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INSIDE
WORLD 8
GERMANY'S PRESIDENT DISSOLVES PARLIAMENT; POLLS ON FEBRUARY 23

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INCLEMENT WINTER WEATHER LASHES DELHI

RAJESH KUMAR ■ NEW DELHI

Delhi's weather took a dramatic turn on Friday, with thunderstorms, moderate to heavy rainfall lashing the city. The waterlogging that ensued threw traffic out of gear in many places. Continuous rainfall compounded the coldwave conditions gripping Delhi and its surrounding areas. The frigid weather is expected to last longer and a yellow alert has also been issued as light to moderate rain, accompanied by thunderstorms, is likely to continue on Saturday, and Sunday.



Photo: Ranjan Dimri/The Pioneer

With dense fog enveloping the National Capital, Delhi's Indira Gandhi International Airport (IGIA) Airport has activated low-visibility procedures to ensure smooth operations. The India Meteorological Department (IMD) has forecast shallow fog on Saturday morning, with light to moderate spells of rain in the evening. According to the IMD, the National Capital recorded its highest December rainfall in the last 15 years. The rain began on Friday around 2.30 am and continued throughout

146 flights delayed so far

Flight-tracking platform Flightradar24 reported 146 delayed flights, three cancellations, and an average delay of nearly 30 minutes for departures and arrivals in Delhi. However, there were no major disruptions. "Low visibility procedures are in progress at Delhi airport. All flight operations are presently normal.

Passengers are requested to contact the airline concerned for updated flight information," read the advisory. Despite the challenges, most flights are operating on schedule, though passengers are advised to remain vigilant about their flight status. Highlighting potential delays due to rain, Air India urged

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

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

Following the rain, the maximum temperature was recorded 14 degree Celsius, six notches below the normal while the minimum temperature stood at 11 degree Celsius, four degree above the normal. The gap between the maximum and

WEATHER

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|-----|--------|
| AQI | 337 |
| MAX | 14.6°C |
| MIN | 11°C |

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

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GRAP Stage-III lifted

STAFF REPORTER ■ NEW DELHI

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

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

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Controversy over Manmohan's State funeral

SAUMYA SHUKLA ■ NEW DELHI

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



President Droupadi Murmu pays her last respects to former Prime Minister Manmohan Singh at his residence

Narendra Modi. According to an order issued on Friday, by the Ministry of Home Affairs (MHA), the funeral will take place at Nigambodh ghat, located on the banks of the Yamuna river, and arrangements will be made by the Defence Ministry for a State funeral with full military honours. Meanwhile, traffic is expected to be affected in Central Delhi till around 2 pm, as security arrangements will be in place. Several dignitaries including Prime Minister Narendra Modi will be there to pay their tributes. According to a senior police official, arrangements have been made accordingly with all protocols in place, since it is one of the busiest crematoriums in the city. The complex also has a CNG crematorium. Commuters to and from Central Delhi will have to plan their journey on the weekend accordingly as security protocols and VVIP routes are in place for the last rites of the senior Congress leader.

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Delhi's power bills get leaner

RAJESH KUMAR ■ NEW DELHI

In a big relief to electricity consumers, the Delhi Electricity Regulatory Commission (DERC) has reduced the Power Purchase Adjustment Cost (PPAC) imposed by the Discoms in the National Capital. The PPAC collected by BSES Rajdhani Power was 35.83, BSES Yamuna Power 38.12 and Tata Power 36.33. According to the DERC's order, PPAC will be reduced from 37.75 percent to 13.63 percent in areas under the BSES Yamuna; 35.83 percent to 18.19 percent in areas under BSES Rajdhani and 37.88 percent to 20.52 percent in Tata Power's areas from December 21, 2024 to March 20, 2025. It is estimated that 10 to 20 percent monthly electricity bill will come down after the DERC's order.

According to rough calculations, a consumer in South Delhi (under BRPL) using up to 400 units of power will likely get relief of around Rs 285 in their monthly bill. Those using up to 600 units of power will likely get relief of around Rs 563 in their monthly bill. An East Delhi consumer using up to 400 units, will likely get relief of Rs 390 per month. Those using up to 600 units, will get relief of Rs 554 per month in their electricity bill. For a north Delhi consumer who uses 400 units, will likely get relief of Rs 281 per month. Those who use 600 units will likely get relief of Rs 554 per month in their electricity billing. "Presently, ongoing PPAC is 27.08 percent, which is applicable till 20/12/2024. PPAC of Q2 of FY 2024-25 to

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



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

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

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

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MARKETS



DGCA suspends two Akasa Air directors for training lapses

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

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

Pilgrims wait in vain as Katra protests continue

MOHIT KANDHARI ■ JAMMU

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

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



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

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

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

Man crawls out from train undercarriage, video goes viral

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ BHOPAL/NEW DELHI

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



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

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

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56 Cyber warriors to digitally safeguard devotees at Mahakumbh

BISWAJEET BANERJEE ■ MAHAKUMBH NAGAR

The Yogi Adityanath government has implemented comprehensive cyber security measures to protect devotees attending the Mahakumbh in Prayagraj. To ensure the digital safety of an estimated 45 crore attendees, including international visitors, a team of 56 specially trained cyber warriors has been deployed. Superintendent of Police (SSP) Rajesh Dwivedi, under the Chief Minister's directives, is overseeing the "Digital Mahakumbh" initiative, which aims to tackle cybercrime through a detailed action plan. Special cyber help desks are being established in all 56 police stations across Mahakumbh Nagar. These help desks will be staffed by experts conducting round-the-clock cyber patrolling to prevent fraud and ensure a secure environment. Awareness campaigns are being launched to educate devotees about potential



cyber threats. Films explaining cybersecurity measures will be displayed on 40 Variable Messaging Displays (VMDs) strategically installed across the fairgrounds and commissionerates. Social media platforms like Facebook, X, and Instagram, along with advanced AI tools, are being leveraged to disseminate information and alerts, ensuring devotees remain vigilant against cybercriminals. A dedicated cyber police station has been set up to address threats from fake

websites, fraudulent links, and other cyber scams. Devotees can report suspicious activities, and prompt action will be taken. The government has also introduced a helpline number, 1920, for inquiries and support related to the Mahakumbh. Attendees are advised to rely on government websites with the ".gov.in" domain for authentic information, while any fake websites can be reported to local police. As part of its pre-emptive measures, the state's cyber team has identified around 50

suspicious websites, and action against these is already underway. Mobile cyber teams have also been deployed to raise awareness among devotees and address online threats on a real-time basis. SSP Rajesh Dwivedi emphasized that the integration of technology with security will ensure a safe experience for all attendees. He added that the government's efforts, including setting up cyber help desks, screening informational films, and taking strict action against cybercriminals, are aimed at making this Mahakumbh a seamless and secure event for devotees. This year's Mahakumbh is not only envisioned as a grand spiritual gathering but also a high-tech event, where tradition and modernity come together. With these measures, the Yogi government has set a benchmark for ensuring digital safety in large-scale religious gatherings, making this Mahakumbh a model for future events.

Didi wants to remove Suvendu thorn before polls, says BJP leader Arjun

SAUGAR SENGUPTA ■ KOLKATA

Senior Bengal BJP leader Sand former Barrackpore MP Arjun Singh has refused to budge from his stated position accusing Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee of harbouring fundamentalist elements in the State for pursuing her vote bank politics. Singh who was on Friday summoned by the State Police but evade appearance at the Jagaddal Police Station in North 24 Parganas reiterated his stance on Friday saying he had only expressed his views regarding the threat perception on State Opposition Leader Suvendu Adhikari accusing the Chief Minister of allowing fundamentalist elements to carve out dens in the State. Singh had earlier said that "Mamata Banerjee has joined hands with the jihadi elements in order to get rid of her political opponents ... she wants to eliminate Suvendu Adhikari before the 2026 Assembly elections ... because she knows that once she can do that her road to victory will be clear."



Singh's statement came almost in tandem with central intelligence reports that some extremist groups of Bangladesh were making plans to attack Adhikari for his "plain speak" against the fundamentalist elements who were daydreaming of dismembering India. Adhikari however said that if there was any threat from the organizations like Lashkar e Toiba or Harkat ul Mujahideen then the people of Bengal and India would protect him. "I was earlier attacked by the CPIM and TMC ... now I hear that the terrorist outfits are targeting me but the peo-

ple of Bengal have always responded against such actions ... Let the subversive activists do their job, and I will do mine... and if there is an attack then the people will give a reply," he said. Referring to the recent arrests of terror moles from Murshidabad and South 24 Parganas --- by the Assam and Jammu and Kashmir Police --- and subsequent revelations that they had acquired aadhar cards, pan cards and even passports and voter ID cards, Singh said that mos4t of the civic volunteers who had been appointed to assist the police by the Trinamool Congress

Government were members of Jamaat. "You will find Jamaat terrorists in every police station. Ninety percent of the civic volunteers who check our passports are Jamaat supporters ... it is unfortunate that the Assam Police are capturing terrorists in Bengal. They work for the country whereas the Bengal Police only work for the State and the party," Singh said. Subsequently a police complaint was filed against the former Barrackpore MP by a local TMC leader who alleged that Singh's defamatory comments had blemished the Chief Minister's image and caused injury to her. Meanwhile, Bengal Minister Firhad Hakim once again accused Singh and other BJP leaders for trying to malign the Mamata Banerjee Government saying there was no terrorist in Bengal. "There is no terrorist in Bengal ... it is the ploy of these BJP leaders who have been repeatedly defeated in the elections to malign the TMC Government," he said.

Former SPG commando recalls Manmohan Singh's love for Maruti 800

BISWAJEET BANERJEE ■ LUCKNOW

In a heartfelt tribute, Asim Arun, a former IPS officer and Special Protection Group (SPG) commando during Manmohan Singh's tenure as Prime Minister, reminisced about the late leader's deep attachment to his humble Maruti 800, a reflection of his unassuming nature and middle-class roots. Now an MLA from Uttar Pradesh's Kannauj Sadar, Arun took to social media platform X to share his memories following Singh's demise at the age of 92 on Thursday night at AIIMS Delhi. Arun's poignant post captured the simplicity that defined Singh's personality, even during his time as the head of the nation. Reflecting on his time as Singh's bodyguard from 2004 onwards, Arun wrote, "Dr. Singh owned just one car—a modest Maruti 800. It was always parked behind the shiny BMWs at the Prime Minister's residence. Despite the grandeur surrounding him, his heart remained with his Maruti." Singh often expressed his longing for the car, Arun recalled. "He would say to me, 'Asim, I don't like traveling in this car (BMW); my vehicle is this one (the Maruti)'. I would explain that the BMW was equipped with essential security features, but whenever the convoy passed the Maruti, he would look at it fondly, as if reaffirming his identity as



a middle-class person who cared deeply for the common man." Asim Arun also shed light on the unique role he played in Singh's life during those years. "The SPG provides the closest security for the Prime Minister. As Assistant Inspector General of the Close Protection Team, I was never far from him. If only one bodyguard was allowed, it would be me. My responsibility was to stay with him like a shadow," Arun wrote. Singh, known for his humility, intellect, and calm demeanor, served as India's Prime Minister from 2004 to 2014 and was widely celebrated as the architect of India's economic liberalization during his tenure as finance minister in 1991. "His attachment to the Maruti 800 wasn't just about nostalgia—it reflected the essence of who he was: a leader deeply rooted in simplicity and a

beacon of hope for the middle class," Arun added. Manmohan Singh's passing has left a wave of mourning across the country, but stories like these ensure his legacy of humility and service to the nation will endure for generations. Meanwhile, Uttar Pradesh government has declared a seven-day state mourning to honor the demise of former Prime Minister Dr. Manmohan Singh, who passed away on Thursday night at AIIMS, New Delhi, at the age of 92. The mourning period will commence on December 26 and continue until January 1, 2025. During this period, the national flag will fly at half-mast across government buildings in the state, and no entertainment programs will be organized by the state government, as per official orders issued on Friday.

Panjab University organised condolence meet to pay homage to alumnus Manmohan

PTI ■ CHANDIGARH

Panjab University Friday organised a condolence meeting to pay homage to former prime minister and distinguished alumnus Dr Manmohan Singh. The gathering was attended by Vice Chancellor Prof Renu Vig, Registrar Y P Verma and faculty and other staff. During the meeting, tributes were paid to Singh, as attendees reflected on his contributions to the nation and his association with the university. Another condolence meeting was also organised jointly by the Department of Economics and the Panjab University Alumni Association. Manmohan Singh did his Master's in Economics in 1954 from the university and came first in his class. He was a Senior Lecturer (1957-1959), Reader in Economics (1959-1963) and Professor of Economics (1963-1965) at PU. A Chair was established after him in the department. Smita Sharma, Associate Professor and chairperson of the Economics Department at PU, remembered him as the architect of economic reforms in the country. Sharma, who also studied at PU, showed the media the room where Singh used to sit with other faculty.



She said her teacher Prof V K Gupta was Manmohan Singh's student at the university. "Dr Singh is our university's most distinguished alumnus," she said. Former Union Minister and Congress' sitting MP from Chandigarh, Manish Tewari said his association with Manmohan Singh goes back to the time when his parents and the ex-PM were neighbours in Panjab University here. "He knew me almost from the day I opened my eyes in this world," Tewari said. "How strange are the ways of God. I was supposed to call on him tomorrow (Saturday) in the morning," Tewari posted on X, "Soft Spoken, Erudite, intelligent but firm he was an inspiration for millions of young people for whom he opened up

the doors of opportunity with the Economic liberalisation in 1991," he said. Tewari said through all these years he shared a personal relationship with him and also served as the Union Minister of Information & Broadcasting in his government. "I recall anchoring his Mega Press Conference on 3rd January 2014 where he gave an exhaustive overview of his 10 years as Prime Minister," said Tewari. Former Union Minister Pawan Kumar Bansal said Singh used to have a free discussion with his cabinet colleagues and used to encourage junior colleagues a lot. Bansal, a Congress leader and former MP from Chandigarh, recalled former US President Barack Obama once saying: "If there were to be

five leaders like Dr Manmohan Singh in the world, it would be a different world." Bansal said the nation will always be indebted to Singh for turning around the economy. "I had the privilege to work in his councils of ministers. A great administrator, he was a superb human being with unparalleled humility," he said. Former Punjab deputy chief minister and Congress leader O P Soni also paid tributes to Manmohan Singh. "I had met him three to four months ago at his Delhi home. He had so much love for Amritsar and Punjab. When he was PM, we got so much work done for Amritsar, its industry," Soni said. When asked if Amritsar is also known for its rich food, did Singh, who spent his childhood days in the holy city, have any preference for any local dish, Soni said, "he always preferred to have simple food. However, he used to love Sarson Ka Saag." Soni, who lives in the central part of Amritsar, said, "when my father passed away in 2015, he visited my house to offer condolence". Manmohan Singh, the architect of India's economic reforms, passed away on Thursday night at Delhi's All India Institute of Medical Sciences (AIIMS). He was 92.

Manmohan was against corruption, says Anna Hazare

PTI ■ MUMBAI

Anti-graft activist Anna Hazare on Friday condoled the death of former prime minister Manmohan Singh and said he was against corruption. Hazare, who had led a massive agitation against corruption during Singh's tenure in the early 2010s, said the former PM took swift decisions concerning his demands for the Lokpal and Lokayukta Act. "Those who are born have to die, but some leave memories and their legacy behind. Singh gave a new direction to the country's economy," Hazare told PTI in his native village Ralegan Siddhi in Maharashtra's Ahilyanagar district. Recalling his protests against graft in the government led by Singh, the octogenarian activist said the former PM invited him for talks and took quick decisions. "He was against corruption and took immediate decisions regarding the Lokpal and Lokayukta Act. He always thought about the country and how best he could work for its people," Hazare said. He always prioritised the welfare of the country and society, said the activist.

Gurugram Police Crime Branch arrests for killing youth over dispute

STAFF REPORTER ■ GURUGRAM

A crime branch team of the Gurugram police have arrested four accused for allegedly killing a 19-year-old youth over a dispute over a mobile phone, police said. The victim was identified as Ashish a resident of Bhangrola village of Gurugram, who was an auto driver. The accused have been identified as Brijesh alias Rinku, Umesh alias Nahne Arvinder Kumar, all residents of Uttar Pradesh, and Siyasan Sahu alias Sibbu of Madhya Pradesh. According to the police, on December 22, they received information that a body of a person was lying in the water filled in the green belt of Dwarka Expressway near the village of Harsaru. On receiving the information, the police team reached the spot and discovered the body. The spot was also inspected by the police's scene-of-crime, FSL and fingerprint teams. "After inspection of the deceased and the spot, efforts were made by the police team to identify the deceased, as a result of which the deceased was identified as Ashish," Varun Dahiya, ACP (crime) said.

The deceased's father told the police through a written complaint that his son Ashish used to drive an auto on rent. His son had injury marks on his head and his neck was tied with a muffler. Some unknown person has murdered his son. Based on his complaint, a case was registered under the relevant sections in Sector-10 police station, Gurugram. During interrogation, a police team of Inspector Jagveer Singh, Incharge Crime Branch Palam Vihar, Gurugram, nabbed the accused on Thursday from Kankarola Road, Gurugram. During police interrogation, it was found that the accused lived on rent in Kankarola. Brijesh was acquainted with Ashish, the deceased. "Ashish had forcibly taken the mobile phone of accused Brijesh. After this, on the night of December 21 and 22, Brijesh, along with his other companions, went to meet Ashish in Bhangrola village, and there they had an altercation with Ashish. After this, the accused hit Ashish on the head with a brick and put him in the auto and strangled him with a muffler and killed Ashish and threw the body in the green belt of Dwarka Expressway and fled," Dahiya said.



A silent crusader

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

The man with the vision and selfless dedication to the nation, Dr Manmohan Singh is no more. Dr Singh passed away on December 26, 2024, at the age of 92. Dr Singh, a towering figure in Indian politics and economics, breathed his last at the All India Institute of Medical Sciences. His demise marks the end of an era defined by humility, intellect and steadfast dedication to nation-building. Dr Manmohan Singh's contributions to India's economic and political landscape are unparalleled. Widely regarded as the architect of India's 1991 economic reforms, Singh's tenure as Finance Minister under Prime Minister PV Narasimha Rao was transformative. At a time when the Indian economy teetered on the brink of bankruptcy, Singh introduced a series of bold measures that liberalised the economy, dismantled the license raj and opened the doors to foreign investment. These reforms not only rescued India from an economic crisis but also set the stage for decades of robust growth and development. During his tenure, Singh's policies prioritised the devaluation of the rupee, moderation of taxes, privatisation of public sector enterprises and encouragement of Foreign Direct Investment (FDI). These initiatives catalysed India's transition into a globally integrated economy and solidified his reputation as one of the nation's most accomplished economists. Known as a reluctant politician, Dr Singh's foray into politics was driven by a profound sense of duty rather than ambition. When he assumed the role of Prime Minister in 2004, heading the Congress-led United Progressive Alliance (UPA) government, he brought the same commitment and vision that had defined his career as an economist. Serving two consecutive terms until 2014, Singh's leadership was marked by both humility and resolve. One of the most defining moments of his tenure was the Indo-US nuclear deal in 2008, a landmark agreement that underscored his courage and conviction. Despite staunch opposition from the Left Front, which led to their withdrawal of support, Singh's government survived a vote of confidence, thanks to the support of the Samajwadi Party. The deal elevated India's status on the global stage and symbolised his unyielding dedication to the nation's strategic interests. Dr Singh was often described as a 'gentleman leader,' a man of integrity who preferred dialogue over confrontation. His humility was legendary, yet he was resolute when it came to principles. Throughout his career, he commanded respect across party lines, not just for his intellect but for his moral rectitude. His tenure as Prime Minister may have been criticised for perceived passivity, but his calm demeanour and quiet determination left an indelible mark on Indian governance. A seven-day period of mourning is a fitting tribute by the nation to a great visionary. His last rites will be conducted with full state honours. While his absence leaves a void, his contributions to India's progress and his example of selfless service will continue to inspire generations. Om Shanti.



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PICTALK



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

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



K S TOMAR

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

Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS) chief Mohan Bhagwat's recent appeal for larger families, framed as a response to perceived demographic challenges, reveals a worldview rooted in traditionalism. This perspective clashes with the progressive social, cultural, and economic ethos of modern India. While presented as a solution to counter declining population trends, Bhagwat's remarks have ignited debates over their communal undertones, potential to deepen gender inequality, and disconnection from contemporary realities. Bhagwat's remarks are part of a larger discourse on demographic imbalances, often aimed at minority communities. This rhetoric fosters fear, undermines social harmony, and contradicts India's pluralistic traditions. Today's youth prioritise quality of life over larger families, influenced by rising living costs, career aspirations, and financial stability. Bhagwat's appeal appears disconnected from these realities, highlighting a gap between traditionalist agendas and contemporary Indian values. The RSS chief's observations clash with India's family planning efforts from the late 1960s and 1970s when the emphasis was on small families. Even former Prime Minister Indira Gandhi, during her tenure, highlighted the dangers of unchecked population growth, stressing the need for planned families. Bhagwat's outdated stance ignores this historical context and the progress India has made in population stabilisation through education, healthcare, and women's empowerment. Bhagwat's proposal for families to have more children is based on the argument that declining fertility rates threaten the survival and dominance of certain communities. This narrative, often accompanied by alarmist rhetoric about population imbalances, underscores divisive politics. Although demographic trends warrant attention, his suggested solution disregards socio-economic realities and entrenches regressive norms. Interestingly, Andhra Pradesh



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

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

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

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

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

dependency and limiting women's agency.

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

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

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

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

choice. Bhagwat's remarks dismiss these values, echoing authoritarian tendencies that clash with Indian democracy. Family planning decisions are deeply personal and should not be influenced by socio-political agendas. Intervening in such choices undermines personal freedoms and contradicts the principles of modern India. In a country where maternal mortality remains a concern and reproductive healthcare is uneven, urging women to have more children intensifies existing vulnerabilities. Instead of alarmist rhetoric, India's leadership should focus on forward-looking policies to address demographic concerns constructively: Improved access to education, particularly for girls, is key to stabilising population growth. Educated women are more likely to make informed reproductive choices, contributing to sustainable demographics and enhancing healthcare. Investing in maternal and child healthcare can reduce mortality rates and improve quality of life. Policies empowering the youth and enhancing employability can transform India's demographic potential into an asset.

(Writer is a senior political analyst and strategic affairs columnist; views are personal)



BHAGWAT'S OUTDATED STANCE IGNORES THIS HISTORICAL CONTEXT AND THE PROGRESS INDIA HAS MADE IN POPULATION STABILIZATION THROUGH EDUCATION, HEALTHCARE, AND WOMEN'S EMPOWERMENT

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

MANMOHAN SINGH PASSES AWAY

Madam — The sad demise of former PM Dr Manmohan Singh is an irreplaceable loss to the nation. Singh will be remembered as the statesman who saved the Indian economy from going over the edge. When he took over as finance minister in the minority government of Narasimha Rao in 1991, the Indian economy was very close to sovereign default. Foreign exchange reserves were barely enough to cover a month of imports, and the country had to suffer the ignominy of having to ship its gold reserves to England. All of that would change with the famous 1991 Budget which Manmohan Singh presented, and the industrial deregulation that accompanied the Budget. Hailed as an architect of India's economic liberalisation, he served as Prime Minister from 2004 to 2014. During his tenure, he spearheaded transformative policies that shaped India's modern economic landscape. His leadership saw India achieve its highest GDP growth rates, and his role in the Indo-US nuclear deal significantly enhanced India's global stature. India is on its way to becoming the third-largest economy in the world in a couple of years, and the seeds of India's growth story were sown during the economic reforms. More than three decades later, there is as big a consensus for reforms in India as there was opposition to it when the process started. **N Sathasiva Reddy | Bengaluru**

DIPLOMATIC CHALLENGE FOR INDIA

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

ICC fines Virat Kohli



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

Bumrah, in his attacking 60 runs, which was a treat to watch. It was an intentional act captured in-camera when Kohli appeared to be dashed against Konstas in the middle while walking across, which sparked an encounter. Watching this, the Aussie legend Ricky Ponting and England's Michael Vaughan were quick to voice their opinions, calling for ICC action. Kohli has been slapped with a fine of 20 per cent of his match fee and given one demerit point by the ICC as well. This is not the expected behaviour from a batter who played 121 tests, 295 ODIs, and 125 T20s. If Kohli was baffled by Konstas belligerence, he should have proved his worth as a batter in the middle rather than engaged himself with the intimidating tactics, which can be construed as cheap for all his calibre. **A P Thiruvadi | Chennai**

in India and her public statements against the interim government have strained relations between the two countries, which have further been worsened by the persecution of Hindus and other minorities in Bangladesh. India is examining the request on legal grounds, but India can refuse extradition, citing political nature or justice-related concerns, but ultimately it is going to be purely political reasons. The ball is firmly in India's court, and if India sends her back, we would seal her fate as she is bound to face the death penalty in Dhaka, and if it rejects this request, then we should be ready for more hostility from our neighbour, and our ties would go from bad to worse. Whatever India chose to do will have long-term ramifications on this whole region. **Bal Govind | Noida**

EMPOWERING RURAL ECONOMY

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

Societies (PACS). These societies not only generate employment but also ensure optimal resource availability and connect farmers' produce to international markets, aligning with the vision of "Prosperity through Cooperation." PACS, as the cornerstone of the cooperative three-tier structure, play a pivotal role in rural upliftment by addressing needs like credit, fertilisers, storage, and water management. The government aims to establish 2 lakh PACS in five years, strengthening rural infrastructure and promoting unity, harmony, and self-reliance. To revive dormant PACS and establish new ones, a detailed Standard Operating Procedure (SOP) has been developed, targeting the setup of PACS in 15,000 villages. These societies are evolving into hubs of multifaceted services, including digital amenities like ticket bookings and financial inclusion via RuPay Kisan Credit Cards and micro-ATMs. **R K Jain | Barwani**

Homeschooling: Affordable and holistic education option

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

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



presents a challenging list of costs: tuition, uniforms, transportation, extracurriculars, and supplies. Homeschooling greatly alleviates these financial burdens. Parents now have the opportunity to invest in essential resources such as top-notch educational materials, online courses, or tailored coaching—all designed to cater to their child's unique needs. Moreover, homeschooling encourages families to tap into their creativity and resourcefulness. Libraries, free online resources, and community programmes provide abundant learning opportunities with minimal or no expense. In a time filled with numerous digital resources, parents have the ability to craft a curriculum that is both cost-effective and thorough. In addition to reducing expenses, there are numerous

other factors contributing to the rising popularity of homeschooling. Parents hold the view that homeschooling can significantly enhance a child's personal and academic development. In contrast to conventional educational institutions, homeschooling offers remarkable flexibility, allowing lessons to align with a child's interests, learning pace, and preferred methods of engagement. A student passionate about science, for instance, can dedicate additional time to experiments and practical activities, while those with a flair for the arts can unleash their creativity free from the limitations of a rigid schedule. Another key factor is the importance of comprehensive development. Homeschooling transcends traditional textbooks and offers genuine, real-world learning experiences. Cooking transforms into a blend of maths and chemistry; gardening embodies principles of biology and sustainability; a visit to the museum or park imparts lessons in history and ecology. These activities, along with practical knowledge, foster

family connections—something that seems rare in today's world. Certainly, homeschooling comes with its drawbacks. Concerns have been voiced by critics regarding socialisation and the stress it imposes on parents. Nevertheless, families who choose to homeschool have found innovative ways to address these issues, including forming co-op groups, engaging in community sports, and coordinating group field trips. This signifies a movement towards appreciating cost-effectiveness, adaptability, and personal expression in education—a tendency expected to expand as households adjust to financial circumstances. Ultimately, homeschooling transcends being merely an educational option; it embodies a declaration of empowerment. For parents aiming to reshape education in a way that resonates with their values, this journey offers not just information but a profoundly rewarding experience for both themselves and their children. *(The writer is a motivator and a freelance writer; views are personal)*



RACHNA LAKHPATRI



FIRST COLUMN

HUNGER FOR POWER

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



APS MALHOTRA

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

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

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

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

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

India must stand firm against Sheikh Hasina’s extradition



HIRANMAY KARLEKAR

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



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

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



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

Awami League’s leaders and ministers in the party’s government. According to a report in The Daily Star carried under the headline, “No option but to succeed: Yunus” on August 18, 2024, Chief Adviser Muhammad Yunus had said during a “Meet and Greet” session with foreign diplomats in Dhaka, “In their efforts to stay in power, the Sheikh Hasina dictatorship destroyed every institution of the country. Judiciary was broken. Democratic rights were suppressed through a brutal decade-and-a-half long crackdown. Elections were rigged blatantly. Generations of young people grew up without exercising their voting rights. Banks were robbed with full political patronisation. And the state coffers was plundered by abusing power.” Referring to a proposed Awami League rally on November 10, 2024, Muhammad Yunus’ press secretary, Shafiqul Alam, had written in a Facebook post on November 9, “The Awami League in its current form is a fascist party. There is no way this fascist party will be allowed to hold protests in Bangladesh. Anyone who would try to hold rally, gathering and processions by taking orders from the mass murderer and dictator Sheikh Hasina will face full force of the law enforcing agencies.”

Leaders of the Anti-Discrimination Students Movement (ADSM), formed on July 1, 2024, to carry the students’ struggle forward, and Jatiya Nagarik Committee (National Citizens Committee), formed on 8 September, 2024, to consolidate the movement’s message and political goals, have spoken in a similar strident and denunciatory vein.

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

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

One can argue that the ICT, and any other court where Sheikh Hasina and other accused may be tried, will ignore such vituperations and pronounce its judgement on the basis of the evidence and arguments placed before it. A horse would guffaw on hearing this. The judiciary has been brought to heel through forced resignations and dismissals. The process began as early as August 10, 2024, when chief justice Obaidul Hassan of the Supreme Court and five judges of the appellate division, resigned as hundreds of students affiliated to the ADSM gathered on the court premises demanding that they quit, and threatened to besiege their residences if they did not.

On October 16, the new chief justice, Syed Refaat Ahmed, sent 12 High Court judges, appointed during the Sheikh Hasina-led Awami League rule, on leave following a demonstration in the court premises by adherents of the ADSM led by Hasnat Abdullah and Sarjis Alam. According to a report in Bangladesh’s The Business Standard on October 16 itself, announcing the plan, Hasnat

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

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

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

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

Unlocking economic potential: Bridging the gender gap in public procurement

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

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

procurement market. WEConnect International is actively working to bridge this gap. Our efforts are making headway, especially in countries such as India, where policy frameworks are beginning to reflect a greater emphasis on gender inclusivity.

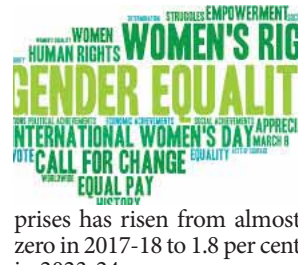
The central government has increasingly prioritised women-centric policies, evident from the substantial rise in gender budget allocations, which is another way to support women and girls in addition to buying their products and services. For example, in 2013-14, Rs 97,134 crore was earmarked for women’s welfare and empowerment. By 2024-25, this figure had reached Rs 3.27 lakh crore, marking a 19 per cent increase over the actual gender budget expendi-



ELIZABETH A VAZQUEZ

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

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



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

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

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

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

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

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

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



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

Prime Minister, Finance Minister and an economist he finds his place among India's tallest leaders. Indian industry, economy and especially entrepreneurs owe a debt of gratitude to the liberalisation reforms that were ushered in the early 90s under his leadership," Mittal said. Infosys founder Narayana Murthy described Manmohan Singh as a gentleman, a scholar, and a value-based politician. "His leading the economic reforms, under the guidance of Sri Narasimha Rao, is what laid a strong and durable foundation for the acceleration of India's economic growth. Therefore, every Indian should be extremely grateful to this extraordinary individual for enhancing the prosperity of our country," Murthy said. Reliance Group head Anil Ambani said the former prime minister's life was a testament to humility, wisdom and service to India. "As the Guru Granth Sahib says, 'Nanak Naam Chardi Kala, Tere Bhane Sarbat Da Bhala' - 'With the Divine Name comes eternal optimism; by You will, may there be well-being for all."

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



PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

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

passing of Mr. Osamu Suzuki, a legendary figure in the global automotive industry. His visionary work reshaped global perceptions of mobility. Under his leadership, Suzuki Motor Corporation became a global powerhouse, successfully navigating challenges, driving innovation and expansion," Modi said in a social media post. Suzuki, who took the risk of partnering with the then Indian government to form a joint venture, Maruti Udyog Ltd, in 1981 - at a time when India was still a closed economy under a licence regime - is widely regarded as the man who spurred the automotive industry in the country. Maruti Udyog Ltd later on became Maruti Suzuki India Ltd subsequent to the government completing its exit in 2007 with Suzuki Motor Corporation holding a majority stake. Osamu Suzuki was the director and honorary chairman of Maruti Suzuki India Ltd.

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



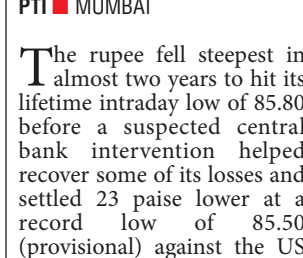
PTI ■ NEW DELHI

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

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

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

PTI ■ MUMBAI



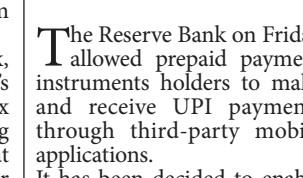
The rupee fell steepest in almost two years to hit its lifetime intraday low of 85.80 before a suspected central bank intervention helped recover some of its losses and settled 23 paise lower at a record low of 85.50 (provisional) against the US dollar on Friday due to a strong greenback amid increased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

side forward contracts set to mature in December and January. Market speculation suggests that the RBI has refrained from rolling over these maturing forwards, leading to a scarcity of dollars and an oversupply of rupees. "Moreover, dollar liquidity in the market remains very low, amplifying the upward momentum in the pair. This imbalance has propelled the USD-INR pair towards 85.8075 levels," said Amit Pabari, MD of CR Forex Advisors. According to Anuj Choudhary - Research Analyst at Mirae Asset Sharekhan, the rupee hit a record low on dollar demand from importers towards the end of the month and outflows from foreign investors (FIIs). "Rising US treasury yields and crude oil prices also weighed on the rupee," he said and projected the USD-INR spot price in a range of Rs 85.30 to Rs 85.85, saying

traders may take cues from goods trade balance data from the US. Meanwhile, the dollar index, which gauges the greenback's strength against a basket of six currencies, was trading higher by 0.04 per cent at 107.94, while the 10-year benchmark US Treasury yield rose 0.76 per cent, hitting its seven-month high level of 4.61 per cent. Brent crude, the global oil benchmark, rose 0.15 per cent to USD 73.37 per barrel in futures trade. In the domestic equity market, the 30-share BSE Sensex settled 226.59 points or 0.29 per cent higher at 78,699.07 points, while Nifty went up 63.20 points, or 0.27 per cent to close at 23,813.40 points. Foreign Institutional Investors (FIIs) were net sellers in the capital markets on Thursday, as they offloaded shares worth Rs 2,376.67 crore, according to exchange data.

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

PTI ■ MUMBAI



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

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

NCLT directs initiation of insolvency proceedings against Hero Electric

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

The National Company Law Tribunal (NCLT) has directed initiation of insolvency proceedings against Hero Electric after admitting a plea filed by Metro Tyres, an operational creditor claiming a default of Rs 1.85 crore. As per provisions of the Insolvency & Bankruptcy Code (IBC), NCLT has appointed Bhoopesh Gupta as Interim Resolution Professional to run the company after suspending the board of Hero Electric. The Delhi-based bench of



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

been duly negated by Metro Tyres, which had supplied tyres and tubes to the company. "In the facts and circumstances of the instant case, we are of the view that the corporate debtor has not been able to raise a plausible contention regarding the pre-existence of 'dispute' between the parties. Hence, the present petition filed under Section 9 of the IBC, 2016 ought to be admitted," it said. Besides, a two-member bench in its 16-page order passed on December 20, declared a moratorium, protecting the company from decree or

order of any court, tribunal or arbitration panel and ban on transferring, encumbering, alienating or disposing of its assets. Hero Electric had approached Metro Tyres, for the purchase of cycle tyres and tubes. Pursuant to that it supplied goods to Hero Electric and in lieu of that various invoices were raised from August 9, 2022 to December 3, 2022 amounting to Rs 3.69 crore out of which Rs 4.27 lakh was paid. However, Rs 1.85 crore was due on Hero Electric, and Metro Tyres submitted that despite its several requests,

records that the corporate debtor (Hero Electric) being the purchaser of goods never raised any quality issue or any sort of dispute in any manner whatsoever as per their own inspection/quality control policies immediately after the receipt of the goods and continued to purchase goods," said NCLT. Hero Electric itself has declared in the user manual/warranty policy for its products that "tyres/tubes" are not covered under its warranty and the original manufacturer is liable for all or any claim for tyres and tubes.

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

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

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

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

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

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



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

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

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

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

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

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



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

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



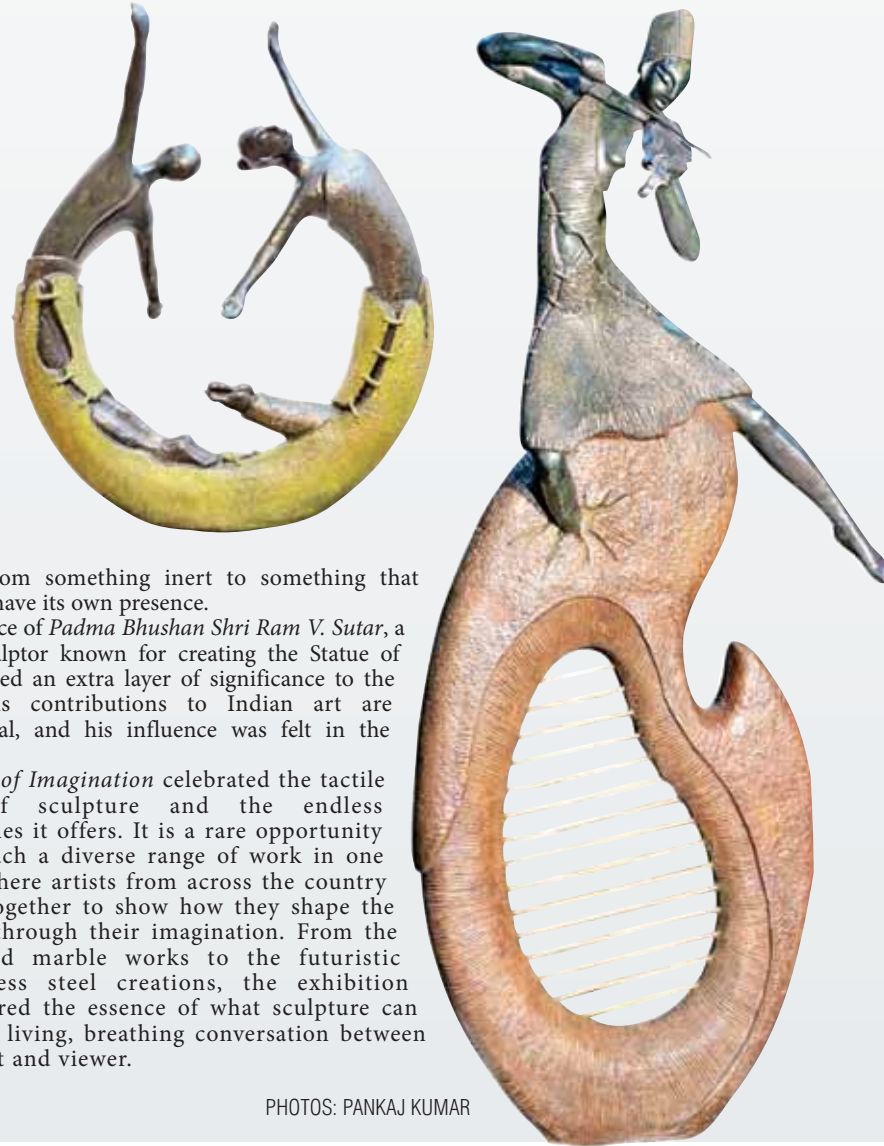
Sculpting the Soul



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

Sculpture is a unique form of art that speaks to us not just through its visual appeal but also through its form, texture, and the materials used. At *The Forces of Imagination*, a groundbreaking sculpture exhibition at the India Habitat Centre, this powerful medium was brought to life in all its glory. The event, curated by the renowned art critic **Nanak Ganguly** and organised by **Chawla Art Gallery** in collaboration with the **Delhi Art Society** and **Calcutta Sculptors**, featured over 100 sculptures from 14 talented artists, each pushing the boundaries of creativity. Upon entering the gallery, the diversity of the works was immediately apparent. There was a remarkable blend of traditional craftsmanship and contemporary innovation. The sculptures, created from materials such as bronze, marble, stainless steel, aluminum and wood, each told its own story. Whether they were smooth, polished surfaces or raw, textured designs, every piece invited a deeper engagement, requiring the viewer to physically move around and truly immerse themselves in the art. One of the highlights of the exhibition was **Vibhor Sogani's** stainless steel sculptures. These works, with their sleek and shiny surfaces, caught the light in a way that made them appear to change shape depending on the viewer's perspective. They felt alive and fluid, showcasing the artist's ability to push the limits of sculpture into a modern, dynamic realm. In contrast, **Neeraj Gupta's** marble sculptures had a classic feel, with intricate details

and deep narratives embedded in the stone. His works spoke of tradition while being distinctly contemporary, highlighting how timeless materials can still feel relevant in today's art world. The exhibition successfully created a space for both established sculptors and emerging talents. It was a platform where seasoned masters such as **Tapas Sarkar** and **Ratan Krishna Saha**, alongside fresh voices from the **Calcutta Sculptors** collective, could showcase their work. The diversity in styles and techniques was fascinating, each piece added a new layer to the conversation, whether through form, medium, or theme. This blending of generations and styles made for an incredibly engaging experience. The curation of the exhibition was impeccable, with each sculpture given ample space to stand on its own while also contributing to the overall dialogue of the show. The lighting in the gallery was carefully considered, casting shadows and highlighting the unique textures of each piece. As you moved through the space, you could feel the transformation of the



material from something inert to something that seemed to have its own presence. The presence of **Padma Bhushan Shri Ram V. Sutar**, a master sculptor known for creating the **Statue of Unity**, added an extra layer of significance to the event. His contributions to Indian art are monumental, and his influence was felt in the exhibition. *The Forces of Imagination* celebrated the tactile power of sculpture and the endless possibilities it offers. It is a rare opportunity to see such a diverse range of work in one place, where artists from across the country come together to show how they shape the world through their imagination. From the detailed marble works to the futuristic stainless steel creations, the exhibition captured the essence of what sculpture can be: a living, breathing conversation between artist and viewer.

PHOTOS: PANKAJ KUMAR



WHERE DRAMA MEETS REALITY

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

Theatre has always had a unique power to bring stories to life, creating a shared space where emotions and experiences are felt deeply by both performers and audiences. The *Bharatmuni Rang Utsav*, a celebration of Indian theatre, truly captured this essence, offering a powerful display of storytelling. Each performance brought something distinct to the stage, reminding us of the magic of theatre and its ability to touch hearts. The festival opened with three exceptional plays that set the tone for the days ahead. **Asmanjas Babu**, written by **Satyajit Ray** and directed by **Utpal Jha**, explored moral dilemmas with nuance and depth. This was followed by **Aakhiri Hila**, written by **Munshi Premchand** and directed by **Durga Sharma**, which brought to life the poignant storytelling of one of India's literary legends. Concluding the evening was **Dhundh**, written and directed by **Amul Sagar**, a

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

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

PHOTOS: PANKAJ KUMAR

The Power of Her Canvas

By **TEAM VIVA**

Women's art has long been a space of untold stories, silent rebellions and vibrant expressions of identity. **Vama: Showcasing Women Artists** from Delhi at the **Shridharani Gallery**, **Triveni Kala Sangam**, brings these narratives to the forefront, presenting a captivating display of works by 20 distinguished women artists from the city. Through this exhibition, **Sahitya Kala Parishad** not only honours their talent but also creates a platform for the celebration of women's creativity and their powerful voices in the art world. The artworks on display offer a striking diversity of mediums and perspectives. **Nilanjana Nandy's This Side-That Side** stands as a poignant exploration of division and alienation, using grid-like spaces to depict the fragmentation of identity. **Aditi Aggarwal's Dream 6 and 7** offers a surreal reflection on memory and change, encapsulating a personal journey through unsettling yet evocative imagery. Both works underscore how women's art often bridges personal



experience with universal themes, offering viewers a chance to engage deeply with complex emotions. Meanwhile, **Angelica Basak's Breathe series** uses ceramic sculptures to embody the delicate balance between chaos and tranquility, while **Rashmi Khurana's** mixed-media works delve into the power of tactile surfaces to evoke profound human emotions. **Shampa Sircar's Mayura Series** incorporates the peacock and lotus to symbolise the interconnectedness of life and spiritual growth. From the global themes explored in **Durga Kainthola's Travelogue Diaries** to **Richa Navani's** geometric abstractions addressing gender and ecology, **Vama** stands as a vibrant celebration of the depth, diversity and power of women's artistic expression. This exhibition is not only an artistic experience but a reminder of the essential role women play in shaping the cultural landscape. It encourages reflection on the ever-evolving role of women in art and society, offering a dynamic space for dialogue and empowerment.

PHOTOS: PANKAJ KUMAR



Empowering Women through Skill Development

By **ABHI SINGHAL**

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

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



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

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

PTI ■ MELBOURNE

A familiar collapse unfolded after Yashasvi Jaiswal's inexplicable run-out as India stared down the barrel at 164/5 against a menacing Australia on day two of the fourth Test here on Friday.

Jaiswal, who was quite fluent during his 118-ball stay that yielded 82 runs, was way short of his crease after a mix-up with Virat Kohli (36) while attempting a quick single, handing Australia the breakthrough that could prove decisive.

India are still 310 runs behind Australia's first innings score of 474 and would need another 111 runs to avoid a follow-on that should never have been a consideration on a placid batting track.

It was 153 for 2 at one stage and in four overs, another three wickets fell with Gautam Gambhir's plan of sending a night watchman in Akash Deep turning out to be one of the many poor calls that the head coach has taken in this game.

In a space of barely five minutes,



Rahul got a ripper from Pat Cummins. Australian bowlers stamping his authority as the next megastar of Indian batting. Kohli, at the other end, endured boos for Thursday's run-in with debutant Sam Konstas and battled his demons. This was after Steve Smith's 34th

Test hundred ensured a very good total for hosts.

Starting the day at 311 for 6, Smith added 112 and 44 runs with Cummins (49) and Mitchell Starc (15) respectively, leaving the visitors searching for back-up plans.

Jasprit Bumrah (4/99 in 28.4 overs) was once again brilliant despite the first spell thrashing from Konstas but Mohammed Siraj's ordinary showing (0/122 in 23 overs) was the primary reason for batters not being under any pressure.

Smith, who was unbeaten overnight on 68 off 111 balls, took another 56 deliveries in the second morning to complete a Test ton which placed him on even keel with the legendary Sunil Gavaskar (34).

The century came with a push drive through the vacant cover region and celebrations were pretty muted with a just vigorous head nod for his teammates in the dug-out.

Smith, who had a torrid run till the second Test of this series, played both days in contrasting styles. On Thursday, he was ready to be patient and waited for deliveries at the expense of looking ugly.

On Friday, the same batter was walking down the track to force the bowlers to alter their length. He was ready to pull and hook, getting two sixes off Bumrah and Siraj respectively.

Despite a significant drop in temperature and some nip in the air, Indians failed to make use of the semi-new Kookaburra, with lines going all awry and length being short enough to be punished. Cummins was allowed to settle down and hit seven boundaries.

The Indian ploy of playing two spinners backfired with Ravindra Jadeja (3/78 in 22 overs) and Washington Sundar (1/49 in 15 overs) never looking penetrative. For a change, Siraj didn't try and sledge an in-form batter, something that he did in Adelaide with some disastrous results.

But that didn't soften the Australian supporters, who constantly booed him and Kohli as and when the ball went to them.



India whitewash West Indies 3-0

PTI ■ VADODARA

Senior off-spinner Deepti Sharma did the star turn with career-best figures of 6/31 before doing her bit with the bat as India completed a 3-0 whitewash of the West Indies with a five-wicket victory in the final Women's ODI here on Friday.

Having bowled out West Indies for 162 after Deepti's superlative performance and pacer Renuka Singh's (4/29) excellent show with the new ball, India recovered after a top-order wobble to reach the target of 163 in 28.2 overs.

India were in a spot of bother at 73/4 but Deepti (39 not out in 48 balls) used all her experience to see the team through with plenty of overs remaining.

Swashbuckling wicketkeeper-batter Richa Ghosh was unbeaten on an 11-ball 23 when the winning runs were scored.

Skipper Harmanpreet Kaur, who eased nerves with two boundaries after last match centurion Harleen Deol's (1) dismissal left India at 23/2, blazed away to a 22-ball 32 before getting bowled by Afy Fletcher.

During her breezy knock, Kaur smashed seven boundaries and looked good for a big one before getting dismissed.

In-form opener Smriti Mandhana (4) departed early as Ashmini Munisar

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

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

Stalwarts of Indian sports paid rich tributes to former Prime Minister Dr Manmohan Singh, who died on Thursday, describing him as a visionary, who had quiet strength and humility.

Singh died here after losing consciousness at his home due to age-related ailments. He was 92.

"Rest in peace, Dr. Manmohan Singhji. His quiet strength, wisdom, and humility were truly inspiring. I had a brief interaction with him in 2013 — he was kind, gracious, and left a lasting impression. My heartfelt condolences to his family," wrote India's ace shuttler Sindhu on X.

Cricketer Sachin Tendulkar termed Singh's demise as a huge loss for the country.

"Dr. Manmohan Singh ji's demise is a profound loss for India. His contributions to our nation shall always be remembered. My prayers are with his family and loved ones as we mourn his passing away," Legendary golfer Jeev Milkha Singh recalled Singh's simplicity and humility, saying he was committed to national duty all his life.

"Dr Manmohan Singh was probably one of the most humble men I had met in my life - a simple and extremely intelligent man. His sense of duty and responsibility shone through. The world has lost a visionary," wrote Jeev.

On Friday, both the men's and women's cricket teams wore black armbands during their respective national assignments to pay homage to the former PM.

Earlier, World Cup-winning former cricketer Yuvraj Singh called Singh a "true statesman".

A visionary leader and a true statesman who worked tirelessly for India's progress. His wisdom and humility will always be remembered. My heartfelt condolences to his loved ones," Yuvraj Singh posted on X.

Similar sentiments were expressed by his former teammate and Aam Aadmi Party's Rajya Sabha member Harbhajan Singh, who described Singh as a thorough gentleman and visionary leader.

"What truly set him apart was his calm and steady leadership in times of crisis, his ability to navigate complex political



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

PTI ■ MELBOURNE

Australian batting mainstay Steve Smith always knew that he was "out of runs" but never "out of form" as he got back-to-back Test hundreds against India within a week of each other after 18 months of lull.

Having scored his 33rd ton in Brisbane, Smith equalled Sunil Gavaskar's then world record of 34 hundreds on the second day of the fourth Test at the MCG on Friday.

Asked how did he chug along all these days when big runs were not coming that easily, Smith dived deep into his inner core.

"Sometimes you can be hitting the ball really nicely, which I think I said to you guys when I wasn't scoring the runs. I actually felt like I was batting pretty well. And there's a difference, I think, between being out of form and out of runs. So, yeah, I thought I was hitting the ball nicely," Smith said at the day-end press conference here.

"I mean, you've got to have faith. You've got to have a bit of trust in what you're trying to do. I've played the game for long enough now to know that you can have your ups and downs. Having some faith and confidence," said the man, who is expected to get to 10,000 Test runs before the five-match series concludes.

"I think you need a lot of luck on these wickets to get big runs as well, the ones we're playing at the moment. And last week I had my fair share. I think I got an umpire's call and got beaten on numerous occasions as to on other days, I would nick it."

"So, yeah, you need a bit of luck. But you've just got to have faith that you're going to turn it around."

Australia's batting was a lot more aggressive on the second day after resuming on overnight 311 for six but Smith said that while batting with Pat Cummins, there was no "general plan" as such.

"There wasn't really a general plan. It was just go out there and play. Yeah, there wasn't a real plan. It was just go out and play and see what's going on. I thought Patty (Cummins) played really nicely. Really good, positive intent."

"We were able to get a nice partnership together and take a bit of the momentum of the game from that point, I suppose."

Chennaiyin FC aim to return to winning ways

PTI ■ CHENNAI

Chennaiyin FC will be aiming to rebound to winning form and finish the year on a positive note when they face Bengaluru FC in the Indian Super league here on Saturday.

In the day's other game, Hyderabad FC will host East Bengal FC with an aim to turn things around and halt the visitors' momentum.

Chennaiyin and Bengaluru have played each other 15 times in the ISL, with the former winning four matches. This corresponding fixture last year produced a 2-0 win for the Marina Machans and head coach Owen Coyle will be eyeing the same this time.

However, the tactician will be without captain Ryan Edwards, who is suspended for the match, and is expected to field an all-Indian backline.

Bengaluru come into the match as the second-placed side in the league, and Coyle is wary of the threat they carry, especially with the team missing key personnel.

On the availability front, Coyle confirmed that he will take late calls on Wilmar Jordan Gil and Ankit Mukherjee, both of whom are back in training after receiving knocks.

The head coach also revealed that Elsinho, who left the pitch under medical care in the previous home match, is recovering in his native Brazil and will be rejoining the squad in the new year.

Task cut out for HFC in Hyderabad This will be the ninth ISL meeting between the two sides, with East Bengal FC aiming to continue their recent dominance over Hyderabad FC.

East Bengal FC have won their last two ISL matches against Hyderabad FC, including a league double in the 2023-24 season.

Meanwhile, Hyderabad FC will look to bounce back after a disappointing run that has seen them lose their last five matches in the league on a trot.

The Red & Gold brigade has managed a turnaround in the previous five matches, winning four of those clashes.



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

PTI ■ NEW YORK

Indian Grandmaster Arjun Erigaisi opened his campaign with four wins and a solitary loss in the World Rapid Chess Championship to be tied fifth even as defending champion Magnus Carlsen endured a frustrating day, managing to log just one victory here.

Carlsen of Norway could not find his mojo drew three games and a late loss against Russian Denis Lazavik.

Another Indian to impress was 13-year-old Raunak Sadhwani, who provided glimpse of his promise by taking down one of pre-event favourites Alireza Firouzja of France on Thursday.

With the first five rounds done and eight more still to come in USD 550,000 championship, Murzin Volodar of Russia, Shant Sargsyan of Armenia and the American duo of Daniel Naroditsky and Lenier Dominguez Perez share the lead on 4.5 points apiece.

Arjun and Sadhwani are in the next group of 11 players who share the fifth spot on four points each. It is an impressive list that includes the likes of Hikaru Nakamura of United States, Nodirbek Abdusattorov of Uzbekistan and Anish Giri of Holland.

In the Women's section being played simultaneously, local star Alice Lee stole the opening day thunder with four straight victories in as many games.

The American is challenged by world champion Wenjun Ju of China, her compatriot Zhongyi Tan, Gunay Mammadzada of Azerbaijan, Nino Batsiashvili of Georgia and India's D Harika who all have 3.5 points to their credit.

With seven rounds to come in the women's event, R Vaishali could also among the ones to watch out for from an Indian perspective as the Chennai-based is on three points.

Highest rated and former winner Koneru Humpy could



manage only 2.5 points and has a lot of catching up to do in the remainder of the event.

Arjun, if he wins this championship, will be the first player to go through to the Candidates, a cycle that started early this year and will continue till December 2025.

Currently the Indian stands second behind Fabiano Caruana of United States who is on 3.5 points. He got things pretty much right except the sole defeat he suffered against Samuel Sevian of United States in the third round.

With four victories under his belt, Arjun can be a real threat.

The day, however, belonged to Sadhwani who found his magical touch as early as in round two when he tackled Firouzja with the black pieces.

The position seemed headed to equal when Sadhwani punched his way back keeping an eye on a weak white pawn with his centralised knight. The knight darted through the board

creating another hole on the king side that forced a resignation.

Harika was the pick of the Indian women as she came up with a crushing victory against Nataliya Zhukova of Ukraine with the white pieces in her fourth-round game.

Harika picked up pawns at will in a Queen and opposite coloured Bishops endgame and registered a smooth victory in a game that lasted 70 moves.

The rapid event has a time control of 15 minutes for the entire game with 10 seconds added after each move is played.

This will be followed by the blitz championship that will have three minutes for both players with just two seconds increment. The women's event is spread over 11 rounds while in the open section, 13 rounds will be played.

In blitz, the top eight will qualify and determine the medallists through a knockout stage.

Standings after round 5 open: 1-4: Shant Sargsyan (Arm); Lenier Dominguez Perez (Usa); Daniel Naroditsky (Usa); Murzin Volodar (FID); 5-15: Arju Erigaisi, Raunak Sadhwani (both Ind); Javokhir Sindarov, Nodirbek Abdusattorov (both Uzb); Duda Jan-Kryzstof (Pol) Anish Giri (Ned); Levon Aronian, Hikaru Nakamura, Ray Robson, Samuel Sevian (All USA); NOgerbek Kazybek (Kaz) 3.5 each; Indians: V Pranav (3.5); R Praggnanandhaa (3); Aravindh Chithambaram (2); Kartik Venkatramanan, Sandipan Chanda (1.5) each; Standings after round 4 Women: 1. 2-Alice Lee (Usa, 4); 2-6: D Harika, (Ind); Nino Batsiashvili (Geo); Wenjun Ju (Chn); Zhongyi Tan (Chn) 3.5 each; Indians: R Vaishali (3); Vantika Agarwal, Koneru Humpy (2.5 each); Sahiti Varshini, Divya Deshmukh (2 each); Padmini Rout (1.5).

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Ministry of Health & Family Welfare
(PMSSY Division)

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2. For further details, please visit Website of the Ministry & this Division i.e. <https://www.mhfw.gov.in> and <https://pmssy-mohfw.gov.in>.

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