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## War of words follow Manmohan Singh



The mortal remains of former PM Manmohan Singh being taken to Congress headquarters for party leaders and workers to pay their last respects PTI

DEEPAK KUMAR JHA ■ NEW DELHI

Political row has erupted between the Bharatiya Janata Party-led Centre and Congress-led Opposition parties over a memorial for the former Prime Minister Manmohan Singh who was cremated with full State honours on Saturday in the presence of top dignitaries from India and abroad. While the Home Ministry claimed to assure the late PM's family in a communication for a memorial in due course, the Congress, Samajwadi Party (SP) and Bahujan Samaj Party (BSP) demanded that the last rites

should have been performed at a designated place where the Manmohan Singh's memorial could have been developed. Singh, 92, died on the night of December 26. Simultaneously former President late Pranab Mukherjee's daughter Sharmistha too cried foul on the part of the grand old party which failed to honour the rights of Mukherjee who spent his entire life serving the Congress. The Congress alleged that the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) was "deliberately insulting" the first Sikh PM of the country by not designating a place for his funeral and memorial. While Congress president Mallikarjun Kharge urged

Prime Minister Narendra Modi to have Singh's funeral at a place where his memorial can be built, SP chief Akhilesh Yadav and BSP president Mayawati urged the Central government to avoid any political controversy over the funeral and memorial of former prime minister Manmohan Singh. Demands for giving Singh a Bharat Ratna, the highest civilian award, were also raised during the last ritual procession of Manmohan Singh. "The tradition of honouring the country's former Prime Ministers must be upheld. There is no need for politics on this issue nor should there be any. Dr. Manmohan Singh's memorial should be constructed at

Rajghat. The BJP should refrain from presenting an inappropriate example of its narrow-minded thinking. History will never forgive them for this negative approach," he said. BSP president Mayawati said the wishes of Singh's family should be respected. "The Central government should ensure that the funeral and memorial of Dr Manmohan Singh, the country's first Sikh prime minister, are conducted at a location preferred by his family. No politics should be done on this matter and the government must honour the sentiments of Singh's family and the Sikh community." Aam Aadmi Party (AAP) also criticised the BJP for not allocating space within the Rajghat complex for the last rites of former prime minister Manmohan Singh and said that it "reflects poorly on India globally". AAP called on the BJP to clarify its stance and demanded an apology to Singh's family and the Sikh community. "Manmohan Singh, a global icon and India's only Sikh Prime Minister, was denied even 1,000 square yards of land for his cremation and memorial at Rajghat. Almost all former Prime Ministers were cremated there, but the BJP government refused this basic courtesy to Singh," said AAP National Convener Arvind Kejriwal. AAP Rajya Sabha MP Sanjay Singh accused the BJP of disrespecting the Sikh community and questioned the rationale behind the decision. In a statement, the Ministry of Home Affairs assured that a place would be allocated for Singh's memorial and that his family and Congress president Mallikarjun Kharge had been informed. BJP President and Union Minister JP Nadda attacked Congress and the Gandhi family for getting into petty politics when the entire nation mourns the demise of Dr. Manmohan Singh.

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## Delhi LG orders high-level inquiry into AAP's ₹2,100 dole for women

RAJESH KUMAR ■ NEW DELHI

In a move that may once again rattle Aam Aadmi Party (AAP) convener Arvind Kejriwal, and his party ahead of the upcoming assembly polls, Delhi Lieutenant Governor Vinai Kumar Saxena ordered has ordered a high-level inquiry into the AAP led Delhi government's proposed Mukhyamantri Mahila Samman Yojana in which AAP's poll promise of Rs 2,100 to women if elected. The Lieutenant Governor also ordered that the Chief Secretary of the Delhi Government may bring the matter to the knowledge of the Election Commission of India (ECI) through the chief electoral office given that such canvassing is happening ahead of the election. Saxena also issued instructions to investigate the alleged presence of intelligence officials from Punjab outside Dikshit's residence with the objective of "intimidating" him and the alleged transfer of cash, in crores, from various parts of Punjab to Delhi with the Delhi Assembly elections around the corner. The Lieutenant Governor's order came in the wake of a representation from a former East Delhi Congress MP and the party's proposed opponent against former Chief Minister Arvind Kejriwal from the New Delhi Assembly constituency, Sandeep Dikshit, who made serious allegations against the AAP-led Delhi government and Kejriwal.



"This has reference to representation dated 25.12.2024 received from Sh. Sandeep Dikshit... he has alleged that the Chief Minister of Delhi and Sh Arvind Kejriwal have been announcing that Delhi Government is going to give every female in Delhi (above the age of 18 years) an amount of Rs 1000 per month... If AAP is elected back in the 2025 Vidhan Sabha elections, they will raise the amount to Rs 2100..." the communication from the LG's Principal Secretary to Chief Secretary Dharmendra and Delhi Police Commissioner Sanjay Arora stated. The communiqué read, "Hon'ble Lieutenant Governor has desired the Chief Secretary to get an inquiry conducted through Divisional Commissioner in the matter of collection of personal details and forms by non-government people."

Further, Commissioner of Police may direct the field officers to take action as per law against the person who is breaching the privacy of gullible citizens by collecting their personal details in garb of giving benefits. DCP's may be advised to take action against private individuals organizing camps for fraudulent enrollment of Government Schemes," the Lieutenant Governor's office said. Meanwhile, the AAP, in response, has alleged that the inquiry came not from the Delhi Lieutenant Governor but from the "office" of BJP leader Amit Shah. Addressing a press conference, AAP convener Arvind Kejriwal also rubbished an order by LG for enquiry into collection of details of women through registration under the scheme as "fake," saying the monetary promise was a poll announcement.

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## Shift Dallewal to hospital: SC gives Punjab Govt till December 31

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

The Supreme Court on Saturday witnessed an unprecedented hearing on the issue of providing medical aid to Punjab farmer leader Jagjit Singh Dallewal, who is on fast-unto-death for over a month at Khanauri border seeking legal guarantee of Minimum Support Price (MSP) of crops among other demands. The hearing was conducted by a vacation bench of justices Surya Kant and Sudhanshu Dhulia, which gave time till December 31 to the Punjab Government to shift Dallewal to a nearby makeshift hospital, in an attempt to save his life. Normally, the SC, during winter break, does not have vacation Benches to conduct urgent hearings on emergent issues, and sitting of a Bench on Saturday is unusual. The Bench pulled up the Punjab Government for allowing the situation to escalate and not complying with its earlier directions to provide medical assistance to Dallewal. Expressing helplessness, the Punjab Government said it is facing huge resistance from protesting farmers who have encircled Dallewal and are preventing him from being taken to hospital. Punjab Advocate General Gurminder Singh told the bench that a team of experts visited the protest site and tried to persuade Dallewal to shift to hospital and take medical help. "He (Dallewal) has refused any kind of medical aid, including (IV) drips, saying that it will undermine the cause of movement," he said.

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## Google maps misguides again: two injured in car accident

BISWAJEET BANERJEE ■ HATHRAS

In yet another incident of Google Maps leading travelers astray, a car accident occurred on an under-construction highway in Hathras district, leaving two people injured. The mishap took place in the Hathras Junction police station area near Vahanpur. According to the police, Bareilly residents Vimlesh Srivastava and Kushal Kumar were traveling to Mathura using Google Maps for navigation. Late at night, after passing through Sikandra Rao, they followed directions onto the under-construction Mathura-Bareilly Highway. Due to the absence of reflective boards warning about roadblocks, their car collided with a heap of stones and soil, causing significant damage. The injured duo promptly informed the police, who arrived at the scene, cleared the car from the highway, and rushed the victims to a hospital for treatment. This is not the first time Google Maps has caused inconvenience or accidents. Recently, a family from



Meerut endured hours of distress while trying to reach Saharanpur from Haridwar at night. Vinod Kumar, a resident of Meerut's Shastri Nagar, was traveling with his wife and son. Initially, their journey via Google Maps was smooth until they reached Bhagwanpur. The app then suggested a shortcut through a link road to Saharanpur. About 10 kilometers into this route, they encountered a dry but rocky stream, making it impossible to proceed. The app redirected them to another route, leading to hours of wandering in forested areas. Eventually, they managed to contact a

relative near Bhari Garh, who guided them to safety. The family reached their destination close to midnight, heaving a sigh of relief. Last month, Google Maps was blamed for a major accident in Bareilly when it directed a car onto an incomplete bridge, resulting in three friends falling off and sustaining severe injuries. Such incidents highlight the risks of relying solely on digital navigation systems without verifying local conditions. Authorities and travelers are urged to exercise caution, especially on unfamiliar or under-construction routes.

## Highest single-day December rainfall in 101 years

RAJESH KUMAR ■ NEW DELHI

Delhiites experienced an overcast and chilly day after the city recorded the highest single-day December rainfall in 101 years. The city received 41.2 mm of rain between 8.30 am on Friday and 8.30 am on Saturday, marking the highest single-day December rainfall in 101 years. According to the India Meteorological Department (IMD), the Capital had last recorded the highest-ever rainfall on a single day in the month on December 3, 1923, at 75.7 mm. While rain in December is not unusual, it is usually light. As per IMD data, Delhi usually sees 8 mm of rain during the month over half a day. The rain in the city over the past 24 hours is over five times that. The rains also made December 2024 the fifth-highest in terms of monthly rainfall since records began in 1901. In December 2024, Delhi logged 42.8 mm, the highest in the last 27 years when 71.8 mm of rain was seen in the month. "The cumulative 24-hour rainfall ending at 8.30am today is the second-highest since 1901 at Safdarjung. December's monthly rainfall is now the fifth-highest. The 24-



hour cumulative rainfall refers to the precipitation recorded over the past 24 hours ending at 8.30am IST on the given date," the IMD official explained. The rainfall largely attributed to an active western disturbance interacting with easterly winds, transformed the usual dry chill of December into an anomaly. "The interaction between a very active western disturbance and a cyclonic circulation on the east, along with a few other factors, has brought about this unusual weather. November and December are the two driest months in Delhi. During these months, it is usually a western disturbance that brings rain to the capital. It is the different weather systems clashing that lead to heavy downpours," an

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MAX 24.1°C(+3.0)  
MIN 15.2°C(+7.8)

IMD scientist said. "Another western disturbance is expected around January 1, but that may not bring rain," IMD further explained. The IMD has issued a yellow alert for Delhi, predicting more showers for Sunday in the capital, Noida, Gurugram and other places in the national capital region. The weather department has forecast very dense fog for Sunday, with the maximum and minimum temperatures expected to settle at 17 and 9 degrees Celsius, respectively

Heavy rainfall coupled with gusty winds continued to lash Delhi in the early hours of Saturday. Several areas, including Palam, Safdarjung, Lodi Road, Mehrauli, and Gurugram, reported uprooted trees, resulting in significant disruptions. In Sector-9, RK Puram, a portion of a road caved in, causing a motorcycle and a car to fall into the cavity. The last time December rains were this intense was in 1997, when the total monthly precipitation was 71.8mm. Going further back, the highest December rainfall was recorded in 1901 at 77.2mm, followed by 1967 (69.5mm) and 1936 (68.1mm). IMD classifies up to 15.5mm of rainfall in 24 hours as "light rain", 15.6-64.4mm of rainfall as "moderate", 64.5-115.5mm as "heavy rainfall" and 115.6-204.4mm as "very heavy rainfall". Delhi witnessed incessant rainfall since Friday morning causing severe waterlogging and traffic snarls in several parts, leading to the mercury dropping in the National Capital. In June this year, Delhi has recorded 228.1 mm of rain in the 24 hours in one of the wettest spells the capital has recorded causing waterlogging in several parts of the National Capital.

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## Kashmiriyat shines as snow envelops J and K

MOHIT KANDHARI ■ JAMMU

When it snowed heavily in different parts of Kashmir valley, unmatched Kashmiri hospitality and timely response of the Indian army brought much-needed cheer to the faces of stranded tourists stuck in snow-bound areas since Friday afternoon. Over 300 tourists were rescued across different locations in the last 24 hours as most parts of Kashmir valley were under a virtual whiteout. Normal life was thrown out of gear in the Union Territory as several parts of the Valley received snowfall that disrupted flight and railway operations and also led to the closure of the Srinagar-Jammu National Highway. Due to bad weather conditions, all flights at Srinagar Airport were cancelled on Saturday, a

spokesman of the Srinagar airport posted a message on X. Kashmir University also postponed all its examinations scheduled for Saturday due to the inclement weather. Fresh dates for the postponed exams will be notified separately, the University said. Moderate to heavy snowfall was recorded across Kashmir since Friday, including the season's first snowfall in Srinagar city and other plain areas of the valley. Tourists camping in Srinagar were seen enjoying snowfall in the busy Lal Chowk area and near the banks of Dal Lake. In south Kashmir, heavy to very heavy snowfall was recorded in the plains, while central Kashmir's plains received moderate snowfall. The plains of north Kashmir received light to moderate snowfall, the officials said. In

the Jammu region, higher reaches of Doda, Kishtwar and Kathua also witnessed a fresh spell of snowfall. Residents of the Gund area on the Srinagar-Sonamarg highway turned out to be real saviours when they decided to throw open the gates of Jamia

Masjid late Friday night to accommodate stranded passengers from Punjab during the night. The warm hospitality and delicious food served by the locals to these tourists not only won their hearts but also sent a message of bonhomie and

mutual trust among the members of the different communities. A video of stranded passengers, relishing delicious meals inside Jamia Masjid, Gund also went viral on various social media platforms. "It was the best possible solution as the mosque has a 'hamaam', which stays warm throughout the night," said Bashir Ahmad, a resident. The tourists expressed their gratitude to the locals for their help. "We were stuck in the snow, and you came to our rescue. We are extremely thankful to all of you," one of them said. The Jamia Masjid at Gund is located less than 10 kilometres from the site of a terrorist attack in Gagangir, where six people, five non-local labourers and a local doctor, were killed in October this

year. In the South Kashmir district of Kulgam, Chinar Warriors responded to an emergency distress call to evacuate a pregnant lady from Munad village, Kulgam. Amidst heavy snowfall, the rescue team reached the location on time and the patient was evacuated to Government Hospital, Yaripora inside a JCB machine. The Indian Army also came to the rescue of stranded passengers in the famous tourist resort of Gulmarg. At least 68 civilians including eight children were safely evacuated by the army personnel from the snow-bound areas and several other passengers were provided with hot meals, shelter and medication. A family in the Kangan area of Ganderbal district also hosted stranded passengers during the night

after they were left stranded in the snowbound area. Chief Minister Omar Abdullah convened a video conference meeting with all districts across Jammu and Kashmir to review snow clearance operations and restoration of essential services following heavy snowfall in the Kashmir Valley. Police and civil administration across different district headquarters have already begun reaching out to stranded tourists, providing hot drinks and other necessities to keep them warm. While authorities launched snow clearance operations at the respective district headquarters, most of the main roads and roads to hospitals were cleared of snow, but many interior roads were still blocked, the officials said.

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# Robbers held in encounter ran 'King of Lucknow' gang

PNS ■ LUCKNOW

The robbers who executed two road hold-up incidents during the night of December 21/22 are no less feared than mafia gangs similar to the 'Eagle Gang' and 'Bichoo Gang' from the film *Josh*. Their gang is infamously known as the 'King of Lucknow' gang. The accused, Veer Yadav and Aman Singh, who were arrested in a police encounter, operated this gang. They recruited youngsters into criminal activity by luring them with promises of a luxurious and carefree life. They have recruited students pursuing BBA and LLB into their gang, and their modus operandi is to target a lone car driver or a family travelling in a car on a deserted stretch of road. They harass girls and extort money from them. This was revealed by the gang leaders, Veer Yadav and Aman Singh themselves. Both were arrested by the Gomti Nagar police in an encounter. Robbery accused Veerpal Yadav and Aman Singh were injured in an encounter near the Janeshwar Mishra Park bridge in Gomti Nagar and were arrested later. They were travelling in the same black Brezza car that they used in

robbing their victims. The encounter took place on December 26. On that day, the police were conducting a checking drive under the Janeshwar Mishra Park bridge in Gomti Nagar when Aman Singh and Veer Yadav were seen in a car. When the police attempted to stop them, they began firing. The police gave chase and shot both Aman and Veer in their legs. The police recovered the Brezza car, firearms, and mobile phones from the accused. According to the police, the miscreants had committed a robbery at gunpoint at Neeraj Chowk in Gomti Nagar on December 21. After this, the police began searching for both of them. It later emerged that the accused also bullied people at petrol stations. When asked for money, they would fire shots and flee. The 'King of Lucknow' gang was operating from jail. One of its leaders, Veer Yadav aka Veerpal, came into the lime-light for bombing during the Tiranga Yatra in 2022. Before that, his name had been associated with petty fights and extortion. Not only this, but he also had the members of the '1000 Gang' which was formed after him, attacked so that the

gang could not surpass his own. To achieve this, 'King of Lucknow' gang leader Veer Yadav, along with 15-16 accomplices, including Vinod Yadav, Ayush Yadav, Shikhar Singh, and Aman Thakur, chased and beat up members of the rival gang with swords and iron rods to instil fear in the area. Subsequently, the police arrested Veer Yadav, Aman Thakur, and Ayush Yadav and sent them to jail. On August 16, 2022, during the Tiranga Yatra, they caused a ruckus by sending threatening messages on Instagram from jail with their accomplices. After this, more people joined their gang. The accused also ran off with diesel in drums without making any payment. According to police sources, Veer Yadav's gang collected weekly payments from the area. They were also involved in land grabbing. These individuals extorted weekly payments from street vendors and shopkeepers. They consumed drugs at night and robbed drivers. They did not spare women either. Recently, in Gomti Nagar, they robbed two families within 10 minutes and misbehaved with the women. During the police investigation, the accused admitted that they would go to

petrol stations to fill their vehicles with petrol and diesel for drums, after which they would flee with the vehicle. If anyone tried to chase them, they would open fire. Since their vehicle had no number plate, no one could identify it. The police have confiscated the vehicle of the accused. The miscreants used to travel in a vehicle without a number plate. Veer Yadav's gang consisted of people ranging from minors to 30-year-olds. In a police encounter in Gomti Nagar, a minor was caught along with them. He had been involved in robbery and extortion with them. During questioning, he told the police that he joined their gang after being impressed by their 'aura'. The minor is studying BBA, while Karan Singh, who was caught along with him, is a second-year LLB student. His father is a government contractor. During interrogation, it was revealed that the gang tests the courage of members before recruiting them. This includes beating up people or firing at them. After this, they lure them into the gang with promises of a luxurious life and the assurance of collecting weekly payments without fear, encouraging them to commit crimes.

# Retired prof among many lose crores of rupees to cyber thugs

PNS ■ LUCKNOW

Cyber thugs have duped several individuals, including a retired professor, of nearly Rs 10 crore rupees under the guise of stock trading, earning money from home, and selling goods. The cyber police have registered a case based on the victims' complaints and are investigating the matter. According to one Ahin Bhattacharya, a resident of Rajajipuram A-Block, he was added to the WhatsApp group of Dex-Trade. After this, cryptocurrency trading began on August 6. He requested the expert conducting the cryptocurrency trading to give him a 30 per cent commission on the profit. Having made a profit of lakhs of rupees, he was added to a larger group. He then invested Rs 51 lakh in the name of trading. This trading was conducted through links sent in different WhatsApp groups. When he requested his money back, he was told to pay 15 per cent of the original amount, along with additional money. When he

refused, his account was blocked. Similarly, cyber thugs made Rano Srivastava of Alambagh invest Rs 15.25 lakh in share trading between November 19 and December 19. When she demanded her money back, the account was blocked. Neetu Tiwari, from Indira Nagar Sector-14, is the director of a company, and her father was having a building constructed. For this, iron rods had to be purchased. They did a Google search and contacted an agency. After that, a young man called and persuaded them to transfer Rs 7.57 lakh to three different accounts for sending the iron rods. After this, he stopped responding, and the fraud was uncovered. According to Nidhi Tripathi, from Nehru Enclave, on September 28, she saw an advertisement for stock trading on Instagram. After clicking the link, she was made to fill out a form. She was then added to the Zerodha Value Added Program. Between October 7 and 25, Rs 19 lakh was deposited into her account under the

guise of trading. Similarly, Rs 6.78 lakh was defrauded from Rahul Kesarwani, a resident of Veer Nagar, Hussainganj, between September 14 and 24 in the name of part-time work. In March 2021, Gajanan Pandey, a resident of Eldeco Udyan, was defrauded in the name of a 3-year PNB Met Life policy. He had taken a policy for Rs 3.18 lakh. He had lodged a complaint as the term of the policy was mentioned as seven years instead of three. On December 3, a cyber fraudster called, claiming to be an employee of PNB Met Life, and asked for the NOC of the policy. He was then lured to transfer the entire amount with interest. He subsequently transferred Rs 34.24 lakh to the cyber fraudster's account. Cyber fraudsters also made Rakesh Kumar Dixit, a resident of Rajnikhand Sharda Nagar, deposit Rs 36.83 lakh into their account under the pretext of online trading. Between September 3 and November 14, they defrauded him by demanding this amount across 47 bank accounts.

# Narrow escape for driver as car hits divider, goes up in flames

Lucknow (PNS): A man escaped with minor injuries as a car rammmed into a divider and overturned before going up in smoke on Saturday morning. He was identified as Santosh Sharma, a resident of Viram Khand. He managed to get out of the car in time. According to the information, the incident took place in front of Shubbh-Labh Restaurant located in Vastu Khand on Gomti Nagar-Chinhath Road. Police reached the spot, removed the car with a crane, and restored traffic. According to the information, the front wheel of the moving car suddenly broke, causing the car to lose control and ram into the divider. The car overturned and caught fire. On receiving information about the incident, the fire brigade team reached the spot, and doused the flames. The FSO, Gomti Nagar, said that after the accident, sparking occurred in the car, which led to the fire.

# 'Bhumi puja' done for police outpost near Shahi Jama Masjid in Sambhal

Sambhal (PTI): A ceremonial 'bhumi puja' was performed on Saturday for a police outpost near the Shahi Jama Masjid in the Kot Purvi neighbourhood, which witnessed deadly violence last month, officials here said. The outpost will function under the Sambhal police station and was planned in wake of the November 24 violence, which claimed four lives and left several injured, they said. "The 'bhumi puja' (land worship) and foundation stone-laying ceremony were carried out following all prescribed rituals. Additionally, measures were taken to ensure the absence of 'vastu dosh' (architectural defects) in the construction," said Shobhit Shastri, the priest conducting the ritual.



Police personnel during the groundbreaking ceremony of the police post to be built near Shahi Jama Masjid, in Sambhal on Saturday

Additional Superintendent of Police Shriish Chandra told reporters, "The 'bhumi puja' for the new police outpost near the Shahi Jama Masjid was completed. This outpost is being established from a security perspective. Sufficient police personnel are already deployed here, and there was a long-standing demand from locals for a permanent outpost." The area around the Shahi Jama Masjid has witnessed tensions, with a violent clash erupting on November 24 during a court-ordered survey of the Mughal-era mosque.

The clash resulted in the deaths of four locals. In a related development, the Sambhal administration focused on identifying ancient wells and pilgrimage sites for restoration as it carried out inspections with the Archaeological Survey of India (ASI). The district administration is working on rediscovering and restoring historical wells and pilgrimage sites across the region, District Magistrate Rajender Pensiya told

reporters. "Sambhal is known to have 19 wells, 36 settlements, 52 inns and 68 pilgrimage sites, collectively constituting 87 religious and historical locations. Of these, we have successfully located 32 pilgrimage sites and all 19 wells," he said. Pensiya, however, noted, "Some sites are not properly aligned, according to their historic descriptions. Additionally, public spaces, temples and inns were historically built around wells that have now

been encroached upon. These wells served as essential sources for water conservation and supply." "Efforts are underway to clear encroachments around such sites to revive these natural water conservation structures," he added. Pensiya said reclaiming these wells and pilgrimage sites would be a crucial step toward sustainable water conservation while also preserving the region's cultural and historical legacy.

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NOTICE

I, Udaypreet Singh S/o: Mahendra Pal Singh, Resident of: 141, LIG, Ratanlal Nagar, Kanpur Nagar U.P. 208022 have changed my name to "Udaypreet Singh Bajaj" for all future purpose.

NOTICE

I have changed my name from GURNOOR CHHATWAL to GURNOOR KAUR, Gurnoor Kaur D/o Naujot Singh Chhatwal R/o 120/903, Ranjeet Nagar, Hans Nagar, Kanpur

NOTICE

My Aadhaar card has Mama Devi written on it whereas my name in other documents is Kanchan Devi which is true. Kanchan Devi should be considered as the name in all documents. Kanchan Devi W/o Naveen Kumar R/o Purva Ujane Aili, Bidhuna, Auraiya

NOTICE

I am Sanjay Balani s/o Late Mr. L.D. Balani, I have changed my son's name from Prithvi Balani to Agastyaa Balani, in future my son should be known and recognized as Agastyaa Balani. Sanjay Balani S/o Late Mr. L.D. Balani 7/109, Prabhu Vatika, Flat No. 4-B, Swaroop Nagar, Kanpur-208002

NOTICE

This is inform that my son's name written as Pranjul Patel S/o Pradeep Kumar Verma instead of Ansh Patel S/o Rajesh Kumar Verma in aadhar card. In future, my son should be recognized as Ansh Patel S/o Rajesh kumar verma . Rajesh kumar verma S/o Omkarnath Verma vill- Chandpur, Pargana Misuda Tehsil Bhihi, District- Ambedkar Nagar, UP

NOTICE

I SUBHASH CHANDRA s/o Shyam Dev r/o vill & post Machhaligaon, tah Jalalpur dist Ambedkar Nagar declared that my incorrect name SHUBHASH CHANDRA is printed on my son Shashank Yadav's 12th marksheet. It should be corrected and printed as SUBHASH CHANDRA in marksheet.

NOTICE

It is informed to the general public that at the High School mark sheet of my son Roll no. -23111535 Year - 2024, his mother's name has been wrongly printed as GEETA DEVI but her correct name is GEETA GOND which is correctly printed at all her documents. Sincerely Chandra Kishor Gond S/O Sudhu Gond, 813 Sidhari, Koirana Azamgarh UP 276001

NOTICE

In my High School Marksheet (ISCE Board, Roll No. 8086447) the name of my father is entered as Arun Kumar Verma, by mistake but in my Aadhar Card, it is Arun Kumar. Arun Kumar and Arun Kumar Verma is the same person. Ayushi Verma D/o Arun Kumar R/O A-2327 MHIG, Awas Vikas Hanspuram Naubasta, Kanpur Nagar

NOTICE

I Jari Rabha M/o Kandali Rabha (No-15780555L) do affirm that in my son's army service record my name and D.O.B. was wrongly entered as Jari Rabha correct name Jaribala Rabha, wrong D.O.B. 01-07-1953 correct D.O.B. 01-01-1960 vide affidavit no-in-up-23118877986708w before kanpur courts only.

NOTICE

I have changed my my minor daughter name from Aditri Gupta to Aaditri Gupta. Aaditri Gupta D/O Chandra Gaurav R/O 1/8 W-1 Saket Nagar Kanpur

NOTICE

My house number EWS 931, awas vikas Scheme no.3, Panki Road, Kalyanpur, Kanpur Nagar, the allotment letter number 6317 dated 01-11-1985 and the power of attorney which is recorded in the Sub-Registrar, Kanpur Nagar, wahi number 4, volume number 1068, page numbers 330 to 332, serial number 2474, dated 24-07-1987, and the family membership certificate which was in the name of Sita Ram has been lost in Kalyanpur, Kanpur Nagar, whose use would be illegal. L.A.R No. 20240001015514Shubhra Chaudhary S/O Sunil Kumar

NOTICE

Rishu singh gaur (DOB 02/04/1990) is legally wedded spouse of Army No. 15726961X Rank NK Name SANDEEP SINGH R/o. Vill. Balaetha, Po. Korihwa Teh. Akbarpur Distt. Kanpur Dehat UP 208001. Declare vide Affidavit n o . 2 2 ( 1 5 ) 2 0 0 0 dated. 26/12/2024. That my name and date of Birth wrongly mentioned as Rishu singh and 02/04/1993 respectively in my Husband's service record That my correct name & D.O.B. are RISHU SINGH GAUR and 02/04/1990 respectively for all Purposes.

# Man attacked for opposing harassment of sister; kin allege police negligence

Amethi (PTI): A 26-year-old man was seriously injured after allegedly being attacked in the Jagdishpur area here when he opposed the harassment of his sister, a Class 9 student, police officials said on Saturday. The incident occurred on Thursday when Ranjit (26) was attacked by a group of boys with a sharp weapon. He was rushed to the Jagdishpur Community Health Center (CHC) for treatment. Ranjit's family claims they had lodged a complaint regarding the harassment with the Jagdishpur police earlier, but no action was taken. According to the victim's sister, who was allegedly being harassed, a group of boys would misbehave with her when she went to school. "Whenever I went to school, a group of boys would misbehave with me and harass me. I informed my family about this, but when they tried to intervene, they received death threats." The victim's family has accused

the local police, including the Jagdishpur police station in-charge and a constable, of negligence in addressing their complaints. The police, however, have refuted the charges. "Constable Praveen Kumar and the station in-charge demanded proof of the harassment instead of acting on our complaint," the girl alleged. "We are aware of the incident. Police forces have been deployed at the site and the injured person, Ranjit, has been admitted to the hospital. Legal action will be initiated against the culprits as soon as we receive a formal complaint," said Deputy Superintendent of Police (Musafirkhana) Atul Kumar Singh. When questioned about the allegations of negligence, Jagdishpur Station In-Charge Dharendra Yadav said, "A complaint was indeed filed and the case was investigated. However, the allegations made by the complainants were found to be untrue during the inquiry."

# GPI (ML) condemns arrest of Nishad, protesting villagers

PNS ■ LUCKNOW

The CPI (ML) condemned the arrest of the rural poor and party's district secretary Sanjay Nishad on December 27 and their subsequent imprisonment. They had been protesting peacefully at the village secretariat since December 25 against corruption in rural works in Sonbarsa village of Nichlhal tehsil in Maharajganj district. State secretary Sudhakar Yadav said in a statement issued on Saturday that the government, which used to chant the slogan of zero tolerance, did not like to hear voices against corruption. "The villagers were sitting on an indefinite strike in Maharajganj demanding action against corruption in rural development works and the village head. Earlier, they had received written and authentic information about corruption under the Right to Information (RTI). They started the dharna after informing the block development officer (BDO) about the programme. On the third day of the protest on Friday, the police, led by Kothibhar police station in-charge, reached the protest site and arrested three people, including Sanjay Nishad, and sent them to jail," he said. The CPI (ML) state secretary stated that due to the police action, there was anger among the villagers, justice-loving people in the area, and the public. "The government is oppressing the poor. The protest at the rural secretariat of Sonbarsa was started under the statewide call of the All India Agricultural and Rural Labourers Association (AIARLA) for a campaign to run from December 20-26," Yadav said. He said that under the autocratic government, villagers were being sent to jail even for the crime of protesting, and this was an insult to democracy. He congratulated the villagers for continuing the protest even after the arrest of the leading comrades. He also demanded the unconditional immediate release of the jailed comrades and action on the issues raised by the protest.

# Noisy celebrations after bail land father-son duo behind bars

Bulandshahr (PTI): Loud celebrations and firing shortly after being released on bail landed a father-son duo in Bulandshahr in fresh trouble after they were arrested on charges of illegal arms smuggling, officials said on Saturday. Police seized a large cache of illegal firearms and ammunition, along with a vehicle during their arrests, they said. "The accused, Rizwan Ansari and his son Adnan from Shekh Sahiban Mohalla in the Khurja Nagar area, were arrested on Friday night. Both have been linked to multiple criminal cases previously, with Rizwan recently released on bail on December 26," Superintendent of Police (Rural), Rohit Mishra, said. Police recovered five .315 bore pistols with 10 live cartridges, two 12-bore pistols with six cartridges, and two .32 bore pistols with six cartridges from the suspects' vehicle. Mishra said, "Rizwan was previously incarcerated for arms smuggling. His

return to Khurja was marked by fireworks, DJ music, and celebratory firing in the neighbourhood, prompting the police to register another case against him." Acting on a tip-off from an informant, police teams from Khurja Nagar and Khurja Dehat intercepted Rizwan's vehicle on the highway. "The suspects attempted to flee but were apprehended after a brief chase. Searches revealed the cache of illegal arms and ammunition," the officer said. Rizwan has six prior cases registered against him, five in Bulandshahr and one in Delhi, while his son Adnan faces two cases in Bulandshahr. The SP said both suspects have been charged under relevant sections of the law and will be sent to jail following due legal procedures. "The arrests highlight our zero-tolerance stance towards illegal activities and arms smuggling," Mishra said.

# Man shoots self using father's licenced gun

PNS ■ LUCKNOW

A 27-year-old man, Shaileendra, also known as Golu, allegedly shot himself in the neck in Dubagga police station area on Friday night. No one was home at the time of the incident. Neighbours, alerted by the sound of the gunshot, rushed to the house and found Shaileendra lying on the floor in a pool of blood. They immediately informed his family and the police, who later arrived at the scene and took possession of the body. The deceased's brother, Dharmendra Kumar, stated that the family originally hails from Mawai Kala village in Rahimabad Kotwali but has been residing in Sita Vihar Colony, Dubagga, for the past 20 years. "On Friday night, around 9:30 pm, my younger brother Shaileendra was alone at home. He shot himself using our father's licensed gun, holding it close to his neck," Dharmendra explained. No suicide note was found at the scene. Dharmendra added that their father, Sohan, had returned home briefly after work but left again for some errands. Their mother, Sunita, was visiting her maternal uncle's house, while Dharmendra and their elder brother, Jitendra, were also away. It was during this time that Shaileendra took the drastic step. Shaileendra was unmarried. The

police are investigating the matter to determine the circumstances leading to the incident. Meanwhile, a clash broke out between a group of men and staff of a mall on Shaheed Path after the former were stopped from entering the premises late at night to celebrate a birthday party. The incident occurred late night within the limits of Sushant Golf City police station, according to police reports. A video of the clash also went viral on social media, prompting police action. The undated, seven-second-long video showed men thrashing each other near the mall, with the sound of gunshots heard in the background. The clash reportedly erupted when a group of young men arrived at the gate of the mall in an inebriated state and attempted to enter the premises. "The group of men arrived around 1:30 am and tried to forcefully enter the mall to celebrate a birthday party. They were stopped by the mall's security personnel, after which they clashed with the mall guards and staff. They also fired bullets into the air," Deputy Commissioner of Police (South) Nipun Agarwal said. "Police have registered a case under relevant sections after receiving the complaint. Three suspects involved in the incident have been taken into police custody," the DCP added.

# 3 women arrested with illegal smack worth ₹75 lakh

Barabanki (PTI): Three women were arrested here on Saturday for alleged drug trafficking and 750 grams of illegal smack were seized from their possession, police said. According to police the seized contraband is worth Rs 75 lakh in the international black market. Additional Superintendent of Police Akhilesh Narayan said the arrest were made under an ongoing campaign to curb crime and drug trafficking in the district. Based on a tip-off, a police team from Ram Sanehi Ghat, apprehended three accused Meena, Roshni, and Shivani, all residents of Kotwa Sadak, he said. The seized items included 750 grams of smack and Rs 5,170 in cash. A case under Section 821(C) of the Narcotic Drugs and Psychotropic Substances (NDPS) Act has been registered

against them, he added. Further investigation revealed that the accused belonged to a family deeply entrenched in drug smuggling activities, Narayan said. "Meena's husband, Jai Prakash Pathak alias Kinni, and her son, Shivam Pathak alias Golu, have been sentenced to 10 years of rigorous imprisonment along with a Rs 1 lakh fine each by a court for their involvement in narcotics trafficking," the ASP said. "Her other son, Satyam Pathak, is currently lodged in Barabanki District Jail on similar charges," he said. During interrogation, the accused confessed to purchasing the illegal smack from Diwakar, son of Jagatram Mishra, and clandestinely selling it through the window of their house to avoid detection, the officer said.



# Maya asks Centre to build memorial for Manmohan

PNS ■ LUCKNOW

Bahujan Samaj Party president Mayawati on Saturday demanded that the Central government build a memorial in the name of former prime minister Dr Manmohan Singh. Dr Singh, India's 14th prime minister, passed away at the age of 92 at the All India Institute of Medical Sciences (AIIMS) in New Delhi on December 26 night. He served two consecutive terms as prime minister from 2004 to 2014, leading the Congress-led United Progressive Alliance (UPA). His last rites were conducted with full state honours at Delhi's Nigam Bodh Ghat, a public cremation ground. President Droupdi Murmu, Prime Minister Narendra Modi, and other senior leaders were present at the Ghat during the cremation. Taking to X, Mayawati posted on Saturday, "After the demise of Dr Manmohan Singh, the first Sikh Prime Minister of the country, the Central Government should arrange for his last rites to be performed and a memorial should be



constructed in his honour at the place where it is the heartfelt desire of his family. "It is not right to do any politics for this and in these matters, it would be appropriate if the Central Government respects the sentiments of their family and the Sikh community as well," she further posted. This comes after the demand of the Congress, in which it has appealed to the Centre to build a memorial at the funeral site itself. Earlier, in a post on X on Friday night, SP president Akhilesh

Yadav said, "The tradition of honouring the country's former prime ministers must be upheld. There is no need for politics on this issue nor should there be any. "Dr Manmohan Singh's memorial should be constructed at Rajghat. The BJP should refrain from presenting an inappropriate example of its narrow-minded thinking. History will never forgive them for this negative approach," he said. A controversy surfaced regarding the allocation of space for Dr Singh's memorial. Congress

leaders criticised the decision to perform the last rites at Nigam Bodh Ghat instead of a location where a memorial could be established. Congress president Mallikarjun Kharge has reportedly spoken with PM Modi to discuss the possibility of creating a memorial at the same site where Dr Singh's last rites were held. At the heart of the issue is the Congress's request for a dedicated memorial site for Dr Singh, despite the fact that previous Congress-led governments established a common memorial, Rashtriya Smriti Sthal, for the cremation of VVIPs. This site, located between the memorials of Jawaharlal Nehru and Lal Bahadur Shastri, has been the location for the last rites of former prime ministers since its inauguration in 2013. Former PM Atal Bihari Vajpayee was also cremated there in 2018. The Centre clarified that a memorial would be allocated but stated that forming a trust and designating space for the memorial would take time. In the interim, the cremation and other formalities proceeded as planned.

## CM Yogi pays tributes to Jaitley on his birth anniversary

Lucknow (PTI): Uttar Pradesh Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath on Saturday paid homage to former Union minister Arun Jaitley on his birth anniversary and said his contributions to building a self-reliant India are inspirational. Jaitley passed away on August 24, 2019, after a prolonged illness. He was 66. In a message on the social media platform X, Adityanath wrote, "Humble tribute to former Union Finance Minister and Padma Vibhushan awardee Arun Jaitley Ji on his birth anniversary!" He added, "His contributions to building a self-reliant and empowered India are unforgettable and inspirational." Adityanath also remembered former BJP president Kushabhau Thakre on his death anniversary. "Humble tribute to former BJP national president Kushabhau Thakre, a skilled organiser and a source of inspiration for countless party workers, on his death anniversary," he wrote. Thakre, a founding member of the Jan Sangh and a former BJP national president, was born on August 15, 1922, in Dhar district of Madhya Pradesh. He passed away in 2003.



Uttar Pradesh Chief Minister paid a courtesy call to Union Defence Minister Rajnath Singh (top) and Union Home Minister Amit Shah (above) during his visit to New Delhi on Saturday

## SP slams Sanjay Nirupam for remarks against Akhilesh Yadav

Lucknow (PNS): The Samajwadi Party has slammed Maharashtra-based Eknath Shinde-led Shiv Sena leader Sanjay Nirupam over his remarks against party's president Akhilesh Yadav on the issue of a non-Muslim member in the Waqf Board. "It seems that Sanjay Nirupam doesn't understand the difference between the Kumbh, which happens after many years and whose committee is constituted just for the execution of the Kumbh, while on the other hand, the Waqf Board is a statutory body," SP spokesperson Fakhrul Hasan Chanda said. "Sanjay Nirupam should ask the BJP government to appoint Muslim members to various boards of other religions too. Why is he just targeting Muslims?" he said. "Why don't they start doing it from Maharashtra? We will be happy if they appoint people from all faiths in various boards of different religions, but targeting only Muslims will not be allowed," the SP spokesperson added. Earlier, Nirupam had slammed the SP chief, saying that if a Muslim leader, Azam Khan, could be made in charge of the Kumbh Mela when the SP was in power in Uttar Pradesh, why can't a non-Muslim be a member of the Waqf Board? "The SP should not raise any irrelevant questions on the Maha Kumbh Mela," Nirupam had said. The SP chief has been raising questions over the government's preparedness for Maha Kumbh 2025 for the last few days.

## CM Yogi for cow-based natural farming to boost income of farmers

PNS ■ LUCKNOW

Uttar Pradesh Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath has said that adopting cow-based natural farming can help farmers significantly enhance their incomes, saving them Rs 10,000 to Rs 12,000 per acre. In a recent event, CM Yogi emphasised the benefits of cow-based natural farming, noting that if a majority of the state's farmers adopt natural farming, the cumulative savings would be enormous. Yogi also highlighted that cow-based farming goes beyond spiritual and cultural values. "It offers multiple advantages, such as reduced agricultural costs, conservation and promotion of cattle, and long-term improvements in soil, water, and human health, which he described as an added bonus," he added. Farming primarily relies on seeds and fertilisers, which are major expenses. Uttar Pradesh produces only about half of the seeds it requires, sourcing the rest from other states, especially from southern India, at a significant cost to the government. Regarding fertilisers, India spends a large amount of foreign currency on imports. According to Central government data, about 15-20% of the most in-demand urea is still supplied through imports. For phosphatic fertilisers and potash, India remains heavily dependent on foreign imports. Being an agriculture-based country, India's demand often leads exporting nations to

increase prices. Data shows that in the 2023-2024 period, India imported urea worth Rs 2,127 crore, excluding other fertilisers. Adopting cow-based natural farming could be a key and effective way to save valuable foreign currency for both the state and the nation. Given its agricultural traditions, Uttar Pradesh holds immense potential for this practice. According to Shyam Bihari Gupta, Chairman of the Cow Service Commission, the state has 2.78 crore farmers and around 2 crore cattle. He suggests that if every farmer keeps just one cow, several issues could be resolved naturally. Experts in natural farming highlight that the dung and urine from one cow, when processed, can support farming over an area of approximately four acres. The Yogi government aims to make every cow shelter self-sufficient. To achieve this, the government is developing these shelters as training centres for cow-based natural farming and other products. The government also plans to establish universities dedicated to natural farming in the state to combine traditional knowledge with modern techniques. To encourage more farmers to adopt natural farming, the government is providing financial support to selected farmers for three years. The financial assistance is Rs 4,800 in the first year, Rs 4,000 in the second year, and Rs 3,600 in the third year.

## Multi-disaster response vehicle deployed at Maha Kumbh

PNS ■ MAHAKUMBH NAGAR

As part of Maha Kumbh 2025 preparations, a state-of-the-art multi-disaster response vehicle has been deployed to enhance safety and disaster readiness. Equipped with advanced tools, it aims to safeguard lives and streamline emergency management during the event, an official said here on Saturday. The multi-disaster response vehicle features a victim location camera and various state-of-the-art tools for efficient disaster response, ensuring the safety of millions of devotees attending the Maha Kumbh. According to Maha Kumbh's Nodal and Chief Fire Officer Pramod Sharma, the vehicle features state-of-the-art equipment capable of handling situations ranging from natural disasters to road accidents. It includes a lifting bag with a capacity of 10 to 20 tonnes, enabling the rescue of individuals buried under debris, and specialised machines to lift and move heavy objects weighing up to 1.5 tonnes. Additionally, the vehicle is equipped with tools to cut and spread through strong debris during emergencies. The victim location camera is particularly effective in locating individuals trapped in collapsed structures. An inbuilt generator ensures the seamless operation of electronic equipment, even in challenging conditions. Apart from this, to ensure the safety of rescuers, the vehicle is stocked with protective gear such as life jackets, life rings, and life buoys. A tempera-

## Over 2,000 drones to light up the sky over Sangam

Mahakumbh Nagar (PNS): Pilgrims visiting the Maha Kumbh 2025 can look forward to a divine visual spectacle as the Uttar Pradesh Tourism is planning to organise a drone show at the Sangam area depicting events of religious and spiritual significance including the 'Samudra Manthan'. The Maha Kumbh, held every twelve years, will take place from January 13 to February 26, 2025 in Prayagraj. The drone show will be organised above the Sangam Nose area during the evening, the state government said in a statement. The Sangam nose is the exact point of confluence of three holy rivers: the Ganga, Yamuna and the mythical Saraswati. According to District Tourism Officer Aparajita Singh drone show will be held during the opening and closing of the event. "A fleet of around 2,000 illuminated drones will bring to life the legendary tales of 'Prayag Mahatmyam' and the Maha Kumbh. The spectacular show will depict iconic

Samudra Manthan (ocean churning) and the emergence of the Amrit Kalash (nectar pot), creating a magical visual narrative in the evening skies," Singh said. The show will also highlight the religious and spiritual significance of Prayagraj, providing a unique experience for pilgrims and locals. Maha Kumbh 2025 is gearing up to be a global cultural spectacle. Preparations are in full swing, reflecting CM Yogi Adityanath's vision of a grand and spiritually elevating Mahakumbh, according to the statement. Development and beautification work is underway across temples, Ganga ghats, parks, roads, and flyovers in Prayagraj, it said. Additionally, visitors and pilgrims will experience several new and unique attractions during this iconic festival, it added. The event will feature floating restaurants, water activities, hot air balloons, and laser light shows. The Uttar Pradesh Tourism Department is introducing innovative attractions to enhance the experience for visitors.

## ABVP's Kashi unit passes motion on environmental conservation, education

Lucknow (PTI): The 64th state conference of the Kashi unit of ABVP, the student wing of BJP, concluded in Sultanpur on Saturday, during which four significant resolutions were passed, including "Imposing a ban on the commercialisation and unethical practices in education by coaching institutes." During this four-day conference, a new executive committee was formed and four major resolutions were passed, including "Imposing a ban on the commercialisation and unethical practices in education by coaching institutes." "Making educational campuses centers for environmental conservation activities," and "A welcoming resolution for the devotees visiting the Maha Kumbh 2025." Around 1,200 student and teacher volunteers from Kashi participated in the conference in Sultanpur which the ABVP also refers to as 'Kushbhavanpur' (the city of Lord Ram's son, Kush). While Professor Suchita Tripathi was re-elected as president and Abhay Pratap Singh was re-elected as secretary, a statement by the Akhil Bhartiya Vidya Parishad (ABVP) said. A key resolution emphasised the need for immediate steps by all stakeholders to curb the increasing commercialisation of education and unethical practices by coaching institutes, while promoting human sensitivity and moral values in these institutions. Another resolution focused on the significant role of campuses in addressing the global environmental crisis, calling for

educational campuses to become hubs of environmental conservation activities. Additionally, a resolution was passed to welcome the devotees and saints arriving from across the world for the upcoming Maha Kumbh in Prayagraj. Apart from these, a resolution hailed the Uttar Pradesh government's "Swami Vivekananda Youth Empowerment Scheme," which is playing a crucial role in empowering the youth of the state. These resolutions were proposed by regional president Abhay Pratap Singh, national executive council member Abhinav Mishra, and regional joint secretaries Kartikya Pati Tripathi and Naman Srivastava. After soliciting suggestions from all delegates, regional president Suchita Tripathi incorporated their feedback and passed these significant resolutions. ABVP zonal organising secretary of East UP, Ghanshyam Shahi, who was a keynote speaker, stated in his speech that the youth are the foundation of India and will determine the future course and direction of the nation. The Akhil Bhartiya Vidyarthi Parishad serves as a nursery for youth personality development, planting the seeds for them to progress with a "Nation First" sentiment. ABVP national secretary Ankit Shukla emphasised that ABVP volunteers are committed to re-establishing India on the global stage. "If we look at history, we see that Indian culture has been far more advanced than any other civilisation," he said.

## Ayodhya hotels nearly sold out as New Year approaches

### Ram Temple trust extends 'darshan' timings

Ayodhya (PTI): The temple town of Ayodhya is gearing up for a massive influx of devotees and tourists as the new year approaches, marking the end of the first English calendar year since the grand consecration ceremony at the Ram Temple was held on January 22. With nearly all accommodations in Ayodhya and neighbouring Faizabad fully booked, the Ram Janmabhoomi Teerth Kshetra Trust has extended 'darshan' timings for the devotees and made extensive arrangements to manage the anticipated crowd. "We are ready to welcome the devotees this new year. All our rooms have been booked in advance till January 15," Ankit Mishra, owner of a local hotel in Ayodhya, said. When last checked on Saturday morning, online booking plat-

forms showed rooms still available at some hotels and lodges, even though a few establishments are charging upwards of Rs 10,000 per night due to the surge in demand. Ayodhya has witnessed a spike in religious tourism since the consecration ceremony earlier this year, and while the Hindu new year in 'Chaitra' (March-April) holds traditional significance, the English new year is also seeing a rise in devotional fervour. "A large number of devotees visit religious sites and offer prayers on January 1, seeking the blessings of Ram Lalla at the start of the year," Ramakant Tiwari, a local priest, said. To ensure smooth crowd management and security, Ayodhya Senior Superintendent of Police (SSP) Rajkaran Nayyar said, "There will be robust security arrangements at the Ram Temple, Hanumangarhi, Lata Chowk, Guptar Ghat, Surajkund, and other popular sites." The temple trust has also made comprehensive preparations to handle the swelling crowd, particularly between December 30 and the first two weeks of

January. A trust representative said, "Extended 'darshan' timings and strategic arrangements have been made to ensure a seamless experience for all the devotees." The consecration ceremony at the Ram Temple, which was attended by Prime Minister Narendra Modi and hundreds of people from all walks of life, marked an upsurge in tourism activities in Ayodhya as well as Uttar Pradesh. According to the state tourism department, 32.18 crore tourists visited Uttar Pradesh in 2022, which rose to 32.98 crore in the first six months of 2024. The increase in tourist footfalls has been attributed to the significant contributions of Ayodhya and Kashi (Varanasi), the Uttar Pradesh government said in a statement last week. "Following the inauguration of the grand Ram temple in January last year, Uttar Pradesh saw a significant rise in tourist influx within the first six months. In January alone, a record-breaking seven crore tourists visited, marking the highest number of visitors to any place in a single month," the government said.

## UP's 'aspirational dev blocks' shine in NITI Aayog rankings

PNS ■ LUCKNOW/NEW DELHI

Uttar Pradesh has delivered an impressive performance under the aspirational development block programme conducted by NITI Aayog, a state government spokesperson said. In the overall rankings released by NITI Aayog, Kaushambi development block in Uttar Pradesh secured the second rank in June 2023, while the Jamunaha development block in Shravasti achieved the first rank in March 2024, the spokesperson said. Delta rankings are issued quarterly based on 40 selected indicators in both overall and zone-wise categories. In the zone-wise rankings, various development blocks of Uttar Pradesh have performed remarkably well. Notable achievements include Harraiya (Basti) securing first place and Virno (Ghazipur) second place in June 2023, Baheri (Bareilly) earning second place in September 2023, and Sandila (Hardoi) and Jagdishpur (Amethi) achieving top ranks in March 2024. Additionally, Puredalai

(Barabanki) and Rajepur (Farrukhabad) excelled in June 2024, while Khesraha (Siddharth Nagar) and Nawabganj (Farrukhabad) ranked first and second, respectively, in September 2024. Notably, NITI Aayog has appreciated Uttar Pradesh for the consistent progress of its aspirational development blocks. It has divided 500 development blocks across the country into six zones—Hilly, North East and Islands, Northern, Southern, Western, Central, and Eastern. Uttar Pradesh is part of Zone-2, which includes 65 blocks. A total of 68 development blocks across 42 UP districts have been selected under this initiative. To encourage excellence, NITI Aayog provides monetary rewards to top-performing blocks. Development blocks securing the first rank in overall rankings receive Rs 3 crore, while the second rank fetches Rs 2 crore. Similarly, for zone-wise rankings, Rs 1.5 crore is awarded for the first rank and Rs 1 crore for the second rank.

## Woman found hanging, cop accused of murder

Lucknow (PTI) : A woman was found hanging under mysterious circumstances inside her home near Awas Vikas Colony in the Amethi police station area, police said on Saturday. The woman's husband has accused a police constable of murdering her even as the police said they have launched a probe into the matter. Divya Agrahari, wife of Alok Kumar Agrahari, was found hanging from the latch of a door at her house near the Amethi-Sultanpur road, police said. Speaking to reporters, Alok claimed, "It is impossible for anyone to hang from such a latch. There is no way she could have committed suicide in this manner." Alok said there had been a dispute between him and his wife three months ago, in which Dial 112 police had intervened. "One of the responding constables, Ravi Shukla, took my wife's contact number at that time. Since then, he had been in regular contact with her and even visited our home frequently," Alok claimed. "Three days ago, he came to

take my wife's mobile phone, which he couldn't get. The phone contained conversations and other incriminating materials involving Shukla and my wife, which is why he wanted it. This morning, I left for work at 9 am. When I returned in the afternoon, I found her hanging from the door latch. I believe constable Ravi Shukla has killed her — she did not commit suicide," he added. Circle Officer Manoj Kumar Mishra said, "Whether it was murder or suicide will be confirmed only after the autopsy report is received. An investigation is underway, and appropriate action will be taken against anyone found guilty." When asked about the murder allegations against Shukla, the officer said, "The matter is under investigation. No conclusions can be drawn until the findings are clear."

According to police, the incident occurred at Jagannathpur village under the Sirouli police station limits at around 2:30 am on Saturday when the victim, Gyani Prasad, was asleep. Additional Superintendent of Police (North), Mukesh Chandra Mishra, said, "On receiving information about the incident, local police reached the spot and found Gyani Prasad's body on the bed. His throat was strangled, and blood was coming out of his mouth and nose. The body has been sent for post-mortem, and efforts are underway to identify and apprehend the culprits," the officer said. The ASP added that the motive behind the murder is still unclear, and the police are examining all possible angles. Once the post-mortem report is received, a formal FIR will be registered based on the family's complaint, he said. The victim's brother, Nekpal, said, "Gyani Prasad had no enmity with anyone, yet he was murdered. The family is in a state of shock. We will lodge a formal complaint once the post-mortem report is received."

### MAN STRANGLED TO DEATH IN HIS SLEEP

Meanwhile, a 62-year-old farmer was strangled to death by unidentified assailants while he was sleeping in the verandah of his house in the Bareilly district, police said on Saturday.



# ADM: Provide proper facilities to devotees visiting Varanasi during Maha Kumbh

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ VARANASI

Additional District Magistrate (City) Alok Kumar Verma, as per the instructions of District Magistrate S Rajalingam, directed the departmental officers concerned at the Collectorate auditorium here on Friday to complete the preparations on time and provide proper facilities to the devotees coming to Kashi during Prayag Maha Kumbh. He directed the officers to display the name of the hotels area-wise and their contact numbers at the main intersections and places of the city so that devotees and tourists do not face any problem. During the meeting, while laying special emphasis on maintaining smooth traffic system, Verma also discussed the diversion plan and gave necessary guidelines. ADM (City) laid special emphasis on making necessary arrangements in view of the large number of devotees and bathers coming to Varanasi before and after the main bathing dates of Maha Kumbh. Along with installing welcome gates at the entry

## Mock exercise at Namoo Ghat

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ VARANASI

Keeping in view the expected increase in the number of devotees in Varanasi during the Maha Kumbh-2025 and to ensure safety, rescue and prevention on any possible accident/disaster, a mock exercise was conducted at Namoo Ghat of Ganga river here in Friday in collaboration with Uttar Pradesh State Disaster Management Authority (UPS-DMA) and District Disaster Management Authority (DDMA). This mock exercise focused on safe rescue of drowning persons in Ganga. The National Disaster Response Force (NDRF) team participated in this exercise as a key stakeholder and rescued the drowning persons in the river safely



using wet rescue and dry rescue techniques efficiently. Along with this, necessary medical assistance was also provided to the affected persons. The aim of this exercise was to strengthen the coordination between all stakeholders, such as Water Police, local sailors, civil police and health department during disasters and to ensure quick and coordinated response in case of emergency. Under the guidance of Deputy Inspector General (DIG) Manoj Kumar Sharma, the NDRF team regularly monitors the Ganga ghats of Kashi and ensures immediate relief and rescue operations in case of any emergency.

routes of Varanasi district, instructions were also given to make arrangements for installing overhead and cantilever on major highways and national highways.

"City map, list of tourist places, related promotional material and Kumbh related promotional material should be arranged at all hotels and paying guest houses", he instructed. The

officials of Hotel Association, Guide Association along with deputy director (Tourism) and other departmental officers were prominently present in the meeting.

# Labourer dies as bridge tower collapses

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ VARANASI

Prayagraj (PNS): A 45-year-old labourer died while eight others sustained critical injuries in Sahason area under Sarai Inayat police station here on Saturday afternoon when a bridge tower collapsed while they were changing the 33,000-volt high tension line. Two labourers got stuck under the tower. One of them died on the spot while condition of another is precarious as his legs were severed in this accident. Eight other labourers were seriously injured. Ring road work is going on in Sahason area and the 33,000 volt high tension line is being changed which is pulled with the help of big pillars. On Saturday the wire broke while pulling the line. On getting information the police-administration team reached the spot and efforts are made to rescue the labourers trapped between the towers. Station House Officer Sanjay Prasad Gupta said labourers, Aamir, Qasim, Anirudh Singh, Abdul, Putul Sheikh, Salim and Chottan from Malda, West Bengal, were seriously injured while Anjani died on the spot. The condition of Aamir is reported to be critical, he added.

# Manmohan was synonymous with clean politics: Minister

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ VARANASI

Uttar Pradesh Minister of State (Independent Charge) for AYUSH Dr Dayashankar Mishra 'Dayalu' expressed deep grief over the demise of former Prime Minister Dr Manmohan Singh. Expressing his condolences, he said Dr Manmohan Singh

was a very humble, simple and straightforward person. "His life was a symbol of simplicity and he never showed political animosity or party discrimination", he said. The minister said Dr Manmohan Singh was synonymous with clean politics. "His liberalisation policies in the 90s proved to be a mile-

stone in giving a new direction to the Indian economy. The contribution of the renowned economist and former Prime Minister Dr Singh to the country will always be remembered", said Dr Mishra. The demise of Dr Singh is an irreparable loss for the country, and his simplicity and dedication will always inspire us, he added.

# Eye testing & awareness campaign for 50+ age group being held in Varanasi

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ VARANASI

Under the Swasthya Dristi Samridh Kashi programme run with the cooperation of the district administration, a door-to-door eye testing and awareness campaign is being conducted for the residents of 50+ age. In this direction, the team of Health department and Sadguru Seva Sangh in Varanasi are providing facilities by going door-to-door for the convenience of people due to which Kashi residents are getting the benefit of healthy vision. Chief Medical Officer (CMO) Dr Sandeep Chaudhary said under the

campaign, 7,01,402 people were screened against a 50+ population of 6,60,861, out of which 1,00,197 patients were referred for camp. 80,907 patients got themselves examined in the camp and spectacles were distributed to 44,811 patients. Besides, 22,649 patients were identified for operation, out of which cataract operation of 12,754 patients was done successfully by Satguru Seva Sangh. CMO appealed to the people of the district that if any person is suffering from cataract, then he can get the operation done by getting examined in his nearest government hospital.

Additional Chief Medical Officer and Nodal Officer of the programme Dr Sanjay Rai said cooperation of ASHA and Anganwadi workers of urban and rural areas is being taken. Under the National Programme for Control of Blindness and Visual Impairment, a target of 49,555 cataract operations has been set in the financial year 2024-25, in which a total of 18,615 cataract operations have been done against the target of 33,036 till the month of November, in which 3,345 operations have been done in government hospitals and 15,270 in private hospitals.

# Dharm Dhwaja of three Ani Akharas installed



PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ PRAYAGRAJ

The Dharm Dhwaja (religious flag) of the three Ani Akharas (Nirvani Ani, Nirmohi Ani and Digambar Ani) was installed here amid chanting of Vedic mantras in the Maha Kumbh area on Saturday. The Dharm Dhwaja was hoisted with rituals in the camp of these akharas built in Sector-20. Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath was also to come here to participate in this ceremony but his visit was cancelled due to national mourn-

ing following the death of former PM Dr Manmohan Singh. Mahant Rajendra Das, president of Nirmohi Ani Akhara, said they had installed the Dharm Dhwaja in a grand manner. Shrimahant Murali Das Maharaj and Mahant Rajudas Maharaj of Ayodhya Hanumangarhi Temple said religious events had also started in their Akhara. **NEW INITIATIVE:** In view of Maha Kumbh, the North Central Railway (NCR) has taken a new initiative. In view of passenger convenience, the

railway has created the Kumbh Rail Seva app. With its help, passengers will be able to get all the necessary information related to the Maha Kumbh in Hindi and English language. This railway app will provide information about the timetable of trains, ticket booking, route from the station to the Mela area and the facilities available at the railway station. Information about the major religious places and cultural places of Maha Kumbh will also be available. Information about emergency contact numbers will also be available in this app. NCR Chief Public Relations Officer (CPRO) Shashikant Tripathi said information about various facilities available at railway stations will also be given in the app. All necessary information related to safety and security arrangements at railway stations and Mela area by the RPF will be provided. Meanwhile the Kumbh Rail Seva web portal regarding the Maha Kumbh was launched on Friday. This portal will provide all necessary information related to travel to the devotees during the Maha Kumbh Mela. Information about availability and schedule of trains for travel will be available from this portal. Passengers will also be

able to know about the train route to go to the Mela. Live status of trains and platform details will also be available. This portal will also help in tracking the lost luggage for the convenience of passengers. **THREE INJURED:** Three people, including Acharya Mahamandaleswar Arun Giri, Peethadheeshwar of Aawahana Akhara, were injured when their Fortuner in which they were travelling met with an accident near Maheshganj intersection under Nawabganj police station. They have been admitted to SRN Hospital. The Peethadheeshwar was returning from Lucknow to Prayagraj Kumbh area with his disciple and driver. On getting information about the incident police reached the spot and took all the injured to the nearest community health center, from where the doctors referred Acharya Mahamandaleswar, his driver and disciple to the SRN Hospital. On the other hand, Dr Santosh Singh said Acharya Mahamandaleswar Arun Giri suffered minor injuries on his lips, back and leg. He is out of danger. The driver and disciple injured with him have also suffered minor injuries. All three are being treated.

# FDP from Jan 15

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ PRAYAGRAJ

The Electronics & ICT Academy IIT Roorkee in association with Sam Higginbottom University of Agriculture, Science And Technology (SHUATS) will conduct a faculty development programme (FDP) on enhancing agriculture and allied domains with artificial intelligence and geospatial technologies on January 15 to 19. Prof Deepak Lal said this faculty development programme will explore integrating AI and geospatial technologies to transform agriculture through precision farming, resource optimisation and data-driven decision-making. It aims to equip faculty with cutting-edge knowledge to train future agricultural professionals. The programme provides exposure to modern agricultural solutions, empowering educators to drive innovation in teaching and research for sustainable agriculture. The principal investigator of this programme will be Prof Sanjeev Manhas, ECE Department, IIT Roorkee. This course is for faculty members, UG & PG students, government officials, professionals working in the semiconductor industries, research scientists and technical staff.

# DM inspects Collectorate offices



District Magistrate S Rajalingam inspecting a Collectorate office in Varanasi on Saturday.

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ VARANASI

District Magistrate S Rajalingam inspected the different Collectorate offices here on Saturday and gave necessary instructions to the officers and desk assistants. During it he inspected various desks and departments of the Collectorate and inquired about their work from the personnel. He also inspected the record

room, arms section, treasury section, main revenue section and archives. The district magistrate directed the officers concerned that better cleanliness should be maintained in all the office rooms and premises within the Collectorate. The records should be kept in an organised and safe manner in the record room. During the inspection, the district magistrate directed

that all applications received for income and caste certificates must be recorded in the register and should also be noted when it was issued by the tehsil concerned. He instructed that the entire Collectorate premises should be kept neat and clean. Additional District Magistrate (Finance), ADM (Administration) and chief revenue officer were present during the inspection.

# Growing importance of AI emphasised



Training on AI being held at BHU in Varanasi on Saturday.

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ VARANASI

The Banaras Hindu University (BHU) organised a transformative training session titled 'Work Smarter: Artificial Intelligence (AI) / ChatGPT in Daily Office Operations', under the aegis of the Staff Development Cell (SDC). Designed to empower non-teaching staff, the session aimed to provide practical strategies for leveraging AI to streamline tasks and elevate workplace efficiency. The session was inaugurated by SDC coordinator Prof SK Dubey, who welcomed the participants and emphasised the growing importance of AI in modern professional environment. He encouraged attendees to make the most of the session and adopt AI-driven tools for optimising office operations. The session was led by Raj Kumar Soni, Assistant Registrar, a member of the SDC and the Nodal Officer for iGOT Karmayogi

for non-teaching staff. Soni delivered a comprehensive and engaging presentation on the fundamentals of AI, starting with an explanation of how AI works. He detailed foundational models, including language models for text-based tasks, image recognition models for interpreting visuals, and speech recognition models that convert spoken language into text. The participants explored AI applications ranging from predictive and decision-making models to sentiment analysis for understanding emotional context, generative models for creating content and data analysis models for identifying patterns and insights in large datasets. The session also highlighted ChatGPT's powerful capabilities, showcasing how it can draft emails, organise data into tables, write reports, solve complex queries, translate languages and create diverse content formats. Practical

demonstrations included drafting professional letters, preparing presentations, creating summaries, and even managing multilingual translations. Participants also engaged in hands-on activities, enhancing their understanding of user prompts and refining techniques to maximise ChatGPT's potential. In addition to exploring ChatGPT, Soni introduced participants to tools like Microsoft Copilot and Adobe Firefly, along with the applications of machine learning and deep learning in office settings. He also emphasised the importance of completing three mandatory UGC courses available on the iGOT Karmayogi platform: Introduction to Emerging Technologies, ChatGPT and Generative AI, and AI Using Google and ChatGPT. The session concluded with an interactive Q&A and a practical assessment where participants successfully applied their learning to solve queries and draft professional documents. Feedback from attendees was overwhelmingly positive, with many praising the session's clarity, depth and relevance. Participants noted the transformative impact of the training on their ability to manage workloads, improve accuracy and adopt innovative solutions for daily tasks. This training session reflects Banaras Hindu University's commitment to equipping its workforce with cutting-edge skills and advancing digital literacy. By fostering a culture of innovation and adaptability, Banaras Hindu University ensures its staff is well-prepared for the future of work.

# Significant achievement in interventional cardiology



The IMS-BHU team which performed a complex heart surgery in Varanasi

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ VARANASI

The Department of Cardiology at Institute of Medical Sciences, Banaras Hindu University (IMS-BHU), led by a team of skilled doctor including Prof Vikas Agrawal, Dr Pratibha Rai, Dr Srasti and Dr Arjun successfully performed a complex ventricular septal defect (VSD) device closure on a 65-year-old male recovering from a myocardial infarction (MI), commonly called a heart attack. This case marks a significant achievement in interventional cardiology. Apart from VSD device closure, the patient also received an angioplasty procedure for his blocked coronary arteries. Patient is now back to his routine activities at the time of first follow-up. Ventricular septal rupture (VSR) or defect is a rare but life-threatening complication of acute myocardial infarction (AMI), occurring in approximately 0.5-1

per cent of cases. During heart attack, blockages in the arteries supplying the heart muscles lead to death of heart muscles due to lack of oxygen and other nutrients. The ventricular septum, a structure separating the right heart (carrying less oxygen blood) from the left heart (carrying oxygenated blood), can be affected if its blood supply is compromised. This damage can result in necrosis and subsequent hole in the septum. Patients with VSR are often critically ill, presenting significant management challenges. Without timely intervention, the condition carries a very high mortality. Traditionally, surgical repair was the primary treatment, but it came with considerable risks, particularly in critically ill patients. Dr Vikas Agrawal underscored the technical difficulties of post-MI VSR closures, especially in elderly patients with multiple comorbidities. He

# Complex surgery performed successfully at IMS-BHU

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ VARANASI

A rare surgery was successfully completed in Institute of Medical Sciences, Banaras Hindu University (IMS-BHU), marking it as the first of its kind in this region. Notably, a similar case in paediatric patients has been reported only at SGPGI, Lucknow. A 10-year-old boy was referred to the Department of Paediatric Surgery at IMS-BHU with a diagnosed case of Wilms tumour, where the tumour thrombus had extended from the inferior vena cava (IVC) into the right atrium. After partial response to chemotherapy, the case was referred to Prof Vaibhav Pandey for definitive surgical management, where he took charge as the team leader for this complex surgery. "The child is recovering rapidly and will soon be referred back to Mahamana Pandit Madan Mohan Malaviya Cancer Centre (MPMCCC) for further chemotherapy. This challenging surgery demonstrated the importance of multidisciplinary collaboration in managing complex paediatric tumors", said Prof Pandey under whose leadership the BHU team delivered high-

quality surgical care at a nominal cost, achieving remarkable success compared to the expenses incurred in private hospitals. The child had earlier received neoadjuvant chemotherapy under the supervision of Dr Parichay Singh and Dr Raghvesh Ranjan at MPMCCC. After examining the tumour's extensive spread, Prof Pandey formed a multidisciplinary team that included Prof Arvind Pandey and Prof Siddharth Lakhotiya (cardiothoracic surgery), Dr Pratibha Rai (cardiology) and Dr RB Singh and Dr Sanjeev (anaesthesiology). Dr Pratibha Rai conducted a detailed evaluation of the tumour's extension into the heart, while Dr RB Singh and Dr Sanjeev developed a comprehensive plan to manage the potential risks of anaesthesia and surgery. Since the patient's family could not afford the high cost of this surgery (approximately INR 5 lakh in private hospitals), Medical Superintendent of Sir Sunderlal Hospital (SSH) Prof KK Gupta facilitated the arrangement of case-specific and expensive equipment, enabling the surgery to be performed at

BHU for a nominal cost of INR 25,000. After three weeks of meticulous preparation, the patient was scheduled for surgery. Under the leadership of Prof Vaibhav Pandey, a team of 20 doctors successfully performed the complex surgery, which lasted approximately 10 hours. The surgery was conducted in two stages. In the first stage, Prof Pandey along with his team carefully removed the tumour from the kidney, IVC and liver. This required exceptional surgical skills to manage significant blood loss while preserving normal structures. In the second stage, Prof Siddharth Lakhotiya conducted the cardiac surgery. This involved temporarily stopping the heart to remove the tumor thrombus from the right atrium, with continuous intraoperative transesophageal echocardiographic guidance provided by the anaesthesiology team, led by Dr Sanjeev. Throughout the procedure, the paediatric surgery team, including Dr Ruchira, Dr Seth Kacchap, and Dr Bhanumati Kaushik, provided critical support.

highlighted that advancements in interventional techniques now make it possible to repair these defects with minimally invasive procedures, provid-

ing a safer alternative to open-heart surgery for high-risk individuals. Prof Siddharth Lakhota, Head of CTVS, noted that while open-heart

surgery remains an option, its high mortality rate often makes device closure a more favourable choice in carefully selected patients.



# Several Union Ministers and CMs to attend WEF at Davos

**PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■**  
NEW DELHI

Union Ministers Ashwini Vaishnav, CR Patil, Chirag Paswan, K Ram Mohan Naidu and Jayant Chaudhary, alongside three Chief Ministers -- Devendra Fadnavis, Chandrababu Naidu and Revant Reddy, will join hundreds of Government and business leaders from across the globe in Swiss ski resort town Davos next month for the World Economic Forum Annual Meeting 2025. Andhra Pradesh Chief Minister Naidu will also be joined by his son and senior minister in his state Nara Lokesh, while Karnataka's Deputy Chief Minister DK Shivakumar, Tamil Nadu Minister TRB Rajaa and Uttar Pradesh Minister Suresh Khanna will also be there for the five-day annual congregation of the world's rich and powerful, starting January 20, 2025. Actor Bhumi Pednekar,

known for films like Dum Laga Ke Haisha, Toilet: Ek Prem Katha, Shubh Mangal Saavdhan, Pati Patni Aur Woh, Badhai Do and Saand Ki Aankh, would also be there. Besides over 50 Presidents and Prime Ministers from across the world, top officials of international organisations like the United Nations, IMF, World Bank, Interpol, NATO, European Central Bank and WTO are also expected to be in Davos for the WEF Annual Meeting 2025. Senior ministers from Pakistan and Bangladesh, including Bangladesh Government's Chief Adviser and head of the interim government Muhammad Yunus would also be present. Vaishnav, Minister for Railways, Information & Broadcasting and Electronics & IT, had also attended the last WEF annual meeting, alongside Smriti Irani and Hardeep Singh Puri from the Union Council of Ministers.

This time, Vaishnav will be joined by Jal Shakti Minister Patil, Food Processing Industries Minister Paswan, Civil Aviation Minister Naidu and Minister of State for Skill Development and Education Chaudhary. Prime Minister Narendra Modi has also attended the meeting in the past, but there is no official word so far about his participation in the high-profile summit, for which the main theme this time will be 'collaboration for the intelligent age'. Expected to be attended by nearly 50 heads of state and governments from across the world, the annual meeting would take place against the backdrop of a change of regime in the US and various geopolitical and macroeconomic issues, including the Ukraine war and continuing West Asia crisis. Both Modi and Donald Trump attended the WEF Annual Meeting in 2018 for the first time as India's Prime



Minister and the US President, respectively. While Modi became Prime Minister of India for the third consecutive term earlier this year, Trump is set to assume office for the second time on January 20, and his return is expected to be among the key topics of discussion at Davos. Maharashtra Chief Minister Fadnavis and Andhra Pradesh

Chief Minister Naidu have been to Davos multiple times, while Telangana Chief Minister Reddy attended the WEF Annual Meeting in January 2024 as well. Besides Government leaders and civil society members, the Indian presence would comprise top executives of business conglomerates like Reliance, Tata, Adani, Birla, Bharti,

Mahindra, Godrej, Jindal, Bajaj and Vedanta groups. Besides Mukesh Ambani and Gautam Adani, the next-generation leaders from their groups are also expected to be present, while technology leaders, including Salil Parekh of Infosys, Rishad Premji of Wipro, as also Sumant Sinha of ReNew, Vijay Shekhar Sharma of Paytm and Adar Poonawalla of Serum Institute are expected in the Swiss Alpine resort town. Geneva-based WEF, which describes itself as an international organisation for public-private cooperation, will convene leaders from government, business and civil society as well as scientific and cultural thinkers for its 55th annual meeting under the theme of 'Collaboration for the Intelligent Age'. According to the WEF, the meeting will serve as a trusted global platform for dialogue and cooperation, bringing together a diverse community

of stakeholders, seek to connect the dots in an era of complexity and be firmly future-oriented -- both in terms of insights and solutions. Several sessions are expected to be attended by Indian leaders, including one on 'India's Economic Blueprint'. As one of the world's fastest-growing major economies, India has been growing at over 8 per cent, and this growth has been buoyed by a focus on promoting local innovation and startups in technology and manufacturing, representing a departure from traditional export-oriented models. The leaders would deliberate how India has capitalised on this new blueprint and to what extent it can continue to drive global growth. According to the WEF, the annual meeting will take place at a time when geo-economic fragmentation, geopolitical polarisation and divisions over values continue to impact countries and communities across the world. At the same time, exponential innovation and deployment around whole sets of inter-connected technologies -- from AI and quantum to energy tech, biotech and health tech -- offer an unprecedented opportunity to increase productivity and hence, standards of living. Reviving and reimagining growth is critical to building stronger and more resilient economies, and the meeting would seek to discuss how to avoid an Age of Fragmentation and instead work together on a can-do, people-centred agenda for an Intelligent Age. The global leaders would also deliberate on how to reinvent the muscle of collaborative innovation to get out of the current low-growth, high-debt world economy and address common challenges from climate change to the ethical use of AI.

## PM CARES fund contributions fall to Rs 912 crore in FY 23

**PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■**  
NEW DELHI

The total voluntary contribution to the PM CARES Fund fell to Rs 912 crore in the fiscal year 2022-23, its lowest since the public charitable trust was created in March 2020 following the COVID-19 outbreak. A study of the audited statements on the Prime Minister's Citizen Assistance and Relief in Emergency Situations (PM CARES) Fund website shows that the voluntary contribution peaked at Rs 7,184 crore in 2020-21 and then fell to Rs 1,938 crore in 2021-22, before declining further in 2022-23 as the Covid threat receded after 2021. The fiscal 2022-23 is the last year for which the statement is available on the website.



Foreign contribution has seen a sharper decline, registering a high of Rs 495 crore in 2020-21, before falling to Rs 40 crore and Rs 2.57 crore in the next two years. The total expenditure in 2022-23 was around Rs 439 crore, with Rs 346 crore of it used by the "PM Cares for Children", a government

initiative to support children who lost both of their parents, legal guardians or surviving parents to the Covid pandemic. An amount of nearly Rs 92 crore was spent on the procurement of oxygen concentrators, according to the statement. The Narendra Modi government had set up the

PM CARES Fund with the primary objective of dealing with any kind of emergency or distress situation, like the one posed by the Covid pandemic, and to provide relief to the affected. It was registered as a public charitable trust. The prime minister is the ex-officio chairman of the body and the fund consists entirely of voluntary contributions and does not get any budgetary support. The fund has been used over the years to boost emergency care, including for setting up oxygen plants and purchasing ventilators in hospitals run by the central and state governments as part of the larger exercise to meet the challenges posed by the pandemic. In 2021-22, an amount of Rs 1,703 crore was spent on

pressure-swing adsorption oxygen plants, besides spending Rs 835 crore on ventilators, out of a total expenditure of nearly Rs 1,938 crore. Its objective was to undertake and support relief or assistance of any kind relating to a public health emergency or any other kind of emergency, calamity or distress, either man-made or natural, including the creation or upgradation of healthcare or pharmaceutical facilities, other necessary infrastructure, funding relevant research or any other type of support. To render financial assistance, provide grants of payments of money or take such other steps as may be deemed necessary by the Board of Trustees to the affected population.

## Indian Army contingent leaves for Nepal to participate in joint military exercise Surya Kiran

**PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■**  
NEW DELHI

An Indian Army contingent comprising 334 personnel departed for Nepal on Saturday to participate in 18th edition of battalion level joint military exercise Surya Kiran. The exercise will be conducted in Saljhandi, Nepal from December 31 to January 13, defence ministry said here adding it is an annual training event conducted alternatively in the two countries. The Indian Army contingent is led by a battalion from the 11th Gorkha Rifles. The Nepal Army contingent will be represented by Srijung Battalion. The aim of the exercise is to enhance interoperability in jungle



warfare, counter terrorism operations in mountains, and Humanitarian Assistance and Disaster Relief under United Nations Charter. The exercise will focus on enhancing operational preparedness, aviation aspects, medical training, and environment conservation. Through these activities, the troops will enhance their

operational capabilities, refine their combat skills and strengthen their coordination to operate together in challenging situations. This edition of the exercise follows successful visits by Army chief General Upendra Dwivedi to Nepal, and the visit by General Ashok Raj Sigdel, Chief of the Army Staff of Nepali Army to India.

## Shift Dalalwadi to hospital: SC gives Punjab Govt till December 31

From page 1

This infuriated the bench which blamed the Punjab Government for not doing enough to contain the situation and said the farmer leaders who are not allowing Dalalwadi to be taken to the hospital are involved in the criminal offence of abetment to suicide. The SC allowed

the Punjab Government to seek any logistic support from the Centre if the situation warrants, and hoped that the state government will comply with its direction of shifting Dalalwadi to hospital. The Bench said Dalalwadi is under some kind of "peer pressure" and those farmer leaders who are not allowing him to be shifted to a hospital do not

seem to be his well-wishers. "Are they interested in his life or something else? We don't want to say much and only hope that the Punjab government will comply with our directions," the Bench said. On Friday, the Bench had 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 that medical aid be provided to Dalalwadi. Dalalwadi has been on an indefinite fast at the Khanauri border since November 26 to press the Centre to accept farmers' demands, including a legal guarantee of Minimum Support Price for crops.

## CBI searches premises of ED official in Shimla

**PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■**  
NEW DELHI

The CBI has searched the premises of an Assistant Director of the ED in Shimla, who managed to give a slip to the agency during a trap

operation on Sunday and escaped, officials said. The Assistant Director of the Enforcement Directorate (ED) posted at Shimla and his brother Vikas Deep, a senior manager in the Punjab National Bank in Delhi, had allegedly gone to Chandigarh to receive bribe money from a businessman, who is facing a case lodged under the Prevention of Money Laundering Act (PMLA), they said.

The businessman filed a complaint with the Central Bureau of Investigation (CBI) about alleged extortion, based on which the Chandigarh unit of the agency planned the trap operation where the complainant was asked to give a bribe of Rs 55 lakh in cash to the officer with CBI sleuths keeping an eye, the officials said. It was planned that the CBI would nab the accused after the bribe was allegedly received by him, they said. The ED officer, who is on deputation from the Central Board of Indirect Taxes and Customs (CBIC), got alerted during the operation and allegedly fled the spot with the cash, the officials said. The agency has been trying to locate him for six days.

## Principal Secretary to PM condoles Manmohan Singh's passing

**PNS ■** NEW DELHI

In his condolences on passing away of former Prime Minister Dr. Manmohan Singh, Principal Secretary to PM Dr PK Mishra on Friday said the country has lost a very distinguished leader, an eminent economist and a great human being. "My memories of Dr. Manmohan Singh dates back to the time when he was teaching at the Delhi School of Economics and I was in my M.A. first year. Seeing him among the stalwart professors in that era was reassuring for a student like me, having come from Sambalpur district in Odisha. Those were the days when very eminent professors such as Amartya Sen, Mrinal Datta Chaudhuri, A.M. Khuro, K.N. Raj, Sukhamoy Chakraborty, Dharma Kumar and others were teaching there," Mishra said in a statement.

## War of words follows Manmohan's farewell

From page 1

"Congress party is busy turning this moment of grief into an opportunity to fulfill their political agenda. Gandhi family has neither honored nor delivered justice to any leader of the nation, even if they were from the Congress party. The nation will never forget or forgive the historic sins of the principle-less Congress party," Nadda said in a statement. Former Rajasthan Chief Minister Ashok Gehlot accused the NDA government of creating an "unnecessary controversy" over the cremation and memorial of former Prime Minister Manmohan Singh. He added that the Government of India is conducting the cremation of

a respected personality at Nigambodh Ghat instead of at any special place. Gehlot recalled after the death of former Vice President Bhairon Singh Shekhawat the Congress led Rajasthan government immediately allotted a special place for his last rites and a memorial in Jaipur and similarly after the death of Bal Thackeray in Maharashtra in 2012, the Congress government allotted a special place in Mumbai's Shivaji Park for his last rites. Before the mortal remains of Singh were consigned to flames, the security forces gave a 21-gun salute to the former PM. Sikh priests and Singh's family members recited verses from the Gurbani before performing

his last rites. Singh's wife Gursharan Kaur and one of their daughters also laid a wreath on his body. The three daughters of Singh, Upinder Singh, Daman Kaur and Amrit Kaur, along with other relatives were present. Singh's funeral pyre was lit by his eldest daughter Upinder Singh at the Nigambodh Ghat amid the chanting of religious hymns. The last rites were performed in the presence of President Droupadi Murmu, Vice President Jagdeep Dhankhar and Prime Minister Narendra Modi, as also top leaders of the Congress party including Mallikarjun Kharge, Sonia Gandhi and Rahul Gandhi. King of Bhutan Jigme Khesar Namgyel Wangchuck and Mauritius Foreign Minister Dhananjay Ramful were

among the foreign dignitaries who paid tributes to Singh, who served as the PM from 2004 to 2014. Defence Minister Rajnath Singh, Home Minister Amit Shah and Lok Sabha Speaker Om Birla also paid their last tributes to the former prime minister and laid wreaths on his mortal remains. Chief of Defence Staff General Anil Chauhan and chiefs of the tri-services also laid wreaths. Several chief ministers also attended the last rites. Amid Manmohan Singh's memorial row, former President Pranab Mukherjee's daughter Sharmistha criticised the party for demanding a separate memorial space for Manmohan Singh while failing to convene a Congress Working Committee meeting

to condole her father's death. Speaking out against the lapse, she revealed that a senior Congress leader had dismissed the idea, claiming such meetings were not customary for former Presidents. "When baba passed away, Congress didn't even bother to call a CWC for a condolence meeting. A senior leader told me it's not done for Presidents. That's utter rubbish," Sharmistha said. She further revealed that her father's diaries documented how, after former President KR Narayanan's death, such a meeting had been convened, with Pranab Mukherjee himself drafting the condolence message. She, however, said that former PM Manmohan Singh deserves a separate memorial space.

## Delhi LG orders high-level inquiry into AAP's ₹2,100 dole for women

From page 1

"We announced Rs 2,100 per month to all eligible women in Delhi under Mahila Samman Yojna and free treatment of the senior citizens under Sanjeevani Yojna, after forming a government in Delhi. What are they going to enquire?" Kejriwal said. The AAP national convenor alleged that the BJP was trying the government's schemes just so that it could have a chance at defeating it in the February election. The party claimed that more than 22 lakh women were already registered for the scheme. The Lieutenant Governor's secretariat stated the Lieutenant Governor has noted that the Women and Child Development Department earlier this week published a public notice in newspapers saying it would launch a digital portal for

collection of forms as and when the scheme is notified. The department advised people not to fill out forms handed to them by unauthorised persons. In regard to Dikshit's allegations that the AAP government in Punjab was "transferring cash (in crores) from various locations in Punjab to Delhi", Saxena requested DGP Punjab and the governments of Haryana and Rajasthan to be vigilant about "private cars from Punjab with Punjab Police escorts" being sent to Delhi through their states. "Hon'ble Lieutenant Governor has noted that the elections to Delhi Legislative Assembly are likely to be conducted shortly and (the) possibility of using such illegal money in the ensuing election to influence the voters of Delhi cannot be

ruled out," the communication to the Delhi chief secretary and police commissioner stated. The use of "money power" in elections, Saxena also noted, was not only an offence under Sections 170 and 171 of the Bharatiya Nyaya Sanhita, 2023, and Section 123 of the Representation of the People Act, 1951, but also an impediment to free and fair elections. Furthermore, Lt Governor directed the police commissioner to investigate surveillance allegations made by Congress leader Sandeep Dikshit and submit a comprehensive report within three days. Dikshit, who has been fielded against AAP chief Arvind Kejriwal from the New Delhi constituency, met Lieutenant Governor Vinai Kumar Saxena on Thursday and made serious

allegations against the AAP as ties between the two parties, part of the INDIA Bloc, hit rock bottom ahead of the elections. In his complaint, Dikshit alleged that the Chief Minister of Delhi and AAP convener Arvind Kejriwal have been announcing that Delhi Government is going to give every female in Delhi (above the age of 18 years) an amount of Rs 2100 per month if elected. Further, Dikshit informed that they are going door to door making women sign some forms. Dikshit has requested that in view of the clarification submitted by the Women and Child development department, GNCTD, it is clear that this is a fraud being perpetrated by the AAP and has requested to institute a high level inquiry in the matter. Dikshit also made allegations on

surveillance by Punjab's intelligence officials and flow of cash from Punjab to Delhi by AAP. In a statement, the AAP said, "They claim we are registering people for a government scheme, but this is completely false, as it has been repeatedly clarified everywhere that this is an electoral promise to be implemented once we come to power. They also accuse us of collecting data from people, but all we ask is for a missed call, which provides a phone number and nothing more, raising the question: is collecting data with consent illegal? People voluntarily share extensive personal data with companies when buying vehicles, purchasing insurance, or signing up for private schemes, so why is this being questioned here?" the AAP questioned.

## Highest single-day December rainfall in 101 years

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The minimum temperature, recorded early Saturday morning, was 12.7 degrees Celsius at the Safdarjung weather station. This was 6 degrees above normal. The maximum temperature was 15.8 degree Celsius. This was five degrees below the normal.

Amid the rain, Delhi witnessed some improvement in the air quality, which remained in the 'moderate' category, with an Air Quality Index (AQI) of 139. This is both because of the rain and a slight increase in wind speed. The Air Quality Early Warning System (AQEWS) for Delhi has forecast that the AQI may even dip into the "moderate" range over the weekend, before deteriorating again early next week. "The air quality is likely to be in the poor category on Sunday. The air quality is likely to be in the very poor category on Monday. The outlook for subsequent six days is that the air quality is likely to be in very poor category," the AQEWS bulletin said. The India Meteorological Department has issued a 'yellow' alert for the weekend, predicting "light rain/ thunderstorms". Meanwhile, North India, including the capital Delhi, will see a chilly start to the New Year, with the weather office predicting a significant drop in minimum temperatures across several regions. Heavy rains at the end of the year will only intensify the ongoing cold wave conditions in the first week of 2025. As intermittent rain continues in several parts of Northwest India, the IMD has predicted a fall in the minimum temperature by 3-5 degrees Celsius in the next two days.

## Kashmiriyat shines as snow envelops J and K

From page 1

Due to slippery conditions, motorists were facing difficulties in driving, they added. The snowfall also affected the power supply in several areas of the valley, the officials said. Jammu and Kashmir Chief Minister Omar Abdullah was himself monitoring the situation. In a post on X, Chief Minister informed, "Out of 41 33KV feeders dysfunctional in Kashmir due to heavy snowfall, 37 have been restored and charged. Similarly, out of 739 dysfunctional 11KV feeders, 639 have been restored and recharged, bringing a major relief to the valley. The majority of the rest are expected to be restored by the evening. Kudos to the PDD team for their relentless efforts in this snowfall in such a short time."



## Putin apologises to Azerbaijani leader for 'tragic incident' involving crashed plane

AP ■ MOSCOW

Russian President Vladimir Putin on Saturday apologised to his Azerbaijani counterpart for what he called a "tragic incident" following the crash of an Azerbaijani airliner in Kazakhstan that killed 38 people.

The Kremlin said in a statement that air defence systems were firing near Grozny, the regional capital of the Russian republic of Chechnya, due to a Ukrainian drone strike as the plane attempted to land on Wednesday. It stopped short of saying the plane was shot down by Russian air defences.

According to a Kremlin readout of the call, Putin apologised to Azerbaijani President Ilham Aliyev "for the fact that the tragic incident occurred in Russian airspace."

The plane was flying from Grozny to Azerbaijan's capital of Baku to Grozny, when it turned toward Kazakhstan and crashed while making an attempt to land. There were 29 survivors.

On Friday, a US official and an Azerbaijani minister made sep-

arate statements blaming the crash on an external weapon.

Friday's assessments by Rashan Nabiyev and White House national security spokesman John Kirby echoed those made by outside aviation experts who blamed the crash on Russian air defence systems responding to a Ukrainian attack. Neither Kirby or the Azerbaijani minister directly addressed the statements blaming air defences.

Kirby told reporters on Friday that the US "have seen some early indications that would certainly point to the possibility that this jet was brought down by Russian air defence systems," but refused to elaborate, citing an ongoing investigation.

Nabiyev, Azerbaijan's minister of digital development and transportation, told Azerbaijani media that "preliminary conclusions by experts point at external impact," as does witness testimony.

Passengers and crew who survived the crash told Azerbaijani media that they heard loud noises on the aircraft as it was circling over Grozny.

Dmitry Yadrov, head of Russia's

civil aviation authority Rosaviatsia, said Friday that as the plane was preparing to land in Grozny in deep fog, Ukrainian drones were targeting the city, prompting authorities to close the area to air traffic.

Yadrov said that after the captain made two unsuccessful attempts to land, he was offered other airports but decided to fly to Aktau in Kazakhstan, across the Caspian Sea.

He didn't comment on statements from some aviation experts, who pointed out that holes seen in the plane's tail section suggested that it could have come under fire from Russian air defence systems.

Earlier this week, Rosaviatsia cited unspecified early evidence as showing that the pilots diverted to Aktau after a bird strike led to an emergency on board.

In the days following the crash, Azerbaijan Airlines blamed "physical and technical interference" and announced the suspension of flights to several Russian airports. It didn't say where the interference came from or provide any further details.

## Israeli airstrikes hit Yemen airport

Jet with hundreds onboard was landing at that time, says UN official

AP ■ UNITED NATIONS

Israeli airstrikes hit Yemen's main airport as a civilian Airbus 320 with hundreds of passengers on board was landing and a UN delegation was waiting to leave, the UN's top humanitarian official in Yemen said Friday.

Julien Harneis told UN reporters that the most frightening thing about the two airstrikes on Thursday wasn't their effect on him and about 15 others in the VIP lounge at the international airport in Yemen's capital, Sanaa, including the head of the UN World Health Organisation.

Rather, it was the destruction of the airport control tower as a Yemenia Airways plane was taxiing in after touching down.

"Fortunately, that plane was able to land safely and the passengers were able to disembark, but it could have been far, far worse," said Harneis, who was with WHO Director-General Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus in the lounge.

He said one airstrike landed approximately 300 metres (330

yards) south of the VIP lounge and another about 300 metres to the north around 4:45 pm, while about five members of the UN team were outside the building.

"Not only obviously did we have zero indication of any potential airstrikes, but we cannot remember the last time there were airstrikes in Sanaa during daylight hours," Harneis said in a video news conference from Sanaa.

The UN said at least three people were killed and dozens injured in the strike. Among the injured was a crew member from the UN Humanitarian Air Service, which was about to fly the UN delegation of some 20 people out of Sanaa.

He suffered a serious leg injury from shrapnel and lost a lot of blood, Harneis said.

Immediately after the airstrikes, Harneis said, UN security officials moved the delegation out of the VIP building and into five armoured cars where they waited for approximately 40 minutes to ascertain what happened and help the injured crew member.

He was taken to a hospital in

Sanaa and underwent four hours of surgery while the rest of the delegation spent the night in a UN compound, Harneis said. The UN plane with Tedros and the UN team, including the injured crew member, was able to depart for Jordan on Friday afternoon — without an operating control tower.

The United Nations said the injured crew member was taken to a hospital in Jordan, and Tedros was heading back to Geneva, where WHO is based.

Yemen's Iran-backed Houthi rebels, who control Sanaa and much of the country's north, have gone after Israel since it started attacking Gaza following the Oct 7, 2023 attacks by Gaza's Hamas militants on southern Israel. The Houthis have attacked ships in the Red Sea, disrupting one of the world's main maritime routes, and recently stepped up missile and drone attacks on Israel.

Israel has escalated its response. The Israeli army said it wasn't aware that the WHO chief or UN delegation were at the

Sanaa airport on Thursday. Israel said it bombed the airport because it is used by the Houthis and Iran.

Harneis responded, stressing that the airport is civilian, not military, and is used for transporting UN and other humanitarian workers, and for one civilian flight — Yemenia to and from Amman, Jordan. The flight operates as a result of an international agreement, and thousands of Yemenis have used the flight to get advanced medical treatment abroad, he said.

Yemen is the Arab world's poorest nation and has been engulfed in a 10-year civil war between the Houthi rebels, who control Sanaa and much of the country's north, and the internationally recognised government forces in the south.

Tedros was in the country to discuss its worsening humanitarian crisis and to seek the release of about 50 people detained by the Houthis since June from the UN, nongovernmental organisations and civil society.

Harneis said 18 million

Yemenis — about half the country's population — need humanitarian assistance this year, and the UN expects the number to increase to 19 million next year because of the worsening economy.

In addition to airstrikes on the Sanaa airport, Israel has been attacking the country's key port of Hodeida, in western Yemen. Harneis said Yemen relies on imports through Hodeida for 80% of its food and more than 90% of its medical supplies to the north.

A recent Israeli airstrike destroyed two tugboats and is estimated to have reduced the harbor's capacity by 50%, the UN official said, while damage from Thursday's airstrikes hasn't been assessed yet.

As for the detainees, Harneis said he joined the WHO chief at meetings with the Houthi prime minister, foreign minister and a member of the group's Supreme Political Council. He said they received commitments on the detainees' possible release and a pathway to it, and on conditions under which they are being held.

## Trump asks Supreme Court to delay TikTok ban

PTI ■ WASHINGTON

US President-elect Donald Trump asked the Supreme Court on Friday to pause the potential TikTok ban from going into effect until his administration can pursue a "political resolution" to the issue.

The request came as TikTok and the Biden administration filed opposing briefs to the court, in which the company argued the court should strike down a law that could ban the platform by Jan 19 while the government emphasised its position that the statute is needed to eliminate a national security risk.

"President Trump takes no position on the underlying merits of this dispute. Instead, he respectfully requests that the Court consider staying the Act's deadline for divestment of

January 19, 2025, while it considers the merits of this case," said Trump's amicus brief, which supported neither party in the case and was written by D John Sauer, Trump's choice for solicitor general.

The argument submitted to the court is the latest example of Trump inserting himself in national issues before he takes office.

The Republican president-elect has already begun negotiating with other countries over his plans to impose tariffs, and he intervened earlier this month in a plan to fund the federal government, calling for a bipartisan plan to be rejected and sending Republicans back to the negotiating table.

He has been holding meetings with foreign leaders and business officials at his Mar-a-Lago club in Florida while he assembles his administration,

including a meeting last week with TikTok CEO Shou Chew. Trump has reversed his position on the popular app, having tried to ban it during his first term in office over national security concerns. He joined the TikTok during his 2024 presidential campaign and his team used it to connect with younger voters, especially male voters, by pushing content that was often macho and aimed at going viral.

He said earlier this year that he still believed there were national security risks with TikTok, but that he opposed banning it.

The filings Friday come ahead of oral arguments scheduled for Jan 10 on whether the law, which requires TikTok to divest from its China-based parent company or face a ban, unlawfully restricts speech in violation of the First Amendment.

The law was signed by President Joe Biden in April after it passed Congress with broad bipartisan support. TikTok and ByteDance filed a legal challenge afterwards.

Earlier this month, a panel of three federal judges on the US Court of Appeals for the District of Columbia Circuit unanimously upheld the statute, leading TikTok to appeal the case to the Supreme Court.

The brief from Trump said he opposes banning TikTok at this juncture and "seeks the ability to resolve the issues at hand through political means once he takes office."

In their brief to the Supreme Court on Friday, attorneys for TikTok and its parent company ByteDance argued the federal appeals court erred in its ruling and based its decision on "alleged risks" that China could

exercise control" over TikTok's US platform by pressuring its foreign affiliates.

The Biden administration has argued in court that TikTok poses a national security risk due to its connections to China. Officials say Chinese authorities can compel ByteDance to hand over information on TikTok's US patrons or use the platform to spread or suppress information.

But the government "concedes that it has no evidence China has ever attempted to do so," TikTok's legal filing said, adding that the US fears are predicated on future risks.

In its filing Friday, the Biden administration said because TikTok "is integrated with ByteDance and relies on its proprietary engine developed and maintained in China," its corporate structure carries with it risk.

## Israel detains director of Gaza hospital

AP ■ DEIR AL-BALAH

Israel's army detained the director of one of northern Gaza's last functioning hospitals as overnight strikes in the territory killed nine people, including children, Palestinian medical officials said Saturday.

Gaza's Health Ministry said Dr Hussam Abu Safiya, director of Kamal Adwan Hospital, was arrested by Israeli forces Friday along with dozens of other staff and taken to an interrogation centre. The ministry said Israeli troops stormed the hospital and forced many staff and patients outside and told them to strip in winter weather, according to the ministry.

Israel's army didn't respond to questions about the director. On Friday, it denied it had entered or set fire to the hospital complex but acknowledged it had ordered people outside, and said it was conducting operations against Hamas infrastructure and militants in the area.

The military repeated claims that Hamas militants operate inside Kamal Adwan but provided no evidence. Hospital officials have denied that.

The hospital has been hit multiple times over the past three months by Israeli troops waging an offensive in largely isolated northern Gaza against Hamas fighters it says have regrouped. The health ministry said a strike on the hospital earlier this week killed five medical personnel.

MedGlobal, the humanitarian organisation for which Abu Safiya worked, said Friday it was gravely concerned about him. It said the incident follows the October detention of five other staff, calling it an "alarming and egregious pattern of targeting medical personnel and spaces."

Israel's nearly 15-month-old campaign of bombardment and ground offensives has devastated Gaza's health sector. The World Health Organisation has said the raid on Kamal Adwan has put northern Gaza's last major health facility "out of service" after growing restrictions on access, adding that "this horror must end and healthcare must be protected."

The Health Ministry said conditions for Kamal Adwan patients who were relocated to the damaged Indonesian Hospital nearby — "also raided in the past — were "extremely difficult."

The war has killed more than 45,400 Palestinians, over half of them women and children, and wounded more than 108,000 others, according to the Health Ministry. Its count does not distinguish between civilians and combatants.

Since October, Israel's offensive has virtually sealed off the northern Gaza areas of Jabaliya, Beit Hanoun and Beit Lahiya and leveled large parts of them. Tens of thousands of Palestinians were forced out but thousands are believed to

remain in the area where Kamal Adwan and two other hospitals are located.

Israel has vowed to destroy Hamas after the militants' Oct. 7, 2023, attack on southern Israel in which they killed around 1,200 people and abducted some 250 others. Some 100 Israelis remain captive in Gaza, around a third believed to be dead.

Israel continued attacks across Gaza on Saturday. An overnight strike killed at least nine people in Maghazi, including women and children, according to staff at Al-Aqsa Martyrs Hospital where they were taken and an Associated Press reporter who saw the bodies. Men cried as the bodies, wrapped in bloodied white plastic, lay on the floor of the morgue.

The Health Ministry said Saturday that 48 people had been killed in the past 24 hours by Israeli fire.

Meanwhile, Israel said its troops had begun operating in the northern city of Beit Hanoun, citing intelligence that fighters and Hamas infrastructure were in the area.

Strikes also continued in Israel. Air raid sirens sounded early Saturday and the military said it intercepted a missile fired by Yemen's Iran-backed Houthi rebels. Israeli warplanes bombed key infrastructure in Yemen again on Thursday. The Houthis also have been attacking shipping in the Red Sea and say they won't stop until Israel agrees to a ceasefire in Gaza.

## Italy's parliament approves budget

AP ■ ROME

Italy's parliament on Saturday approved the government's 2025 budget, worth about 30 billion euros (USD 31 billion) in tax cuts and social security contributions for low-income citizens.

The measures, pushed by the far-right cabinet headed by Premier Giorgia Meloni, won final approval in the Upper House by 108 votes to 63. The country's centre-left opposition had harshly criticised the economic package, saying it didn't meet the premier's pledges to slash taxes for most Italians and boost employment.

## Afghan forces target Pakistan in retaliation for deadly airstrikes

AP ■ KABUL

Afghanistan's Defence Ministry said Saturday that its forces hit several points inside Pakistan in retaliation for deadly airstrikes last week.

Pakistan last Tuesday launched an operation to destroy a training facility and kill insurgents in Afghanistan's eastern Paktika province. The strikes killed dozens of people, mostly women and children. Comments from the Taliban Defence Ministry on

Saturday, posted on X, said its forces targeted Pakistani points that "served as centres and hideouts for malicious elements and their supporters who organised and coordinated attacks in Afghanistan."

Ministry spokesperson Enayatullah Khwarzami gave no further information about the strikes, including how they were carried out and if there were any casualties on either side.

However, a pro-Taliban media outlet, Hurriyet Daily News,

cited ministry sources as saying that the strikes killed 19 Pakistani troops and three Afghan civilians. No one from Pakistan's Foreign Ministry was immediately available for comment. People celebrated Afghanistan's retaliation in the country's southeastern Khost province, according to the organiser, Rasheedullah Hamdard.

Thousands turned out to show their happiness and assure the Afghan military of their support against Pakistan. Khost neighbours Paktika, which was target-

ed last week. "All of them were chanting angry slogans against this action by Pakistan, such as death to Pakistan," Hamdard said. "All Afghans are brothers, so it is necessary that the nation and government show their pride in their blood." Pakistani officials have accused the Taliban of not doing enough to combat cross-border militant activity, a charge the Taliban government denies, saying it does not allow anyone to carry out attacks against any country from its soil.

## Most US adults to make new year resolutions, says survey

AP ■ NEW YORK

If you're planning on ringing in the new year quietly at home, you're not alone.

A majority of US adults intend to celebrate New Year's Eve at home, according to a new poll by The Associated Press-NORC Centre for Public Affairs Research.

"As I've gotten older over the last few years, it's like if I don't make it to midnight, it's not a big deal, you know?" says Carla Woods, 70, from Vinton, Iowa. Nearly 2 in 10 will be celebrating at a friend or family member's home, and just 5% plan to go out to celebrate at a bar, restaurant or organized event, the poll found.

But many US adults will celebrate the new year in a different way — by making a resolution. More than half say they'll make at least one resolution for 2025.

There's some optimism about the year ahead, although more than half aren't expecting a positive change. About 4 in 10 say 2025 will be a better year for them personally. About one-third don't expect much of a difference between 2024 and 2025, and about one-quarter think 2025 will be a worse year than 2024.

**Relaxed New Year's Eve plans for many:** Kourtney Kershaw, a 32-year-old bartender in

Chicago, often fields questions from customers and friends about upcoming events for New Year's Eve. She said this year is trending toward low-key. "A majority of who I've spoken to in my age range, they want to go out, but they don't know what they're going to do because they haven't found anything or things are just really expensive," she said.

"Party packages or an entry fee are like a turnoff, especially with the climate of the world and how much things cost."

As expected, younger people are more interested in ringing in the new year at a bar or organised event — about 1 in 10 US adults under 30 say they plan to do that. But about 3 in 10 older adults — 60 and above — say they won't celebrate the beginning of 2025 at all.

Anthony Tremblay, 35, from Pittsburgh, doesn't usually go out to toast the arrival of the new year, but this year he's got something special cooked up: He and his wife will be traveling through Ireland.

"I don't do anything too crazy for New Year's, usually. So this is definitely a change," he said. "I wanted to do something unique this year, so I did."

Woods will be working New Year's Eve and New Year's Day. She answers calls on The Iowa Warmline, a confidential, non-

crisis listening line for people struggling with mental health or substance use issues.

"Holidays are really hard for people, so I don't mind working," she said. "I'm passionate about it because I have mental health issues in the family and so being able to help people is rewarding to me."

**Younger Americans are more likely to make a resolution:** Every New Year's also triggers the eternal debate about resolutions. A majority of US adults say they intend to make a New Year's resolution of some type, but millennials and Gen Z are especially likely to be on board — about two-thirds expect to do so, compared to about half of older adults. Women are also more likely than men to say they will set a goal for 2025.

Tremblay hopes to lose some weight and focus more on self-care — more sleep, meditation and breathing exercises. "It's probably a good year to focus on mental health," he said.

Many others agree. About 3 in 10 adults choose resolutions involving exercise or eating healthier. About one-quarter said they'll make a resolution involving losing weight and a similar number said they'll resolve to make changes about priorities of money or mental health.

Woods' resolutions are to stay

social and active. As a mental health counsellor, she knows those are key to a happy 2025 and beyond: "Probably one of my biggest resolutions is trying to make sure I stay social, try to get out at least once a week — get out and either have coffee or do something with a friend. That's not only for the physical but also for the mental health part."

Kershaw, the bartender, says weight loss and better health are the top resolutions she hears people make. "Mental health is the new one, but I think it's high up there as well as with regular health," she said.

She prefers more goal-oriented resolutions and, this time, it's to do more travelling and see more of the world: "I don't know if that's really a resolution, but that's a goal that I'm setting." And how will she welcome the arrival of 2025? Usually, she takes the night off and stays home watching movies with plenty of snacks, but this year Kershaw has a different plan, maybe one of the most Chicago things you can do.

This die-hard sports fan will be at Wrigley Field on Tuesday watching the Chicago Blackhaws take on the St. Louis Blues. "Hockey's my favourite sport. So I will be watching hockey and bringing in the new year," she said.

## BNP criticises Yunus' suggestion to lower voting age to 17

PTI ■ DHAKA

The Bangladesh Nationalist Party (BNP) on Saturday said that Chief Adviser Muhammad Yunus' suggestion to set the minimum voting age at 17 would put pressure on the Election Commission and could delay the election process.

Yunus, 84, who was sworn-in to lead the interim government after the ouster of former prime minister Sheikh Hasina in August, on Friday suggested that the minimum voter age should be lowered to 17 years, The Dhaka Tribune newspaper

reported.

In a video message played in an election dialogue, Yunus said, "To give their (youth) opinion on their own future, I think the voting age for them should be fixed at 17 years."

BNP secretary general Mirza Fakhrul Islam Alamgir, during a discussion at the Jatiya Press Club here, said the chief adviser's suggestion to lower the voting age to 17 means a new voter list would have to be prepared.

"Now, people will fear that even more time will be wasted and further delays will occur," he was quoted as saying.

Alamgir said there is an

impression among the people that the interim government is deliberately trying to delay the election process. "But that is not my perception," he added.

The BNP leader said the chief adviser should not have raised the issue without first consulting the stakeholders.

"You are the chief executive, and you said that 17 years is better. When you say this, it becomes binding on the Election Commission," he said.

Alamgir said the government should have left the matter to the Election Commission, allowing it to make a decision. He said that the current mini-

mum age of 18 for becoming a voter is acceptable to all.

"If you want to reduce it by one year, then let the new Election Commission propose it and engage in discussions with the political parties," the BNP leader said.

During his Victory Day speech on December 16, Yunus indicated that elections might be held by early 2026.

"Broadly speaking, the election can be scheduled between the end of 2025 and the first half of 2026," he said.

Yunus said that the elections would be held after updating the voters' list.

## 9th telecom firm hit by massive Chinese espionage campaign, White House says

AP ■ WASHINGTON

A ninth US telecom firm has been confirmed to have been hacked as part of a sprawling Chinese espionage campaign that gave officials in Beijing access to private texts and phone conversations of an unknown number of Americans, a top White House official has said.

Biden administration

officials said this month that at least eight telecommunications companies, as well as dozens of nations, had been affected by the Chinese hacking blitz known as Salt Typhoon.

But deputy national security adviser Anne Neuberger told reporters Friday that a ninth victim had been identified after the administration released guidance to companies

about how to hunt for Chinese culprits in their networks.

The update from Neuberger is the latest development in a massive hacking operation that has alarmed national security officials, exposed cybersecurity vulnerabilities in the private sector and laid bare China's hacking sophistication.

The hackers compromised the networks of telecommuni-

cations companies to obtain customer call records and gain access to the private communications of what officials have said is a limited number of individuals. Though the FBI has not publicly identified any of the victims, officials believe senior US government officials and prominent political figures are among those whose whose communications were accessed.



# Gutsy Reddy's maiden ton keeps India afloat

PTI ■ MELBOURNE

Nitish Reddy, an unknown entity in red ball cricket before the start of Border-Gavaskar series, virtually bailed India out with his dogged maiden Test century here on Saturday, severely denting Australia's hopes of winning the Boxing Day contest.

Reddy's unbeaten 105 took India to 358 for nine, still 116 runs short of Australia's first innings score of 474 as rain brought an early end to the third day's play.

With the flat MCG deck not offering much to the bowlers, saving the Test match shouldn't be a big deal for India. Reddy, easily India's 'find of the series', played a pivotal role in visitors' fightback.

Reddy's combative spirit and the invaluable 127-run stand he shared with Washington Sundar (50 off 162 balls) proved to be the turning point for the hosts.

Reddy's innings was termed as one of greatest Test knocks by the legendary Sunil Gavaskar given the situation as India were in a precarious

position after Rishabh Pant's dismissal courtesy a rash shot had left India tottering at 191 for six.

The young Andhra batter could have been stranded on 99 when Jasprit Bumrah got dismissed, leaving Reddy with last-man in Mohammed Siraj, who walked in to another round of boos and faced three deliveries from home skipper Pat Cummins.

Both Reddy and his father Muthyala's expressions changed with each ball but Siraj survived to allow Reddy savour the moment he must have dreamt a thousand times.

A picture-perfect straight drive off Scott Boland was the moment of the series for India as Reddy balanced his helmet with the bat and took a knee, expressing his gratitude towards the Indian dug-out which gave him a standing ovation.

The 21-year-old struck the 'Pushpa' pose after completing his fifty and aced the 'Salaar' pose to celebrate the century.

A decade back, when his father Muthyala left a secured job to open a micro-



finance (lending) business and incurred losses, the Reddy family was advised not to give wings to young Reddy's cricketing dreams but they were unrelenting.

Sitting in the stands near the boundary, Reddy's father broke down when his son achieved the milestone.

As Indian fans clicked selfies with him it must have reminded of the day when his son received the best U-16 cricketer award from the BCCI in 2017, and an impressionable Reddy was seen clicking selfie with his idol Virat Kohli and his wife Anushka Sharma while leaving the hotel premises.

Reddy's batting was based on stable core, playing the ball late and only going for the drive when the ball was pitched up. He wasn't defending unnecessarily and 10 fours and a six was a testimony to that.

If the morning was more about Rishabh Pant's inexplicable shot selection, the afternoon session belonged to Reddy, whose attacking game put the pressure right back on Australia.

There were plenty of boundaries and a six off Nathan Lyon but none more gorgeous than the off-drive off Cummins. Reddy has been by far India's most consistent batter in the series and the maiden Test century couldn't have come at a more opportune time and that too at an iconic venue.

Washington, at the other end, grew in confidence and trusted his defence apart from punishing the loose deliveries. It did help that the drop-in surface at the MCG has got better for batting as the match progressed.

The second new ball did very little for Australian bowlers and the Indian duo ran very well between the wickets. With Mitchell Starc's back acting up a little, the two batters looked to reduce the deficit further.

In the morning it was all about Pant's shot selection that hurt India.

The third day's MCG track is perhaps the best to bat on with green grass making way for a brownish tinge and an old Kookaburra hardly doing anything.

Had Pant stuck around,

there was no way he wouldn't have scored big. Pant did start well and got a few boundaries but then the urge to play the falling lap pull over long-leg brought about his dismissal.

When he tried it for the first time off Scott Boland, who came round the wicket, Pant was hit in the naval area and seemed to be in pain.

He got up but didn't realise that Cummins had placed one fielder at deep fine-leg and one at deep third man for both the conventional and reverse lap shot.

Without learning his lessons or caring about success percentage, Pant tried a similar shot but the extra bounce meant that the top edge flew to third man for a regulation catch.

"If there was a word called 'worstest', then this was one such shot," former India skipper Sunil Gavaskar said on air.

But Reddy showed steely resolve as he started with a punchy off-drive off Lyon and also jumped down the track to loft him over for a straight six during a splendid recovery act.

## Nitish Reddy: Story of sacrifices made by middle class family

PTI ■ MELBOURNE

Nitish Reddy loves his tattoos like most 21-year-olds do, and one on his ankle is a picture of 'Achilles' Heel'. He considers it a reminder of all the difficulties that his family has endured in the last 10 years to power his cricketing dream.

For Reddy, becoming a cricketer was both a choice and a compulsion. He wanted to do something for his parents, who gave their tears and sweat to fuel his India dream.

The middle-class family gambled with its finances to allow Reddy soar high. The risks taken and losses suffered will not bother them now.

"Getting into the Indian team is a proud feeling but it is only 50 percent of the dream. It will be fulfilled if I can wear that jersey and win matches for my country," an emotional Reddy had told PTI in June this year.

"I want to see respect for my father in the eyes of those who once tore him to shreds for believing in my talent."

The maiden Test ton

celebration in 'Salaar' style was a tribute to his father Muthyala, who watched his son rescue India from the stand behind team's dug-out.

The journey was not just Reddy's but also of his father's sacrifices and belief that his son was special.

As a 12 year-old, Reddy overheard his relatives cursing his father for losing money in his micro-financing business after taking a voluntary retirement from service (VRS) from Hindustan Zinc.

He took the decision to avoid getting transferred to Udaipur since he knew the city did not have the facilities and coaching to help his son excel as a cricketer.

He invested the payout of Rs 20 lakh to start his business. However, his friends, who took loan from him never returned the amount, resulting in massive losses.

"I could hear those discussions and even as a 12-year old, I understood everything. It was a promise I made to myself that only one thing can redeem my



dad's prestige — an India call-up," Reddy had told back then.

It was the time when he could just afford one bat a year (one good seasoned English willow cost around 15,000 back then. It is close to 50k now for international players).

"I can't tell you how happy I am," Muthyala said, struggling to express his emotions, standing outside the MCG after his son's rescue act.

"Virat sir has told him to work hard," he said. A few years back, Reddy was adjudged the best U-16 cricketer by the BCCI and

he attended the Annual Awards Function in Bengaluru.

The entire Indian team was in attendance and the 14-year-old was desperate for a selfie with Kohli and his wife Anushka, who were waiting near the elevator of the hotel.

Kohli was in a hurry but obliged and it became a memorable moment for young Reddy. Now getting applauded for his effort by his idol is an unforgettable memory for him.

Reddy's family also can't thank enough former Andhra Cricket Association's head MSK

Prasad for enrolling him in its state-of-the-art academy in Visakhapatnam.

"Initially, he was placed in our U-14 academy, located far from his hometown. However, his parents encouraged him to pursue his dreams, and he steadily progressed through our academies. Nitish eventually earned a spot in India's U-19 team, showcasing his skill and determination," Prasad recently told PTI.

In 2023, Reddy secured spot in India's Emerging Asia Cup team but was dropped after playing a few games. The squad had players like Yash Dhull, Nishant Sindhu, who are far away from national reckoning.

There are certain events that change the course of one's career and that Emerging Asia Cup made him realise that to make a mark at the international level, he needed to think out of the box. "I started spending more time at the nets and also hired a few side arm specialists (throwdown) available in Vizag and practised for a month. "They were all hurling the

ball at 145 clicks and initially I found it hard. And then by the end of the month got adjusted. That practice went a long way when I played IPL this season where I could hit sixes," he had said.

His SRH skipper Pat Cummins might be smiling quietly and thinking aloud as to why he told Reddy that he has the potential to play for India and develop into a good all-rounder.

India head coach Gautam Gambhir also deserves credit for putting his foot down for having Reddy Down Under after watching his exploits in a T20 series against Bangladesh.

It was a leap of faith and Reddy is now the 'find of the series' for India. On the Christmas Day, when everyone was fretting about India's combination, Sanjay Manjrekar had questioned, "Will Leaving Reddy out give India a better balance?" On Saturday, one of Reddy's sponsors, a popular sports equipment and apparel brand quote tweeted Manjrekar with the cricketer's pic urged the cricket pundit to keep quiet.

## Nick Kyrgios heavily criticizes Sinner, Swiatek for doping-related issues

AP ■ BRISBANE



Just days away from his return to tennis at the Brisbane International, Nick Kyrgios hasn't minced his words in referring to doping-related charges against Jannik Sinner and Iga Swiatek, labelling breaches of the sport's anti-doping program as "disgusting for our sport."

The International Tennis Integrity Agency (ITIA) levelled charges against world No.1 Sinner and former world No.1 Iga Swiatek. Sinner tested positive twice for an anabolic steroid in March, but avoided a ban because the ITIA determined he was not to blame.

Swiatek also accepted a one-month suspension in November after testing positive for the banned substance trimetazidine.

"Two world No.1s both getting done for doping is disgusting for our sport. It's a horrible look," Kyrgios said at his Brisbane International

press conference on Saturday. "Tennis integrity right now, and everyone knows it but no one wants to speak about it, it's awful." Kyrgios, 29, has not played tournament tennis since June 2023 due to wrist and knee injuries. He was asked about his motivations for speaking out on the Sinner and Swiatek situations.

"Someone like me ... I would never even in my entire life ever try and dope in this sport," he said. "Especially going through an injury like I went through, obviously there are things out there that could speed up healing, help me get back to prime level, help my recovery."

## Carlsen disqualified from top chess meet for violating dress code

PTI ■ NEW YORK

Five-time world champion Magnus Carlsen was first fined and then disqualified from the World Rapid and Blitz Chess Championship here for his refusal to comply with the FIDE's dress code after turning up in jeans here.

Defending champion Carlsen was fined USD 200 for wearing jeans, which are "explicitly prohibited" under tournament regulations and when he refused the request to change his attire right after the eighth round by chief arbiter Alex Holowczak, he was disqualified.

He was not paired for Round 9 of the Rapid championship, taking place at Wall Street.

One of the game's greatest players, the Norwegian ace had agreed to follow the dress code from the next day but was not ready to do it immediately, resulting in his disqualification.

"I would rather be at someplace with better weather," was how Carlsen summed up his disqualification from the championship in which he has won in the last two editions.

In a statement, the game's global governing body FIDE emphasised that the dress code rules are well-communicated to all participants and designed to ensure professionalism.

"The dress code regulations are drafted by members of the FIDE Athletes Commission, which is composed of professional players and experts. These rules have been in place for years and are well-known to all participants and are communicated to



them ahead of each event," FIDE said in the statement, posted on X.

"FIDE has also ensured that the players' accommodation is within a short walking distance from the playing venue, making adherence to the rules more convenient."

It added, "Today, Mr. Magnus Carlsen breached the dress code by wearing jeans, which are explicitly prohibited under long-standing regulations for this event. The Chief Arbiter informed Mr. Carlsen of the breach, issued a USD 200 fine, and requested that he change his attire."

"Unfortunately, Mr. Carlsen declined, and as a result, he was not paired for round nine. This decision was made impartially and applies equally to all players."

Earlier, Russian Grandmaster Ian Nepomniachtchi was also penalised for a similar violation but he complied by changing his attire, allowing him to continue in the event.

Meanwhile, "upset" with the turn of events, Carlsen said he won't participate in the Blitz section of the championship as he is "pretty tired" of FIDE's dress code policies. "I am pretty tired of FIDE, so I want no more of this. I don't

want anything to do with them. I am sorry to everyone at home, maybe it's a stupid principle, but I don't think it's any fun," Carlsen told Norwegian broadcasting channel NRK.

"I said I don't want to bother changing now, but I can change until tomorrow, that's fine. But they didn't want to compromise. I've reached a point where I am pretty upset with FIDE, so I didn't want to either. Then that's how it goes," he added.

The Carlsen dress code fiasco is being seen as a signal to the chess world about his keenness to develop the faster version of the game that he considers as a "real skill" as well as his personal interest about developing the "freestyle chess" for which he recently raised USD 12 million.

Freestyle chess, as he prefers to call it, is the version of the game wherein chess pieces can be shuffled in any order. This was an idea propagated by the great Bobby Fischer. "This is a war with FIDE (the game's apex body)," said Norwegian sports broadcaster Kaja Snare before adding that this is the end of an era for world chess.

## Chhetri farewell signals end of an era in forgettable year for Indian football

PTI ■ KOLKATA

Indian football found itself in the throes of despair throughout 2024 with the senior men's team failing to register a single win in a year when the long-serving Sunil Chhetri finally decided to hang up his boots internationally after 19 years of yeoman service.

The familiar sight of the diminutive No. 11 running into the box, deftly chipping the ball into the back of the net, bringing out his trademark 'namaste' celebration, and looking skywards with his fingers pointing to the heavens will forever be etched in the hearts of Indian football fans.

With his record 151 appearances and 94 goals for India, Chhetri became synonymous with the sport in the country, inspiring millions while leading the team with distinction.

The talisman's retirement, at 39, marked a poignant end in a year of more lows than highs with the men's national team facing transitional challenges and failing to notch a single win across 12 months for the first time in a decade.

"You don't wish to stop playing for the country. But one day you have to, and you will be fine. Finally, I reached this decision. And I think I made the right decision," an emotional Chhetri had said after his decision to retire.

India's FIFA World Cup qualifier against Kuwait was his last appearance for the country. On June 6, in his final match at Salt Lake Stadium, 58,921 fans gathered to bid farewell



to the legend but the game ended in a goalless draw, much to the disappointment of his supporters.

It was a night heavy with emotion, as Indian football lost its torchbearer, the unifying figure who had carried the sport on his shoulders for nearly two decades. The national team has never been the same since his retirement.

World Cup Qualifiers debacle

The disappointing exit from the second round of FIFA World Cup Qualifiers was followed by the acrimonious sacking of head coach Igor Stimac, a year before his contract expired.

Stimac initially demanded USD 920,000 (Rs 7.72 crore) as compensation and approached the game's governing body FIFA after rejecting the All India Football Federation's (AIFF) offer of first three, then five, and finally 10 months' salary as settlement.

The matter escalated before both parties reached an

agreement, setting the national federation back by USD 400,000.

Stimac was earlier given an extension until 2026 on the condition of reaching the quarterfinals of the AFC Asian Cup but India finished last in their group after failing to win a single match.

Manolo Marquez, a familiar face in Indian football having led Hyderabad FC to an ISL title in 2022, was appointed as the new head coach in July while keeping his job at FC Goa till the end of the ongoing season.

But his appointment failed to turn around India's fortunes as the team lost once and drew thrice under the Spaniard.

The Indian team ended the year with a 1-1 draw against Malaysia. In all, the side played 11 matches and suffered six losses in a forgettable year. The lack of results reflected in their rankings as the team slipped to 126 in the FIFA chart from 102 in December last year.

At club level, Mohun Bagan

and Mumbai City FC continued their dominance with the two teams winning the Shield and ISL title respectively.

There was, however, also a setback for Mohun Bagan who were considered 'withdrawn' from the AFC Champions League 2 after refusing to travel to Iran for their match against Tractor SC on October 2, citing security concerns amid political unrest in that part of the world.

The Asian Football Confederation (AFC) cancelled all of Mohun Bagan's matches in the competition, considering them null and void. This followed the club's goalless draw against Ravshan Kulob in their opening Group A match at Salt Lake Stadium.

The year proved to be a historic one for Odisha FC who secured a spot in the AFC Women's Champions League Group Stage after topping their preliminary stage group with two wins, including a 4-1 victory over Lion City Sailors and a 2-1 win against Etihad Club.

There was also a tug of war between bitter rivals Mohun Bagan and East Bengal over one of the finest centrebacks Anwar Ali, leading to legal battles over his contract.

Controversy off the field The sport also had its share of off-the-field controversies with some questioning AIFF president Kalyan Chaubey's leadership following the termination of Nilanjan Bhattacharjee, the head of the national federation's legal body.

Chaubey faced allegations of mishandling tender processes

and using AIFF funds for personal expenses from the ousted Bhattacharjee.

Former India captain Bhaichung Bhutia also called for Chaubey's resignation citing "issues" with AIFF's administration.

If that was not enough, the federation found itself embroiled in a new controversy over its handling of the broadcasting rights for the I-League 2024-25 season.

After initially entering into a deal with Sony for the coverage of matches, the AIFF abruptly switched to Shracchi Sports, an inexperienced entity. The move led to sponsor concerns, with club owners threatening to withdraw teams if proper broadcasting arrangements aren't made.

The AIFF, though, denied any wrongdoing. Future tense

The Indian team is currently in a transition phase, with head coach Marquez experimenting with various combinations and giving opportunities to a group of promising youngsters to identify the next No. 10.

However, the team remains unsettled, with the veteran duo of Gurpreet Singh Sandhu and Sandesh Jhingam carrying significant responsibility at the back.

Following a challenging year, Marquez faces the task of steering India to a third consecutive AFC Asian Cup qualification.

The Blue Tigers are placed in a competitive Group C and will face Hong Kong, Singapore, and Bangladesh after beginning their campaign on March 25 next year.





# THE YEAR THAT WAS: FASHION



A year of creativity, celebration and heartfelt goodbyes, 2024 showcased Indian fashion's evolving soul and the stories it tells, writes **SAKSHI PRIYA**

PHOTOS : PANKAJ KUMAR

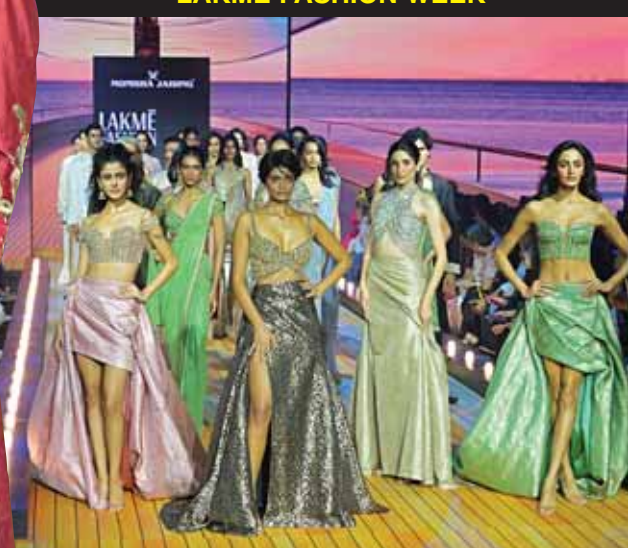
## INDIAN COUTURE WEEK



In July, Fashion in 2024, showcased at *Indian Couture Week*, celebrated Indian craftsmanship with bold innovation. Designers like *Abu Jani Sandeep Khosla* infused traditional embroidery with modern silhouettes, while *Amit Aggarwal's ANTE VORTA* featured futuristic metallics. *ASAL's MARD* redefined menswear with gender-fluid designs and *Falguni Shane Peacock's Pang Mahal* exudes opulence. *Jayanti Reddy* highlighted understated elegance, *Gaurav Gupta* stunned with sculptural draping and *Rahul Mishra* merged nature-inspired motifs with intricate embroidery. *JJ Valaya* added royal grandeur, while *Dolly J* showcased ethereal designs, alongside many others who enriched the event. The year embraced sustainability, inclusivity and modern aesthetics, marking a milestone in Indian couture.

Fashion is the art of self-expression, a canvas where creativity meets elegance, a place where every stitch tells a story and every design carries a vision. As we bid farewell to 2024, this year has truly proven to be a defining moment in the world of fashion. From the grand showcases at *Indian Couture Week* to the dazzling displays at *Lakmé Fashion Week*, Delhi has been the stage for timeless elegance and bold creativity. Designers like *Rahul Mishra*, *Gaurav Gupta* and *Ravi Bajaj* have brought their unique touch to Indian fashion, seamlessly blending tradition with modern innovation. The year culminated in *Rohit Bal's* emotional final show, marking the end of a legendary era. As we look forward to the exciting promises of 2025, we wish our readers a year ahead filled with inspiration, style, and unforgettable moments in the ever-evolving world of fashion.

## LAKME FASHION WEEK



In October 2024, the fashion world was treated to an unforgettable display of Indian craftsmanship and innovation. *Péro* by *Aneeth Arora* opened the season with its enchanting "HELLO péro" collection, which creatively blended nostalgia and modernity. *Kalki's* "Mushk" collection wowed with its intricate handwoven embroidery, while *Monisha Jaising's* luxurious designs made a bold statement. *Payal Pratap's* work elegantly fused traditional techniques with contemporary silhouettes. *Samanth Chauhan's* showcase stood out with his unique handloom weaves and rich textures. The grand finale, presented by *Rohit Bal*, unveiled his breathtaking "Kaaynaat: A Bloom in the Universe," where intricate embroidery and flowing fabrics celebrated nature's beauty, leaving a lasting impact with Lakmé muse *Ananya Panday* as the showstopper.

## QUETZALLI BY SUNEET VERMA

*Suneet Verma's* Quetzalli collection fuses Mexican craftsmanship with Indian Couture, celebrating heritage and artistry. *Varma's* Quetzalli collection, in collaboration with *PATRÓN Tequila*, brought together the best of Mexican craftsmanship and Indian couture. The show was a visual feast, with gowns adorned in intricate lacework, metallic motifs and dramatic feather details. The collection, which blended traditional techniques with modern sensibilities, captivated the audience from start to finish. A fitting grand finale left a lasting impression, showcasing *Varma's* genius in weaving cultural stories through couture.



## MISHRU BY SWAPNA ANUMOLU

October in Delhi brought a wave of creativity and couture to the city, with *Resonance 2024/25* by *Mishru* taking centre stage at the Embassy of Belgium. The artistry of *Swapna Anumolu*, whose latest collection beautifully fused nature with urban aesthetics. Each piece told a story, blending intricate craftsmanship and vibrant textures. The highlight of the evening was Bollywood's *Shradha Kapoor*, who graced the runway as the showstopper, effortlessly bringing the collection to life. *Mishru's* stunning fusion of traditional techniques with modern designs marks a new chapter for Indian fashion, embracing both heritage and future innovation.



## THE MAN IN THE MIRROR BY ABHINAV MISHRA

The 2024 couture season brought a stunning celebration of tradition and innovation with *Abhinav Mishra's* "The Man in the Mirror." The collection showcased mirror-work, with pieces like "Kalbeliya" drawing inspiration from Rajasthan's folk dance, featuring bold colours and intricate patterns. From traditional lehengas to contemporary kaftans, *Mishra's* creations blended heritage with modern flair.

## AURUM BY RAVI BAJAJ

*Ravi Bajaj's* new label, "Aurum," made its debut with a stunning fashion show that beautifully combined traditional Indian elements with a modern twist. The collection, focused on wedding wear, featured intricate designs in lace, organza

and pearls, with men's kurtas and womenswear lehengas showcasing timeless elegance. The collection's gold and white colour scheme symbolised prosperity, offering a fresh take on bridal attire. As 2024 ends and the wedding season approaches, "Aurum" stands out, redefining modern wedding wear with grace and sophistication.

## A FAREWELL TO A FASHION ICON

As 2024 unfolds, it has been a year of both celebration and sorrow in the fashion world. We witnessed monumental achievements in design and innovation, but also faced the heart-wrenching loss of *Rohit Bal*, affectionately known as "Gudda." His final show at *Lakmé Fashion Week*, titled "Kaaynaat: A Bloom in the Universe," was a moving tribute to his creative spirit, celebrating the beauty of nature and cosmic wonder. Actress *Ananya Panday*, the showstopper, embodied *Bal's* timeless, graceful vision, while each piece showcased his devotion to beauty, detail and imagination. His legacy will endure.

## BAARAAT BY TASVA BY TARUN TAHILIANI

Men's fashion has evolved dramatically, with 2024 marking a defining year in wedding wear. The spotlight shifted to the modern groom, embracing his individuality and heritage. "BAARAAT by Tasva," a showcase designed by the renowned *Tarun Tahiliani*. The collection featured exquisite sherwanis and bandhgallas, each a perfect blend of tradition and contemporary flair. The collection, with intricate detailing and luxurious fabrics, allowed grooms to shine, making a powerful statement about embracing personal style while honoring their roots.

Get in touch at [vivacity@dailypioneer.com](mailto:vivacity@dailypioneer.com)

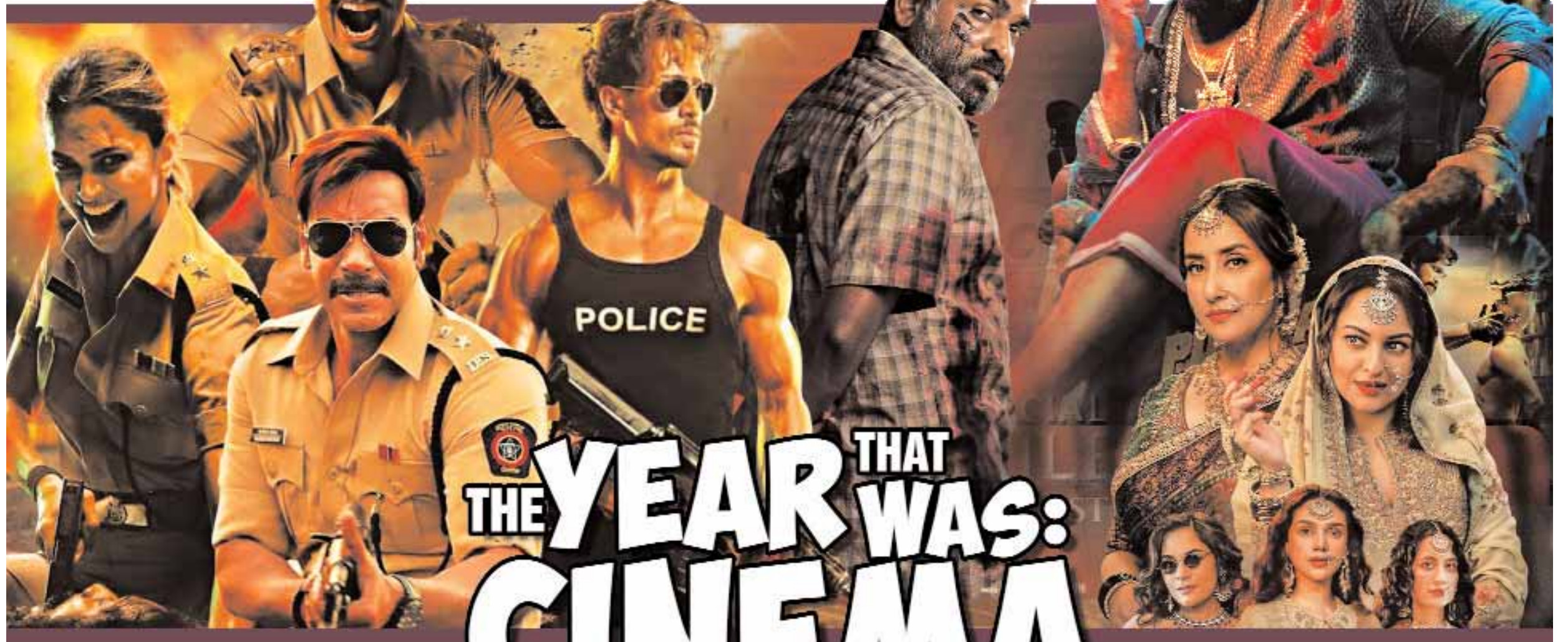
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# the pioneer agenda

"Cinema's characteristic forte is its ability to capture and communicate the intimacies of the human mind"  
— Satyajit Ray



## THE YEAR THAT WAS: CINEMA

2024 has yet again been an amazing year for films, from iconic performances to thrilling narratives and unexpected misses, writes **ABHI SINGHAL**

Cinema has long been a reflection of society, a medium of mass communication, and an instrument for change. From its inception, films have served as more than just a source of entertainment. They have been a mirror to society, amplifying voices, shedding light on pressing issues, and sparking conversations that transcend borders. Over the decades, the cinematic landscape has evolved, offering a fascinating mix of artistry, storytelling, and technical brilliance. This year was no exception.

Looking back at the journey of Indian cinema, it is astonishing to witness its evolution—from the poignant realism of Satyajit Ray's "Pathar Panchali" and the thought-provoking narratives of Shyam Benegal to the visual spectacles crafted by modern filmmakers like S.S. Rajamouli and Sanjay Leela Bhansali. Over 69 years, the industry has grown into a cultural phenomenon, shaping not just entertainment but also the values and ideals of its audience.

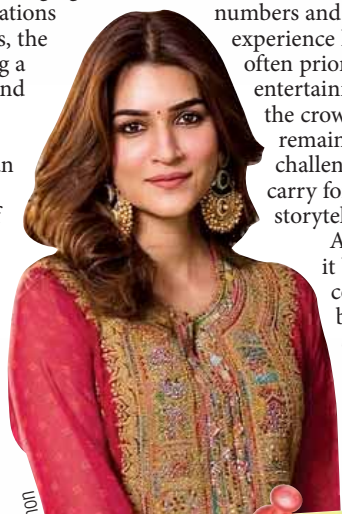
The early years of Indian cinema were driven by socially conscious storytelling, as seen in classics like Shatranj Ke Khilari, Sadgati, and Aparajito. These films addressed societal issues with sensitivity and depth, using the medium to educate and inspire change. Directors like Ray and Benegal paved the way for a golden era where art met purpose, creating a legacy of films that resonated deeply with audiences.

In recent years, however, talking about

films like Pushpa 2, Teri Baaton Mein Aisa Uljha Jiya, Kalki 2898 AD, Kill, and more there has been a discernible shift in the motives behind filmmaking. While the essence of cinema as an art form endures, the industry has leaned heavily towards commercialisation. With a focus on box office numbers and global appeal, the cinematic experience has transformed into a spectacle, often prioritising grandeur and entertainment over substance. Yet, amidst the crowd of mass-market releases, there remain exceptions about the films that challenge norms, provoke thought, and carry forward the tradition of meaningful storytelling.

As we look back at the year that was, it becomes evident that cinema continues to straddle the line between its artistic roots and its commercial aspirations.

The past year has been a testament to the diversity of the medium, offering a mix of groundbreaking narratives, record-breaking successes, and a glimpse into the future of filmmaking will also some flops which didn't do well. This retrospective explores how the industry has evolved over time and examines the key highlights of the cinematic journey this year, from the unforgettable performances to the innovative storytelling that defined 2024.



@kritisanon

### Actor of the year

Kirti Sanon stole 2024 in her name by her stellar, glamorous performances and delivering back to back hit films even with female protagonists loved by the audience.

### TOP 10 FILMS

**Amar Singh Chamkila:** The film takes you through the lives of pop star duo Amar Singh Chamkila and Amarjot Kaur, shedding light on their rise to fame in the 1980s through chart-topping songs.  
**RATING: 4/5**

**Do Patti:** Do Patti is a story of twin sisters, whose troubled relationship is tested by love, betrayal, and redemption. The film explores the themes of domestic violence with standout performances by Kriti Sanon.  
**RATING: 4/5**

**Maharaja:** After his home is broken into, a barber seeks revenge by cryptically telling police that his "lakshmi" has been abducted. The story of his journey to retrieve "lakshmi" begins.  
**RATING: 4/5**

**Bhaiyya Ji:** A retired crime boss is pulled back into a world of bloodshed and violence as he seeks vengeance against those who killed his younger brother, featuring Manoj Bajpayee as Bhaiyya Ji.  
**RATING: 4/5**

**Lucky Bhaskar:** Lucky Bhaskar a Telugu-language period crime drama about a lower-middle-class man who turns to financial scams to overcome debt and humiliation, featuring Dulquer Salmaan in a compelling titular role.  
**RATING: 4/5**

**CTRL:** CTRL is a thriller directed by Vikramaditya Motwane, plotting the dark side of the digital age and the dangers of oversharing online.  
**RATING: 3.5/5**

**Article 370:** The story follows Yami Gautam as a special agent, assigned a high-stakes mission to quell violence in Kashmir and render Article 370 ineffective.  
**RATING: 3.5/5**

**Berlin:** In 1993, the Bureau accused and arrested a deaf-mute young man of spying in New Delhi. An interpreter with expertise in sign language is brought in.  
**RATING: 3/5**



**Laapataa Ladies:** Laapataa Ladies is a humorous and heartwarming tale of identity, empowerment, and self-discovery, marking Kiran Rao's triumphant return to direction.  
**RATING: 4.5/5**



**Sector 36:** Sector 36 is a chilling crime thriller showcasing Vikrant Massey as a psychotic serial killer. The 124-minute drama is a must-watch for crime genre enthusiasts, delivering an unsettling narrative.  
**RATING: 3.5/5**

### WRONG CHOICES (FLOPS)

**Bade Miyan Chote Miyan:** Bade Miyan Chote Miyan is a Hindi sci-fi action film directed by Ali Abbas Zafar, starring Akshay Kumar, Tiger Shroff, and Prithviraj Sukumaran. The story follows two ex-soldiers racing to thwart a vengeful scientist's plan to attack India.

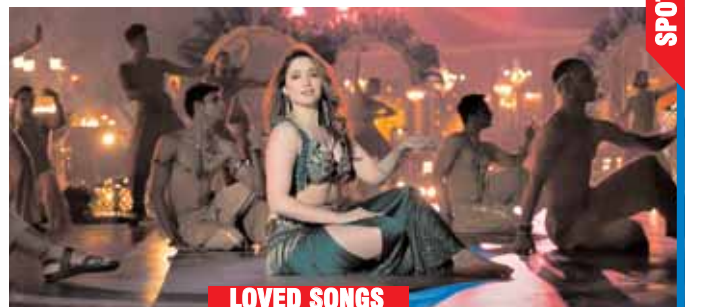
**Sarfira:** Sarfira is a Hindi drama directed by Sudha Kongara, starring Akshay Kumar, Paresh Rawal, and Radhika Madan. A remake of Soorai Potturu, it follows a man's fight to create affordable airlines for low-income people, battling numerous obstacles along the way.

**Maidaan:** Maidaan is a biographical sports drama directed by Amit Ravindernath Sharma, starring Ajay Devgn as Syed Abdul Rahim, a pioneering football coach in India.

**The Buckingham Murders:** The Buckingham Murders is an Indian crime thriller directed by Hansal Mehta, starring Kareena Kapoor Khan as a grieving British-Indian detective investigating a child's murder in Buckinghamshire.



**Yodha:** Yodha an action thriller following Arun Kalyal (Sidharth Malhotra), a former soldier suspended after a failed mission, who is found on a hijacked plane years later. Blamed for the hijacking, Arun seeks revenge against the system.



**Aaj Ki Raat:** Madhubanti Bagchi, Divya Kumar, Sachin -Jigar

MixSingh

**Ve Haaniyaan:** Danny Ft Avvy Sra

**Kaavaalaa:** by Shilpa Rao, Anirudh Ravichander

**Sunian Sunian:** Juss and

### TOP 5 WEB SERIES

**1 Jamnapaar:** Jamnapaar is a series on Amazon Mini TV about Shanky Bansal, a young man from East Delhi grappling with identity and aspirations. Struggling with feelings of inferiority, Shanky disowns his roots but eventually learns to embrace and take pride in them.

**2 Gyaarah Gyaarah:** Gyaarah Gyaarah, streaming on Zee5, is an Indian adaptation of the South Korean series Signal. It blends time travel, suspense, and crime drama across three timelines.

**3 Heeramandi:** Airing on Netflix, Heeramandi: The Diamond Bazaar is a 2024 Hindi period drama by Sanjay Leela Bhansali, exploring the lives of tawaifs in Lahore's Heera Mandi during India's independence struggle. The star-studded cast includes Manisha Koirala, Sonakshi Sinha, and Aditi Rao Hydari.

**4 Mirzapur Season 3:** The third season of Mirzapur gets into an intense power struggle between Guddu, Sharad Shukla, and Kaleen Bhaiya, as alliances shift and rivalries deepen in the lawless city.

**5 Ranneeti:** The web series Ranneeti: Balakot and Beyond is a 2024 action series streaming on Zee5, following an R&AW agent and his team as they combat hybrid warfare post-Pulwama attacks. They race to rescue a captured pilot, expose Pakistan's propaganda.



# The year that was: food

With 2024 about to end, we reflect on the food trends and unforgettable flavours that defined the year, says **SAKSHI PRIYA**

## A YEAR TO SAVOUR: FOOD MOMENTS OF 2024

As 2024 draws to a close, it's time to reflect on the tastes and trends that defined our culinary year. From viral dishes that united food lovers to beloved celebrity recipes that took over our kitchens, the year reminded us how food connects us. Whether it was the streets of Delhi buzzing with chatter over piping-hot kachoris or Instagram feeds flooding with quirky food combos, 2024 proved that our love for good food knows no bounds. So, let's dive into the highlights that made this year a feast for both our plates and our hearts.

## VIRAL CELEBRITY RECIPES



### Jackie Shroff's Anda Curry Patta and Baingan Bharta

Jackie Shroff's *Anda Curry Patta* became a go-to comfort dish for many, while his smoky *Baingan Bharta* gave eggplant a superstar moment. Everyone seemed to try their hand at his recipes, inspired by the way he explained each step in his cooking videos, peppered with his trademark "bhidu" charm. Fans couldn't get enough, rating his dishes a solid 10 out of 10 for their earthy, soulful, and undeniably delicious flavours. Jackie truly became the culinary hero of 2024!

### Aditi Rao Hydari's Khagina

Aditi Rao Hydari's *Khagina* became a sensation as everyone tried recreating her rich, buttery take on the classic egg dish. Her charming explanation, "cut the onions into moon-shaped slices, cook until pinkish, crack the eggs and top with masala", made it a viral hit. Fans across the internet hailed it as the perfect brunch staple, calling it a true "taste of warmth".



### Farah Khan's Yakhni Pulao

Farah Khan's *Yakhni Pulao* was the culinary sensation of the year. A soulful mix of tender meat and fragrant rice, the dish captivated fans who couldn't stop praising its simplicity and rich flavour. On her YouTube channel, she showed every step, making it easy to recreate. Viewers loved her detailed tips and rated it a perfect 10, proudly sharing their own versions online and creating videos titled "Trying Farah Khan's Favourite Yakhni Pulao".



## FLAVOURS THAT TRAVELLED

As we say goodbye to 2024, we revisited the places that captured our hearts and taste buds (Travel page III), where every bite told a story. Here's to the flavours that made this year's travels truly special.

### Banaras #malaiyo #tamarchaat

Banaras delivered on all fronts this year, especially with its food. The winter-special *Malaiyo*, a frothy dessert that melts in your mouth, became a seasonal must-try. Meanwhile, the tangy and spicy *Tamatar Chaat* delighted foodies with its zesty flavours, making it the city's street-food superstar.

### Kashmir #kahwa #roganjosh

The "Paradise on Earth" showcased its culinary treasures alongside its natural beauty in 2024. *Kahwa*, the traditional spiced tea and the aromatic *Rogan Josh* were must-haves for travellers seeking warmth and flavour amidst the snow-draped landscapes.

### Lakshadweep #muskaavab

The smoky and succulent *Mus Kaavab* paired perfectly with the aromatic, coconut-infused *Tuna Curry*, making every bite a celebration of coastal flavours. Each meal offered a taste of island life, blending the sea's bounty with vibrant flavours.

### Ladakh #thukpa #buttertea

Ladakh's dishes weren't just delicious, they were soul-soothing. The hearty *Thukpa*, a noodle soup packed with vegetables and meat, became a favourite, while the creamy, salty *Butter Tea* was a comforting companion in the chilly weather.

### Goa #porkvindaloo #crabxecxec

Goa's cuisine stole the spotlight in 2024 with its bold and flavourful offerings. The spicy and tangy *Pork Vindaloo*, *Crab Xec Xec* and fiery *Prawns Balchao* cemented their place as iconic dishes, bringing joy to every table.

## INSTAGRAM VIRALS

**Vada Pav in Delhi:** A tiny stall in the heart of Delhi sent Mumbaikars into a frenzy! Foodies queued up for hours to get a taste of this Mumbai classic, proving that Delhi truly embraces all flavours.

**Popcorn Momos in GK:** Momo mania reached new heights with this crunchy, buttery twist. Found at a GK corner, this snack became the ultimate winter indulgence, drawing food bloggers and crowds alike.

**Viral Cucumber Jar Salad:** Healthy eating met Instagram aesthetics with this layered cucumber salad in a jar. With its vibrant colours and zesty dressing, it became a favourite for fitness enthusiasts and food photographers.



THESE DISHES NOT ONLY DEFINED THE CULINARY LANDSCAPE OF 2024 BUT ALSO REMINDED US OF THE DEEP CONNECTIONS BETWEEN FOOD, CULTURE AND COMMUNITY. HERE'S TO MORE DELECTABLE ADVENTURES IN THE YEAR AHEAD!

## CELEB VIRAL FOOD COMBOS



**Deepika Padukone's Ema Datshi**  
Deepika's love for the Bhutanese cheesy chili dish *Ema Datshi* had people flocking to Tibetan restaurants to experience its fiery, creamy magic.

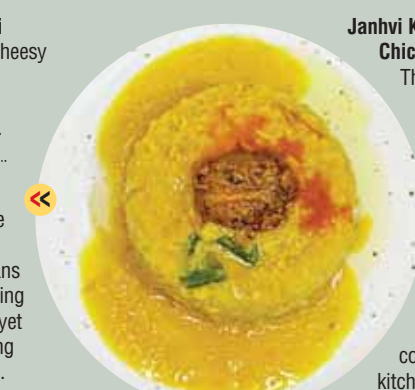


### Janhvi Kapoor's Idli and Chicken Curry

This unlikely combo went viral after Janhvi shared her love for it. Foodies everywhere couldn't resist trying it, and it quickly became a trending dish, with fans recreating it at home and experimenting with the combo in their own kitchens.

### Shraddha Kapoor's Varan Bhaat

This Maharashtrian classic became a viral sensation as Shraddha shared her family recipe. Fans across India tried recreating this simple yet comforting dish.



## ALL-TIME FAVOURITE FOOD STREETS OF DELHI

Let's remember Delhi's iconic street food, a delight for food lovers. Delhi's street food scene never fails to impress.

**Chandni Chowk:** This winter, Chandni Chowk dazzled with iconic *dahi bhallas*, *daulat ki chaat* and hot *jalebis* paired with creamy *rabri*.

**Kamla Nagar:** A shopper's paradise, the area also shone for its unbeatable *chole*

*bhature* and *Sharma Ji's kachoris*.

**Lodhi Colony:** *Anna Durga South Indian* offered perfect *dosas* and *idlis*, earning its spot as a social media favourite.

**Connaught Place & Janpath:** From *Jain Chawal Wale's* iconic *rajma rice* to *mini samosas* and *Wenger's* timeless baked treats, CP and Janpath were unmissable.





WANDERLUST OF INDIAN DESTINATIONS


2024 has been all about travel, realising the importance of travel, be it solo or in groups. Travel in every way is a gateway to self-discovery and deeper connections with the world around us, writes **ABHI SINGHAL**

**KASHMIR**




**#winterwonderland #switzerlandofindia**  
Kashmir, often called "Paradise on Earth," boasts breathtaking natural beauty with vibrant autumn foliage, crystal-clear lakes reflecting the snow-capped peaks, and verdant valleys nestled amidst majestic mountains. This pretty landscape, with its serene charm, makes Kashmir a truly unforgettable travel destination.

**BANARAS**




**#gangaarti #kashivishwanath**  
Banaras or Varanasi or Kashi, a sacred city in Uttar Pradesh and it holds immense significance in Hinduism. It is a renowned pilgrimage site, deeply intertwined with traditions of death and mourning. The city was known for the most visited and trending places in India in 2024.

**LADAKH**



**#pangonglake #kargil**  
Ladakh also known as Little Tibet, is a breathtaking region in India soared with snow-capped mountains, frozen lakes, ancient Buddhist monasteries perched on dramatic cliffs, and vibrant festivals filled with music and dance. Ladakh is one of the most loved places in 2024.

**LAKSHADWEEP**



**#tropicalparadise #islandescape**  
Lakshadweep, a pure archipelago in the Arabian Sea, is a true beauty on Earth. Pristine white sand beaches lapped by clear turquoise waters, coral reefs teeming with marine life, and lush coconut palms swaying gently in the breeze. Lakshadweep offers a unique blend of natural beauty, and cultural richness.

**GOA**



**#goadiaries #beachlover**  
Goa, a coastal paradise in India, is a vibrant blend of Portuguese heritage and Indian culture. There are pristine beaches lined with swaying palm trees, azure waters perfect for swimming and watersports, delicious seafood, and a lively nightlife scene.



THE YEAR THAT WAS: TRAVEL

Travel isn't just a physical journey, it's a soulful expedition, and some people always loved it while others have started loving it through social media. It opens doors to diverse cultures, helping us understand people and their unique stories. Exploring new destinations promotes a sense of spirituality, connecting us with something bigger than ourselves. Whether it's the tranquility of a mountain sunrise or the vastness of an ocean, nature teaches us to embrace its beauty and simplicity. Meeting new people on these adventures broadens perspectives, bridging gaps and giving a sense of empathy. Travel is a reminder of how small yet interconnected the world and fills your heart with gratitude for the experiences that shape your journey through life.

#NEWYEARGETAWAYS

FOR TROPICAL CLIMATE LOVERS

**GUWAHATI**



From Guwahati you can expect a cool and pleasant weather in the north east on the New Year and can plan a getaway around visiting Kamakhya Temple.


**KERALA**



Kerala, "God's Own Country," can work as a perfect New Year's getaway helping in rejuvenating yourself amidst serene backwater cruises, and lush greenery.


FOR WINTER LOVERS

**MANALI**




Manali has started receiving the snowfall and has become a white paradise. It is the perfect getaway, offering snow-covered peaks and cosy cafes.

**AULI**



Auli as a destination is beautiful and scenic and has snowfall predictions on 27th December and after, making it a perfect destination for your new year.

**MUKTESHWAR**



Mukteshwar is an untouched beauty to help you find yourself and peace this new year. The charming trails and dense forests make it idealic.





**YOUR WEEK AHEAD**

MADHU KOTIYA



**ARIES** March 21-April 19

This week holds significant potential for financial and business success. You are poised to make impactful decisions that could lead to considerable gains, especially from real estate investments. Those involved in trading, finance, or property management may find their efforts yielding substantial rewards due to their dedication and hard work. Expect unexpected opportunities to arise, presenting offers that may surprise you with their favorable terms. Your ability to maintain connections primarily through digital means will be crucial, as your schedule may not allow for face-to-face interactions. Toward the week's end, you might find yourself drawn more towards spiritual activities. Engaging in worship, charitable acts, and assisting those in need could provide a profound sense of fulfillment. Exercise caution with financial transactions during this time to ensure everything proceeds smoothly.

**Lucky number 11 | Lucky colour Amber**  
**Lucky day Sunday**



**LEO** July 23-Aug 22

This week starts on a high note for you, as recent efforts begin to show promising progress. You're deeply engaged and pushing forward with vigor, bolstered by the support and encouragement from your close ones. Partnerships, in particular, are flourishing, bringing satisfying outcomes your way. As the week progresses, stay vigilant; some opposition may arise, prompting a need to rethink plans made with family. Unexpected commitments will emerge, demanding prioritization, which may shift your scheduled activities. Pay particular attention to your health and financial management. It's wise to consult a healthcare professional to stay on top of any potential issues and to handle financial matters with care to avoid overspending, safeguarding against future economic challenges.

**Lucky number 3 | Lucky colour White**  
**Lucky day Friday**



**SAGITTARIUS** Nov 22-Dec 21

You are known for your generosity and your willingness to invest in spiritual growth, as well as your interest in supporting charitable causes. Managing finances may become important soon, particularly regarding the educational needs of your children. Family matters may also demand more of your attention. This period calls for an understanding of how crucial balance is in managing life's various demands. Establishing a structured, disciplined approach will be essential to meet your obligations effectively. Any ongoing legal matters are likely to resolve favorably for you. Expect some joyful moments towards the end of the week, including long-awaited positive news. There might be opportunities for relocation or changes in your work environment that align with your preferences. Your reputation as a diligent individual will be reinforced in your community.

**Lucky number 6 | Lucky colour Yellow**  
**Lucky day Saturday**



**TAURUS** April 20-May 20

This week, you may find that your efforts at work are progressing more slowly than expected. Despite initiating projects and investing time, the outcomes may not be immediately apparent. Patience will be crucial during this period. Approach your tasks with the diligence of a farmer tending to crops, from planting to harvest. As the week progresses, anticipate some unexpected shifts that could positively impact your financial situation, with additional income sources emerging. For some, work-related travel or a favorable relocation might be on the horizon. Any funds previously extended to others are likely to be repaid. By week's end, you may find yourself indulging in fantastical thoughts and seeking material comforts, which might distract from your actual objectives. However, input from family will help steer you back towards practical paths.

**Lucky number 7 | Lucky colour Black**  
**Lucky day Friday**



**VIRGO** Aug 23-Sep 22

This week is pivotal for those who excel in critical thinking and analysis. You are approaching a decisive moment in an essential aspect of your life, which could significantly influence your future direction. This could pertain to either personal or professional realms. For some, an enticing professional opportunity with a promising offer might arise. Midweek, you may find yourself needing some form of healing or medical assistance. Recovery will bring you a sense of renewal and improved quality of life. However, towards the week's end, you may experience a dip in your energy levels. Emotional sensitivity could lead to conflicts, especially if family tensions are present. Your inclination to dissect situations logically could exacerbate these issues. This period calls for stepping back from conflicts and focusing on rest and personal rejuvenation.

**Lucky number 10 | Lucky colour Jade**  
**Lucky day Sunday**



**CAPRICORN** Dec 22-Jan 19

The week begins on a high note, marked by joyful gatherings and significant life events that bring friends and family together in celebration. As the week progresses, you'll find yourself driven by a surge of determination and resilience, pushing you to dedicate yourself diligently to your pursuits. Despite encountering hurdles along the way, your inherent wisdom enables you to navigate through them effectively. A spiritual journey later in the week offers a profound sense of solace, clarifying any lingering doubts and fostering inner peace. Towards the weekend, financial mindfulness becomes crucial; recent oversights in spending may lead to a tight financial situation. This period calls for a reassessment of your budgeting strategies, possibly considering borrowing options or seeking assistance from close ones to stabilize your financial footing.

**Lucky number 17 | Lucky colour Parrot Green**  
**Lucky day Thursday**



**GEMINI** May 21-June 20

This week is set to be a dynamic one, marked by a series of shifts and transitions. It begins on a joyful note, with family and personal well-being bringing you considerable joy. Expect a surge in creativity and a flurry of new opportunities that could enhance your professional and financial landscape. Promising developments from distant places might bring uplifting news, and you might find yourself hosting or celebrating a significant event at home. As the week progresses, you'll find yourself contemplating necessary changes in your routine, diet, or overall lifestyle. This period of transformation is crucial for paving the way to a more fulfilling future. Towards the week's end, focus on financial and health matters becomes essential. Review any outstanding debts or financial obligations, and consider a health check-up to ensure everything is in order.

**Lucky number 2 | Lucky colour Lilac**  
**Lucky day Monday**



**LIBRA** Sep 23-Oct 22

Be mindful of negative influences that may be surrounding you. Emphasize honesty and fairness in your dealings to mitigate potential disruptions. There could be challenges arising from hidden agendas or unethical temptations that may put you in a difficult situation. It's essential to clear away these adverse energies to maintain your well-being. As the week progresses, expect a significant shift in your perspectives and convictions. This change will usher in surprising developments, helping you become more structured and responsible. You will find yourself being more attentive and caring towards others, particularly close relatives and friends. Toward the week's end, a profound personal experience might inspire you, boosting your resolve and strength to overcome any obstacles. This period could be pivotal in fostering a deeper connection with your spiritual self.

**Lucky number 8 | Lucky colour Opal**  
**Lucky day Tuesday**



**AQUARIUS** Jan 20-Feb 18

As the week begins, you may encounter challenges that disrupt your progress on an important project or assignment. These obstacles could lead to moments of doubt and frustration, tempting you to abandon your efforts. However, a resilient spirit within you will rise, empowering you to confront these challenges with renewed vigor. This determination will guide you to triumph and a sense of fulfillment. Midweek brings a wave of positivity that touches various aspects of your life, from financial gains and familial joy to impressive achievements by your children, perhaps even securing rewarding career opportunities. Your creativity will surge, filling you with enthusiasm and inspiring you to undertake new ventures. The week concludes on a reflective note, drawing you towards community and spiritual engagement.

**Lucky number 22 | Lucky colour Fuchsia**  
**Lucky day Tuesday**



**CANCER** June 21-July 22

This week starts with a sense of fulfillment and gratitude. Early on, you'll experience deep connections and a harmonious relationship with your partner, enhancing both your emotional bonds. Spiritual growth is also a highlight, allowing you to dedicate time to achieving your spiritual aspirations. As the week progresses, you might find yourself wrestling with intrusive thoughts or unexpected impulses that could challenge your peace of mind. However, guiding insights will help maintain your equilibrium. Towards the week's end, your creative energies will surge, paving the way for significant achievements. Expect an acceleration in professional endeavors and an increase in financial rewards. This period also brings personal joy, possibly from family or close relationships, with the potential for welcoming a new family member or celebrating a significant personal milestone.

**Lucky number 13 | Lucky colour Beige**  
**Lucky day Tuesday**



**SCORPIO** Oct 23-Nov 21

This week, some individuals may find themselves deeply focused on personal goals, seemingly blind to new prospects that may arise. Often, they prefer solitude, finding comfort in their own company. Despite this, they maintain connections through digital means such as online chats and calls, bridging the gap between isolation and social interaction. As the week progresses, a burst of creativity leads to a meaningful encounter with someone influential, poised to offer significant financial guidance. This period also hints at potential prosperity, prompting desires to embrace a fuller experience of life. Toward the week's close, transactions involving real estate are favorable. Strengthening relationships with family, particularly extended relatives, is advised. Children's needs come into focus, and for those residing afar, a brief return to one's roots may occur, coupled with constructive family discussions that promise beneficial outcomes.

**Lucky number 15 | Lucky colour Green**  
**Lucky day Friday**



**PISCES** Feb 19-March 20

Navigating through the early days of the week may feel challenging as concerns about investments could cause unease and disturb your peace of mind. This is a time to address your fears and manage stress carefully. However, as the week progresses, expect a shift in fortune. You'll find yourself in a position to reap the rewards of your earlier efforts, possibly through significant financial gains. This period also highlights generosity and charity, enhancing your sense of fulfillment. The week is particularly favorable for working individuals who balance multiple responsibilities with grace. Their resilience and nurturing qualities come to the forefront, possibly influenced by a positive female presence in their lives. Acknowledging and cherishing relationships with key figures like a mother, spouse, or elder sister could be crucial for personal growth.

**Lucky number 5 | Lucky colour Gray**  
**Lucky day Wednesday**

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THE LIFE GUIDANCE



Seerat Kaur Marwaha

Chanting the Aditya Hridaya Stotram, a hymn dedicated to Suryadev, is another common practice that fosters vitality and mental focus

# The Significance of Khar Maas



**K**har Maas, a revered period in the Vedic calendar, begins on December 15, 2024, when the Sun enters Sagittarius and concludes on January 14, 2025, with its transition into Capricorn, marking the celebration of Makar Sankranti. This month holds a unique spiritual essence, encouraging individuals to focus on inner growth, devotion, and alignment with divine energies. The origin of Khar Maas is rooted in an ancient story. It is said that the Sun God, Suryadev, drives his chariot, pulled by seven celestial horses, to maintain the cosmic cycle of day and night. One day, the horses, thirsty and weary, sought a break to drink water. To allow this, Suryadev temporarily replaced them with donkeys. The slower pace of the donkeys extended the journey to thirty days, giving rise to what we now call Khar Maas, as "Khar" means donkey in Sanskrit. This period is observed as a sacred time for reflection and devotion. However, traditions discourage undertaking new ventures or life events with long-term implications during this month. Weddings, engagements, housewarming ceremonies, groundbreaking rituals, and the establishment of new businesses are avoided. Instead, individuals are encouraged to turn their focus inward, prioritising spiritual practices over material pursuits.

Khar Maas is an ideal time for self-purification and strengthening one's connection to higher energies. Devotees often engage in tapasya (austerities), perform fire rituals (hawans), embark on pilgrimages, and undertake charitable acts. These activities are believed to cleanse the soul, resolve karmic imbalances, and invite divine blessings.

During Khar Maas, fasting is another common spiritual practice observed by many. Fasting is believed to purify the body and mind, allowing individuals to detach from material desires and focus on spiritual upliftment. Consuming sattvic food-pure, vegetarian meals devoid of onion and garlic-is encouraged during this time to maintain a calm and

balanced state of mind. Additionally, devotees are advised to recite sacred mantras like the Gayatri Mantra and meditate daily to enhance their connection with the divine. Acts of kindness, such as feeding the poor or supporting those in need, are also emphasised, as they not only cleanse negative karma but also reinforce the

spirit of compassion and service. To maximise the benefits of this spiritually charged month, several practices are traditionally followed. Offering water to the Sun every morning is a powerful ritual that signifies gratitude and invokes clarity and strength. Chanting the Aditya Hridaya Stotram, a hymn dedicated to Suryadev, is another common practice that fosters vitality and mental focus. In the evenings, lighting a ghee diya near Goddess Tulsi is believed to attract positivity, prosperity, and divine protection. Khar Maas serves as a reminder of the cyclical nature of life, urging us to embrace moments of pause and reflection. While the material world may temporarily slow down, the soul is given an opportunity to grow. This sacred period helps prepare individuals for new beginnings and auspicious endeavours that can commence after Makar Sankranti. As the Sun resumes its celestial journey with renewed vigor, the energy for material and spiritual success flows harmoniously once again. This month is a gift to recalibrate, focus on devotion, and nurture inner peace. By honouring the practices and teachings of Khar Maas, one can achieve a sense of spiritual fulfillment and create a strong foundation for future endeavours.

— She is a Life Coach and Founder of Soulful Wellness