chinelle Henry (61) and Shemaine Campbelle (46), helping them to cross 160. Without this stand, the visitors might have been bowled out for less than 100. Both batted really well and were aggressive against the spinners.

Tendulkar, Sindhu among sporting stars to pay tributes to Manmohan Singh

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

Stalwarts of Indian sports paid rich tributes to former Prime Minister Dr Manmohan Singh, who died on Thursday, describing him as a visionary, who had quiet strength and humility. Singh died here after losing consciousness at his home due to age-related ailments. He was 92. "Rest in peace, Dr. Manmohan Singhji. His quiet strength, wisdom, and humility were truly inspiring. I had a brief interaction with him in 2013 — he was kind, gracious, and left a lasting impression. My heartfelt condolences to his family," wrote India's ace shuttler Sindhu on X. Cricket great Sachin Tendulkar termed Singh's demise as a huge loss for the country. "Dr Manmohan Singh ji's demise is a profound loss for India. His contributions to our nation shall always be remembered. My prayers are with his family and loved ones as we mourn his passing away," Legendary golfer Jeev Milkha Singh recalled Singh's



simplicity and humility, saying he was committed to national duty all his life. "Dr Manmohan Singh was probably one of the most humble men I had met in my life - a simple and extremely intelligent man. His sense of duty and responsibility shone through. The world has lost a visionary," wrote Jeev. On Friday, both the men's and women's cricket teams wore black armbands during their respective national assignments to pay homage to the former PM. Earlier, World Cup-winning former cricketer Yuvraj Singh called Singh a "true statesman".

landscapes, and his unwavering belief in India's potential," he wrote. It was during Singh's second term that India hosted the 2010 Commonwealth Games in the national capital. It was the first international multi-sport extravaganza to be held in the country after the 1982 Asian Games, also hosted by Delhi. He had also inaugurated the National Football League's 11th edition in Kolkata back in 2005 when late Congress leader Priya Ranjan Dasmunshi was heading the All India Football Federation. Former wrestler Vinesh Phogat, who is now a Congress MLA in Haryana, called Singh a man of "extraordinary wisdom, simplicity and vision." "Dr. Manmohan Singh was not just a Prime Minister, but he was a thinker, economist and a true patriot. His calm leadership style and economic vision gave the country a new direction, from the 1991 economic reforms to establishing India's reputation on the global stage.



There's difference between being out of runs and out of form: Smith

PTI ■ MELBOURNE

Australian batting mainstay Steve Smith always knew that he was "out of runs" but never "out of form" as he got back-to-back Test hundreds against India within a week of each other after 18 months of lull. Having scored his 33rd ton in Brisbane, Smith equalled Sunil Gavaskar's then world record of 34 hundreds on the second day of the fourth Test at the MCG on Friday. Asked how did he chug along all these days when big runs were not coming that easily, Smith dived deep into his inner core. "Sometimes you can be hitting the ball really nicely, which I think I said to all you guys when I wasn't scoring the runs. I actually felt like I was batting pretty well. And there's a difference, I think, between being out of form and out of runs. So, yeah, I thought I was hitting the ball nicely," Smith said at the day-end press conference here. "I mean, you've got to have faith. You've got to have a bit of trust in what you're trying to do. I've played the game for long enough now to know that you can have your ups and downs. Having some

faith and confidence," said the man, who is expected to get to 10,000 Test runs before the five-match series concludes. "I think you need a lot of luck on these wickets to get big runs as well, the ones we're playing at the moment. And last week I had my fair share. I think I got an umpire's call and got beaten on numerous occasions as to on other days, I would nick it. "So, yeah, you need a bit of luck. But you've just got to have faith that you're going to turn it around." Australia's batting was a lot more aggressive on the second day after resuming on overnight 311 for six but Smith said that while batting with Pat Cummins, there was no "general plan" as such. "There wasn't really a general plan. It was just go out there and play. Yeah, there wasn't a real plan. It was just go out and play and see what's going on. I thought Patty (Cummins) played really nicely. Really good, positive intent. "We were able to get a nice partnership together and take a bit of the momentum of the game from that point, I suppose."

Chennaiyin FC aim to return to winning ways

PTI ■ CHENNAI

Chennaiyin FC will be aiming to rebound to winning form and finish the year on a positive note when they face Bengaluru FC in the Indian Super league here on Saturday. In the day's other game, Hyderabad FC will host East Bengal FC with an aim to turn things around and halt the visitors' momentum. Chennaiyin and Bengaluru have played each other 15 times in the ISL, with the former winning four matches. This corresponding fixture last year produced a 2-0 win for the Marina Machans and head coach Owen Coyle will be eyeing the same this time. However, the tactician will be without captain Ryan Edwards, who is suspended for the match, and is expected to field an all-Indian backline. Bengaluru come into the match as the



second-placed side in the league, and Coyle is wary of the threat they carry, especially with the team missing key personnel. On the availability front, Coyle confirmed that he will take late calls on Wilmar Jordan Gil and Ankit Mukherjee, both of whom are back in

training after receiving knocks. The head coach also revealed that Elsinho, who left the pitch under medical care in the previous home match, is recovering in his native Brazil and will be rejoining the squad in the new year. Task cut out for HFC in Hyderabad This will be the ninth ISL meeting between the two sides, with East Bengal FC aiming to continue their recent dominance over Hyderabad FC. East Bengal FC have won their last two ISL matches against Hyderabad FC, including a league double in the 2023-24 season. Meanwhile, Hyderabad FC will look to bounce back after a disappointing run that has seen them lose their last five matches in the league on a trot. The Red & Gold brigade has managed a turnaround in the previous five matches, winning four of those clashes.

Arjun Erigaisi tied fifth after first day of World Rapid Chess Championship in New York

PTI ■ NEW YORK

Indian Grandmaster Arjun Erigaisi opened his campaign with four wins and a solitary loss in the World Rapid Chess Championship to be tied fifth even as defending champion Magnus Carlsen endured a frustrating day, managing to log just one victory here. Carlsen of Norway could not find his mojo drew three games and a late loss against Russian Denis Lazavik. Another Indian to impress was 13-year-old Raunak Sadhwani, who provided glimpse of his promise by taking down one of pre-event favourites Alireza Firouzja of France on Thursday. With the first five rounds done

and eight more still to come in USD 550,000 championship, Murzin Volodar of Russia, Shant Sargsyan of Armenia and the American duo of Daniel Naroditsky and Lenier Dominguez Perez share the lead on 4.5 points apiece. Arjun and Sadhwani are in the next group of 11 players who share the fifth spot on four points each. It is an impressive list that includes the likes of Hikaru Nakamura of United States, Nodirbek Abdusattorov of Uzbekistan and Anish Giri of Holland. In the Women's section being played simultaneously, local star Alice Lee stole the opening day thunder with four straight victories in as many games. The American is challenged by

world champion Wenjun Ju of China, her compatriot Zhongyi Tan, Gunay Mammadzada of Azerbaijan, Nino Batsiashvili of Georgia and India's D Harika who all have 3.5 points to their credit. He got things pretty much right except the sole defeat he suffered against Samuel Sevian of United States in the third round. Under his belt, Arjun can be a real threat. The day, however, belonged to Sadhwani who found his magical touch as early as in



round two when he tackled Firouzja with the black pieces. The position seemed headed to equal when Sadhwani punched his way back keeping an eye on a weak white pawn with his centralised knight. The knight darted through the board creating another hole on the king side that forced a resignation. Harika was the pick of the Indian women as she came up with a crushing victory against Nataliya Zhukova of Ukraine with the white pieces in her fourth-round game. Harika picked up pawns at will in a Queen and opposite coloured Bishops endgame and registered a smooth victory in a game that lasted 70 moves. The rapid event has a time

control of 15 minutes for the entire game with 10 seconds added after each move is played. This will be followed by the blitz championship that will have three minutes for both players with just two seconds increment. The women's event is spread over 11 rounds while in the open section, 13 rounds will be played. In blitz, the top eight will qualify and determine the medallists through a knockout stage. Standings after round 5 open: 1-4: Shant Sargsyan (Arm); Lenier Dominguez Perez (USA); Daniel Naroditsky (USA); Murzin Volodar (FID); 5-15: Arju Erigaisi, Raunak Sadhwani (both Ind); Javokhir Sindarov, Nodirbek

Abdusattorov (both Uzb); Duda Jan-Kryzstof (Pol) Anish Giri (Ned); Levon Aronian, Hikaru Nakamura, Ray Robson, Samuel Sevian (All USA); NOgerbek Kazybek (Kaz) 3.5 each; Indians: V Pranav (3.5); R Praggnanandhaa (3); Ravindh Chithambaram (2); Kartik Venkatraman, Sandipan Chanda (1.5) each; Standings after round 4 Women: 1. 2-Alice Lee (USA, 4); 2-6: D Harika, (Ind); Nino Batsiashvili (Geo); Gunay Mammadzada (Aze); Wenjun Ju (Chn); Zhongyi Tan (Chn) 3.5 each; Indians: R Vaishali (3); Vantika Agarwal, Koneru Humpy (2.5 each); Sahiti Varshini, Divya Deshmukh (2 each); Padmini Rout (1.5).

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