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

J GOPIKRISHNAN ■ NEW DELHI

With controversies raging on the United States Department of Justice indicting Adani Group for bribing 265 Million Dollars to multiple solar energy companies in India, recent orders from the American authorities, shows that many US firms which gave the bribes in India and other countries, have settled the case by paying more than 300 per cent penalty to avoid prosecution. The US-based research and design firm Moog Inc was caught for bribery of more than half-a-Million Dollars to Hindustan Aeronautics Limited (HAL), Indian Railways settled their case with US Securities and Exchange Commission by paying more than 1.68 Million Dollars. The IT giant Oracle Corporation, caught for charges of corrupt practices and bribery of more than

6.8 Million Dollars in Indian Railways, and organisations in United Arab Emirates (UAE) and Turkey, settled the case by paying a fine of 23 Million Dollars to the US Treasury as per the orders of US Securities and Exchange Commission. US-based chemical manufacturing company Albemarle Corporation was caught by the US Department of Justice for bribing Indian Oil Corporation and companies in Indonesia and Vietnam for more than 63.5 Million Dollars settled the case by paying a hefty fine of more than 198 million dollars to avoid prosecution. As per the orders on October 11, 2024, the Securities and Exchange Commission (SEC), Moog Inc through its Indian subsidiary Moog Motion Controls Private Limited (MMCPL) bribed officials in Hindustan Aeronautics Limited (HAL), South Central

Railway and Research Designs and Standards Organisation (RDSO) under the Ministry of Railways to bag contracts. "In August 2020, shortly after engaging Agent A, Moog brand was added to the supplier list for an upcoming South Central Railway (SCR) tender notice... then tender notice listed Moog, along with one additional supplier for potential supplier for a specific part in the SCR tender..." In September 2020, Moog Inc's India subsidiary MMCPL won the SCR contract for \$34,323. In April 2022, Agent A invoiced MMCPL for "commission charges," which several MMCPL employees knew included the improper payments to Government officials to eliminate competition and win contract awards. The payments were falsely recorded as legitimate contractor services," says the SEC Order, adding that 10% was the

bribe commission in the Railways contract. The SEC order detailing bribery in HAL says in November 2021, Moog bagged \$ 1,399,328 valued contract for parts and services related to the April 2021 contract tender. Investigation found that 2.5% commission was received as a bribe by "a HAL official." As per the eight page order, Moog Inc paid more than 5,00,000 Dollars as bribe for getting contracts in HAL and Railways. The US Department of Justice's order dated September 28, 2023 says Albemarle Corporation bagged big contracts in Indian Oil Corporation and companies in Indonesia and Vietnam by corrupt practices and bribing of more than 63.5 million dollars. Albemarle is supplying refining solutions to more than 700 refineries across the world and dealing with Indian Oil Corporation (IOC) from 2009

**THE PUNISHED**  
Moog Inc caught for bribery of over a half a Million Dollars in HAL, Railways settled the case with United States Securities and Exchange Commission by paying a penalty of more than 1.68 Million Dollars.  
Oracle Corporation, caught for bribery of more than 6.8 Million Dollars in Indian Railways, UAE and Turkey, settled the case by paying a penalty of 23 Million Dollars.  
Albemarle Corporation caught for bribery in Indian Oil Corporation & companies in Indonesia & Vietnam for more than 63.5 Million Dollars settled the case by paying a penalty of more than 198 Million Dollars to avoid prosecution.

"Albemarle paid approximately \$1.14 Million in commission to India intermediary company relating to Indian Oil Corporation business and obtained approximately \$11.14 million in profits on that business between approximately 2009 and 2011," said the Order. Albemarle was caught for bribery by US authorities in 2017 for 63.5 Million Dollars and then settled the case in September 2023 by paying a hefty fine of more than 198 Million Dollars to avoid prosecution. The 46-page Order imposing fine on Albemarle says the US company also engaged in corrupt practices with an Indian private refinery. However the name of the private refinery is not mentioned in the Order. The September 27, 2022 dated Order of Securities and Exchange Commission says that the IT giant Oracle Corporation was engaged

in corrupt practices and bribery in India, UAE and Turkey. "In 2019, Oracle India sales employees also used an excessive discount scheme in connection with a transportation company, a majority of which was owned by the Indian Ministry of Railways..." One of the sales employees involved in the transaction maintained a spreadsheet that indicated \$67,000 was the "buffer" available to potentially make payments to a specific Indian SOE (State Owned Entity) official. "A total of approximately \$330,000 was funneled to an entity with a reputation for paying SOE officials and another \$62,000 was paid to an entity controlled by the sales employees," states the 10-page order of Securities and Exchange Commission imposing hefty fine of Rs.23 Million Dollars on Oracle, caught for bribery amount of 6.8 Million Dollars.



MARCH 9, 1951-DEC 15, 2024

### The tabla falls silent, Ustad Zakir Hussain passes away at 73

Tabla maestro Ustad Zakir Hussain passed away in the United States on Sunday. He was 73. Hussain was admitted to the ICU of a San Francisco hospital with heart related problems, his friend and flautist Rakesh Chaurasia had told PTI earlier on Sunday. Hussain is hailed as the maestro who took the tabla to the global stage. He had been having blood pressure issues, added Hussain's manager Nirmala Bachani. The eldest son of legendary tabla player Allah Rakha, Hussain followed in the footsteps of his father, becoming a marquee name in India and across the world. Hussain has received five Grammy Awards in his career, including three at the 66th Grammy Awards earlier this year. In his career spanning six decades, the musician has worked with several renowned international and Indian artists, but it was his 1973 musical project with English guitarist John McLaughlin, violinist L Shankar, and percussionist BH 'Vikku' Vinayakram that brought together Indian classical and elements of jazz in a fusion hitherto unknown. The percussionist, one of India's most celebrated classical musicians, received the Padma Shri in 1988, the Padma Bhushan in 2002, and the Padma Vibhushan in 2023.

## Now Omar chips away at India Bloc

DEEPAK KUMAR JHA ■ NEW DELHI

There seem to be further cracks developing in the Congress-led Opposition INDIA Bloc, as Jammu and Kashmir Chief Minister and head of National Conference Omar Abdullah on Sunday categorically rejected the grand old party's crying over Electronic Voting Machines (EVMs) after losing elections. Omar is one of the important ally of the INDIA Bloc and his resentment against Congress comes within one week which saw other constituents like Sharad Pawar-led Nationalist Congress Party (NCP), Mamata Banerjee-led Trinamool Congress (TMC), Lalu Yadav-led Rashtriya Janata Dal (RJD) echoed similar views and called for Congress must rethink and give up its Big brother attitude after the party had dismal performance in the just concluded



Assembly polls in Haryana, Maharashtra, Jharkhand and J & K where the party was outshined by their principle ally Jharkhand Mukti Morcha (JMM) and Jammu and Kashmir National Conference (JKNC), respectively. "When you get a hundred plus members of Parliament using the same EVMs, and you celebrate that as sort of a victory for

your party, you can't then a few months later turn around and say... We don't like these EVMs because now the election results aren't going the way we would like them to," Abdullah, currently in Delhi, said. The J & K CM said political parties should not contest elections if they do not trust the voting mechanism. "If you have problems with the EVMs, then you should be consistent in those problems," he said. Going against the INDIA Bloc thought process, Omar also reiterated his stand for the New Parliament Building and the upcoming massive Central Vista. "Central Vista project is a good idea to develop in the Lutyens' and I also have read out my mind for a new Parliament building as the old one has outlived," he said.

## BJP has no CM face, says poll ready Kejriwal

RAJESH KUMAR ■ NEW DELHI

With a couple of months left for the Delhi Assembly polls, the Aam Aadmi Party (AAP) released its fourth, and final, list of 38 candidates on Sunday. AAP convener Arvind Kejriwal will contest from New Delhi constituency for the fourth consecutive time, while Delhi Chief Minister Atishi has been fielded from Kalkaji for the second time. In the fourth list, a total of 38 candidates have been announced, of which 36 are sitting MLAs. The AAP has now released names of its candidates for all 70 seats in the Delhi Assembly. The party has, so far, dropped 19 sitting MLAs. The party has given a chance to two new names- Ramesh Pehalwan from Kasturba Nagar and Naresh Balyan's wife Pooja Balyan. The upcoming polls are expected to be a litmus test for the party's governance model and its appeal to the electorate. Besides Kejriwal's bid for New Delhi, where he has won since 2013 the AAP faces significant



competition. The Congress has fielded former Member of Parliament Sandeep Dikshit, son of Sheila Dikshit, the city's longest-serving chief minister while the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) is expected to field former MP Parvesh Sahib Singh Verma, son of former Delhi Chief Minister Sahib Singh Verma who was denied a ticket for the Lok Sabha polls.



Photo: Ranjan Dimri/The Pioneer

### Delhi AQI will rise as temp dips

RAJESH KUMAR ■ NEW DELHI

Delhi's air quality worsened on Sunday as the Air Quality Index (AQI) remained in the 'poor category' alongside a significant drop in temperature, intensifying cold conditions across the city. According to the India Meteorological Department (IMD), mercury dipped once again across the capital on Sunday, falling to 4.9 degree Celsius for the third time this winter season as sharp decline from Saturday's 9.4 degree Celsius while the Central Pollution Control Board (CPCB) reported Delhi's AQI was recorded at 294, deteriorating from 212 the previous day. With 15.005 per cent, the transport sector was the key contributor to air pollution, followed by Industries with 8.8 percent. Visuals from areas like Jama Masjid and

AIIMS showed individuals braving the cold under thick blankets, trying to rest amidst harsh conditions. No cold wave conditions prevailed, as per the data, the IMD said. Safdarjung, the representative station for Delhi's weather, recorded a minimum temperature of 4.9°C on Sunday, which is four degrees below normal for this time of year. Forecasts indicate that Delhi's minimum temperature is likely to hover around 5°C until Tuesday, maintaining the chill. Aya Nagar recorded 5.2 degree Celsius and Ridge 5.3 degree Celsius. The minimum temperature recorded at Palam Observatory at 8.30 am today was 6.2 degrees Celsius which is three degrees Celsius below the normal temperature of the season. The drop in temperature in 24 hours is 0.2 degrees Celsius.

## Devendra Fadanvis expands Maha Cabinet

T N RAGHUNATHA ■ MUMBAI

In the first-ever expansion of this ministry undertaken by him ten days after he and two Deputy Chief Ministers were sworn in, Maharashtra Chief Minister Devendra Fadanvis on Sunday inducted 39 ministers, including 33 ranked ones, into his Cabinet, while he dropped 10 senior MahaYuti leaders, including BJP's Sudhir Mungantiwar and Nationalist Congress Party NCP (Ajit Pawar) leader Chhagan Bhujbal, from it. In a swearing-in ceremony held at Raj Bhavan in Nagpur for the second time since 1981, Maharashtra Governor CP Radhakrishnan administered oath of office to the 39 ministers, including six Ministers of State, ahead of the start of the Winter Session of the Maharashtra Legislature on Monday. Interestingly enough, as many as 25 new faces found place in the Devendra Fadanvis Cabinet. Late BJP leader Gopinath Munde's daughter Pankaja Munde, who has made a comeback as a State minister for the second time in her career, is among the four women ministers in the State Cabinet. With the induction of 39 ministers, the total number of ministers in the State Cabinet has gone up to 42, which is one less than the stipulated 43-member ministry which accounts for 15 percent of total



Maharashtra Governor CP Radhakrishnan, Chief Minister Devendra Fadanvis, Deputy Chief Ministers Ajit Pawar and Eknath Shinde and others during the swearing-in ceremony of cabinet ministers amid State Cabinet expansion, at Raj Bhavan, in Nagpur

288 members in the State Assembly. Of the 39 ministers inducted into the State Cabinet, 19 are from the BJP, 11 from the Shiv Sena and 9 from the NCP (AP). Apart from Mungantiwar and Bhujbal, eight other senior leaders from the MahaYuti, comprising Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP), Shiv Sena (Eknath Shinde) and NCP (AP), who have been dropped from the Fadanvis Cabinet are Vijay Kumar Gavit, Suresh Khade, Tanaji Sawant, Abdul Sattar, Deepal Kesarkar, Dilip Walse-Patil, Anil Patil and Sanjay Bansode. What has come as a big surprise is the induction of 25 ministerial faces who were not in the earlier government include Chandrashekhar Bawankule, Ganesh Naik, Pankaja Munde, Ashish Shalkar, Jaikumar Rawal, Nitesh Rane (all from the BJP), Pratap Sarneck, Sanjay

## Justice Shekhar Kumar Yadav to appear before SC Collegium soon

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

Justice Shekhar Kumar Yadav, who made controversial statements at a Vishva Hindu Parishad (VHP) function, is likely to appear before the Supreme Court Collegium soon to explain his stand on the controversy. The SC on December 10 took note of news reports over the statements and sought a report from the Allahabad High Court on the entire issue. "The Supreme Court has taken note of newspaper reports of a speech given by Mr Justice Shekhar Kumar Yadav, a sitting judge of the High Court of Judicature at Allahabad. The details and particulars have been called from the high court and the matter is under consideration," an official statement had said. As per the established practices, a judge, against whom a report is sought by the Supreme Court Collegium on any controversial issue from the High Court concerned, is given an opportunity to put forth his or her version before the top court Collegium headed by the Chief Justice of India (CJI). The Allahabad High Court judge is likely to be asked to appear and put forth his version as per established practices, said many legal experts.



At a VHP function on December 8, Justice Yadav said the main aim of the uniform civil code was to promote social harmony, gender equality and secularism. He was addressing a provincial convention of the legal cell and high court unit of the VHP in Allahabad High Court. Supreme Court Bar Association President and Rajya Sabha MP Kapil Sibal initiated signatures from parliamentarians to initiate impeachment procedures against Justice Yadav. A day later, videos of the judge speaking on provocative issues, including the law working according to the majority, were circulated widely on social media, prompting strong reactions from several quarters, including opposition leaders who questioned his reported statements, labelling it as "hate speech".

## Lucky escape for eight lions chilling on railway tracks

PTI N BHAVNAGAR

Alert loco pilots of a goods train and a passenger train applied the brakes in time to save the lives of eight lions that had wandered onto railway tracks in Gujarat's Bhavnagar district in the last two days, an official said Sunday. With the vigilance of the loco pilots of the Western Railway's Bhavnagar division and the help of trackers of the forest department, 104 lions have been saved so far in this financial year, said Mashooque Ahmad, senior divisional commercial manager, Bhavnagar. As per a release, loco pilot Dhavalbhai P, driving a goods train heading to Pipavav port from Hapa on Thursday, noticed five lions crossing the track near



Rajula city. The alert loco pilot applied emergency brakes to stop the train and provide safe passage to the big cats, it said. The release said the train was allowed to move after the forest guard reached the spot and found all the conditions normal.

Similarly, on Friday, loco pilot Sunil Pandit, driving a passenger train, noticed a lioness with two cubs crossing the track in the Chalala-Dhari section and stopped the train by applying emergency brakes. "On receiving the information, a forest guard reached the spot. He saw that the lions had moved away from the railway track. When all conditions were found normal, the forest guard asked the loco pilot to depart," the release said. Asiatic lions have either died or been seriously hurt on the railway line connecting Pipavav Port with north Gujarat, with the Gujarat High Court raising concern and directing authorities to come up with a standard operating procedure (SOP) to avoid such incidents. The Bhavnagar Division has instructed loco pilots operating the trains to work with special vigilance while following the prescribed speed, the release said. The state forest department has also erected fences along the track at regular intervals to save lions from getting hit by train

## WINTER WONDERLAND



Tourists visit a frozen waterfall at Drung area on a cold winter morning, in Baramulla district, Jammu and Kashmir



# New government should complete pending plans for journalists: Raghubar

PNS : JAMSHEDPUR

Odisha Governor Raghubar Das expressed his hope that the new state government would address the unmet needs of journalists and complete pending plans for their welfare. Speaking at the Kolhan Division Level Honor Ceremony-2024 organized by the Press Club of Jamshepur, Governor Das emphasized the importance of supporting journalists, acknowledging the contributions of senior journalists, and honoring the families of deceased media professionals.

The ceremony, held on Sunday at NH Hill Hotel, brought together journalists and dignitaries from across the region. Governor Das, who served as the Chief Minister of Jharkhand, reminisced about his efforts to promote journalist welfare during his tenure. "I feel immense joy and pride in meeting and honoring today's young journalists. While I initiated several journalist-friendly initiatives, including housing schemes and health insurance, some plans remained incomplete due to the change in government. I



hope the new government prioritizes these initiatives," he said. The Governor expressed sorrow for the loss of many senior journalists and highlighted the need to support their families. During his tenure, he had introduced financial aid of five lakh rupees for deceased journalists' families and initiated health insurance schemes, which were left incomplete. Governor Das encouraged

the current government to revive and expand these efforts. The event also featured speeches by notable journalists, including Ganesh Mehta, Editor of Hindustan, and U.N. Pathak, Editor of Dainik Jagran. They shared their perspectives on the evolving role of journalism and the challenges faced by media professionals. Journalists were awarded based on their work across

various categories: Print Media (Hard Story): Rohit Singh secured the first prize, followed by Santosh Mishra and Uttam Mahato. Print Media (Feature Story): Parvinder Bhatia won the first prize, with Rishabh Srivastava and Raja Karmakar taking second and third places, respectively. Print Media Photography: Sudarshan Sharma took the top spot, followed by Md. Parvez and Anup Mishra.



Electronic Media: Vijay Sahu won first place, with Prashant Singh Rajput and Prabhanjan Kumar coming in second and third. Digital

Media Portal: Akash Kumar claimed the first prize, while Charanjit Singh and Md. Shahzada secured second and third places. In addition,

26 senior journalists, 17 families of deceased journalists, and 19 supporting institutions and individuals were honored for their contribu-

tions to the field of journalism.

The event began with a presidential address by Sanjeev Bhardwaj, President of the Press Club of Jamshepur. Kulvinder Singh conducted the program, ensuring its seamless flow, while Vikas Srivastava delivered the vote of thanks. Prominent attendees included Press Club Vice President Rakesh Singh, Sumit Jha, Joint Secretary Amit Tiwari, Uttam Gupta, Treasurer Manman Pandey, and other esteemed members.

Parvinder Bhatia bags first prize in report writing Jamshepur : Senior journalist Parvinder Bhatia of The Pioneer, won the first prize in the report writing contest (Print Media- features category) organized by the Press Club of Jamshepur. Governor Das presented the award to Bhatia for his outstanding report on Ratan Tata, which showcased Tata's lesser-known contributions, including his architectural designs for two houses in Jamshepur. Bhatia's achievement was celebrated as a testament to the excellence and dedication of local journalists.

## Operation of Vehicle Pollution Centers Mandatory, Action on Lapses: DTO Bokaro

PNS : BOKARO

BOKARO : District Transport Officer (DTO) Vandana Sejwalkar issued a notice on December 14, 2024, directing all petrol pump owners in the district to renew their licenses by December 31, 2024, for the upcoming year as per regulations.

The DTO emphasized that the proper operation and timely updating of vehicle pollution testing centers at petrol pumps are mandatory for license renewal.

She further warned, "Any discrepancies found during inspection will result in strict



action as per regulations." The DTO instructed petrol pump owners to complete their license renewal within

the stipulated timeframe, along with all necessary documents. Failure to comply will lead to legal action.

## IIM Bodh Gaya hosts the three-day Inter-IIM Sports Event, Aarohan



PNS : RANCHI

IIM Bodh Gaya organized "Aarohan", a three-day inter-IIM sports event, from December 13 to 15, 2024. The event brought together IIMs from the eastern part of India in a celebration of talent and camaraderie. A total of 111 participants joined, with IIM Sambalpur contributing 56 athletes (26 females and 30 males) and IIM Ranchi contributing 55 athletes (15 females and 40 males).

The event kicked off on December 13 with the arrival of teams from IIM Sambalpur and IIM Ranchi. The inauguration ceremony was done by Hon'ble Chief Guest Major General Joy Biswas, an alum-

nus of NDA Khadakvasala, IMA Dehradun, and DSSC Wellington, with a distinguished military career spanning over 31 years. He is currently serving at OTA Gaya.

During his address, he emphasized the importance of discipline and sportsmanship, setting the tone for the event. Following the inauguration, an oath-taking ceremony was held to ensure fair play, and the event flags were handed over. Dr. Vinita S. Sahay, Director of IIM Bodh Gaya, participated in a friendly cricket match between faculty and students. Dr. Sahay also played badminton and table tennis, reflecting the spirit of the event. Day one featured matches between IIM

Sambalpur and IIM Bodh Gaya in cricket and badminton, both won by IIM Bodh Gaya. Day two was filled with intense matches across football, chess, table tennis, volleyball, throwball, and badminton. IIM Bodh Gaya emerged as the winner in football, chess, table tennis, volleyball, and men's badminton. IIM Sambalpur won the women's throwball match. The day concluded with a bonfire and an open mic session.

On the final day, December 15, IIM Bodh Gaya won the cricket match and men's throwball match against IIM Sambalpur. IIM Bodh Gaya also secured first place in the 100m sprint, while IIM Ranchi finished second.

Raja Arvind, a participant from IIM Ranchi, shared, "The event was a great opportunity to connect and learn from participants of other IIMs. The competitive spirit and teamwork displayed was truly motivating."

The event concluded with a prize distribution ceremony, where athletes were awarded for their performances in cricket, football, volleyball, chess, athletics, badminton, table tennis, and throwball. Dr. Amresh Kumar, Chairperson of the Sports Committee, was instrumental in organizing the event which provided a platform for athletes from IIM Bodh Gaya, IIM Sambalpur, and IIM Ranchi to showcase their talent.

## BSL's 'Happy Street' Inaugurated by DIC B.K. Tiwari

R SHARMA : BOKARO

Bokaro Steel Limited unveiled its much-awaited 'Happy Street' today in a vibrant and festive ceremony. The initiative, themed 'Active Bokaro, Healthy Bokaro,' was inaugurated by B.K. Tiwari, Director In-Charge (DIC), BSL, in the presence of senior officials and enthusiastic citizens. The event, aimed at promoting health, fitness, and community bonding, offers a refreshing opportunity for residents to celebrate life and togetherness.

Speaking at the event, DIC B.K. Tiwari highlighted the true essence of Happy Street, calling it a platform to enjoy life without hesitation. "Happy Street is a true platform to enjoy life to its fullest. As I say, 'Do some of what you love, and let me do some of what I love. This is where people can follow the call of their hearts and celebrate life freely,'" he said. His words set the tone for an event that seamlessly blended recreation, fitness, and cultural celebrations.

DIC Tiwari enthusiastically interacted with participants and visited several uniquely themed stalls, where he was warmly welcomed, particularly by schoolchildren who were excited to see him. The event showcased a kaleidoscope of activities designed to engage participants of all age groups. Fitness workshops, sports sessions, and cultural performances kept the audience entertained, while stalls promoting wellness, art, food, and social awareness became central attractions, drawing large crowds.

The event witnessed active participation from schools, cultural bodies like Sangeet Kala Academy, women's organizations, CRPF, CISF, Rotary and Lions Clubs, and various other local associations. Notably stalls also served as platforms for addressing critical social issues and promoting wellness initiatives. Adding to the occasion, (ED) J.B.S. Popli from SAIL Corporate Office, under whom the concept of Happy Street was originally launched, sent a message of encouragement. He extended his best wishes to participants and emphasized that the initiative stands as a reminder to live a healthier and happier life by fostering community spirit and togetherness.

As Happy Street unfolds, it becomes clear that it is not just an event but a movement. It inspires citizens to embrace health, happiness, and shared experiences as essential parts of life. Under the visionary leadership of DIC B.K. Tiwari, the event sets an example of unity, wellness, and positivity for Bokaro's residents.



## Inauguration of Paddy Procurement Center and Farmer Initiatives in Bokaro

PNS : BOKARO

Bokaro, December 15, 2024: MLA Shweta Singh inaugurated the Paddy Procurement Center at Radha Nagar PACS Limited under the Bokaro Assembly constituency today.



Singh stated that the center will act as a bridge between the government and farmers, enabling them to sell their produce directly without middlemen's interference. She emphasized the Jharkhand government's commitment to farmer welfare, ensuring direct benefits to agricultural families.

During her visit, Singh was honored at an event organized by the local community at Rabindra Bhavan, Chas Municipal Corporation. She expressed gratitude for the public's trust and assured dedicated service to the constituency.

Later, at Ram Mandir Market in Bokaro Steel City, Singh inaugurated a fresh vegetable shop by Ormanjhi Farmer Producer Organization Limited and encouraged vendors to maintain quality in their trade. A.K. Singh GM BSL was also present during the occasion.

## Rotary Play School Annual Function Celebrated Successfully

PNS : BOKARO

Bokaro Steel City, December 15, 2024: Rotary Play School, Sector 4, hosted its annual function with great enthusiasm. Chairperson Rotarian Poonam Trehan applauded the young talents and dignitaries.



Children presented vibrant performances, including dance, singing, and drama, winning hearts with their creativity. Principal Rotarian Mansi Sahana and Vice Principal Annie Seema Giri highlighted the school's commitment to holistic child development and appreciated the efforts of teachers and

parents. The event concluded with the distribution of gifts and refreshments, attended by Rotary Club members, parents, and dignitaries.

# COPS DESTROYS 15 ACRES OF POPPY CULTIVATION IN PALAMU

PNS : DALTONGANJ

Winter is the sowing time to poppy cultivation. Palamu police is out to ruin it in its nascent stage.

A team of police and forest officials in a joint operation destroyed the upcoming poppy cultivation at Siknee and Sakda villages under the Manatu police station. Officer in charge of the Manatu police station Nirmal Oraon told this newspaper today "We have jointly destroyed 15 acres of upcoming paddy cultivation on Saturday." Four tractors were

pressed in the operation against poppy. 10 acres of poppy cultivation were destroyed at Sikda village and 5 acres at Sikni village.

It was a 5 hour strenuous drive. The two poppy sites are 8kms away from the nearest police station Manatu.

Police officer Nirmal Oraon said there was no compromise with the security as Siknee and Sakda villages are infamous for the banned cash crop paddy.

Sources said where there is poppy there is naxalism as right from Maoists down to splinter group of naxalo narco extremism is cash oriented.



Police officer Oraon further said no villager of any of the two villages Siknee and Sakda gave any name of the cultivator. Police officer added there is no FIR lodged in this case. Only station diary entry

has been made added the police officer Oraon. Sources said this is the first major joint drive of the police and forest personnel against the illicit cultivation of the poppy. Forest officials used to

keep distance from such operation with the police. This is a new beginning.

Sources said it's the new HoFF Satyajit Singh who has directed the DFOs and others to come out of the green house and help people in their fight against drugs.

Forest officials joining hands with police and that too under the Manatu police station limits was an unheard of thing till 2023.

But with new HoFF forest officials are showing courage to take up cudgel against illicit drug lords in the rural landscape.



# Discussions on agri employment, urban devp at NITI Aayog meet

PNS : RANCHI

The three-day conference organized by NITI Aayog in the country's capital Delhi concluded today. It was chaired by Chief Secretary Alka Tiwari on behalf of the Jharkhand government. In this conference, discussions were held on agricultural employment, urban development, renewable energy, progressive economy etc. in the process of becoming self-reliant for development. Let us tell you that the topic of the conference was to take advantage of the demographic dividend and pave the way for new dimensions of development.

It should be known that in this conference, the Chief Secretary of the state Alka Tiwari underlined many points for the development of the state. Along with this, special



emphasis was laid on the participation of the state on pulses, the main point in the conference. This event is an important link to strengthen the partnership between the central and state governments as well as to establish cooperative dialogue in the

country. On this occasion, Principal Secretary Planning Mast Ram Meena, Secretary Rural Development K Srinivasan and Secretary Industries Department Jitendra Kumar Singh and other special officials participated.

The fourth National Conference of Chief Secretaries started in Delhi on Friday. This conference of Chief Secretaries is organized with a view to strengthen cooperative dialogue, to ensure better coordination between the Center and the States towards achieving development and progress. On behalf of the Jharkhand Government, the conference was chaired by Chief Secretary of Jharkhand Government Alka Tiwari, Principal Secretary Planning Mast Ram Meena, Secretary Rural Development K. Srinivasan and Secretary Industries Department Jitendra Kumar Singh and other special officials.

The conference organized to prepare a coherent format of the common development agenda of the Central and State Governments. Its main

objective is to promote entrepreneurship, create skill-based employment and to exploit the dividends to more people.

The main objective of this conference is to establish the best working system on the basis of discussions between the Prime Minister of the country, NITI Aayog, Central Ministry as well as the prominent representatives and experts of the state and union territory. This year, special sessions will be organized in this conference on broad topics like manufacturing, services, rural non-agriculture, urban development, renewable energy, Mission Karmayogi. Apart from this, discussions will also be held on self-reliance in agriculture, fertilizers, oil and pulses, population growth, renewable energy and Indian traditional knowledge.

# Students to protest at JCC Office



PNS : RANCHI

The matter of "alleged paper leak" in JSSC CGL does not seem to stop. Candidates from various districts gathered in Ranchi today on Sunday regarding this. Students will surround and protest at the JSSC office located in Namkum, Ranchi.

Security arrangements have been tightened outside the JSSC office in view of the students' siege of the office. Ranchi district administration is also on alert mode. Barricading has been done in the entire ground. At the same time, about 2500 soldiers and officers are deployed on the spot for security arrangements. Also, two layers of security have been done on the road leading to the JSSC office.

Apart from this, fire brigade, water cannon and Vajra vehicles are also deployed. Tents have been put up for the police administration outside the JSSC office and barricading has

been done in the entire ground. The JSSC office premises are being monitored with drones. All movements are also being video-graphed. Let us tell you that CM Hemant Soren has handed over the investigation of the "alleged paper leak" case in JSSC CGL to the CID.

On Saturday, DIG Anup Birathre visited the commission's office in Namkum and inspected the security arrangements. During this, he gave necessary instructions to the policemen engaged in security. Movement has been stopped 100 meters before the JSSC office. Two layers of barricading have been done here. At the same time, Section 163 has been implemented within 500 meters of the JSSC office and Sadabahar Chowk, which will remain till December 20.

Meanwhile, the commission also held a press conference on Saturday and termed all the allegations of paper leak as baseless. The secretary of the commission said that there was no irregularity of any kind in the examination held on September 21 and 22. Giving information about the candidates shortlisted for the examination, he said that out of 2231 candidates, 2145 are residents of Jharkhand and 83 percent of them are from the reserved category. Jharkhand Staff Commission conducted the JSSC CGL exam on 21 and 22 September 2024. Students say that the paper has been leaked and sold by shutting down the internet on the day of the exam.

At the same time, the commission has been denying all such allegations. After the elections are over, the commission has released the list of shortlisted students of the exam and has called them for document verification from December 16.

Even before this, the JSSC CGL exam was conducted in January, in which the paper was leaked. After this the exam was canceled.

# 21 paddy procurement centers started in Lohardaga district

PNS : LOHARDAGA

Twentyone selected paddy procurement centers were started in the district on Sunday for paddy procurement work for farmers in Kharif marketing season 2024-2025. On this occasion, the inauguration of paddy procurement center at Ningani Lampas of Sadar block was done in the dignified presence of MLA representative Nishith Jaiswal and the inauguration of paddy procurement center at Senha Lampas was done in the dignified presence of MP representative Alok Sahu, MLA representative Bishunpur. On this occasion, District Supply Officer Gyan Shankar Jaiswal, District Cooperative Officer, concerned

Block Development Officer and other dignitaries participated. At the launch of paddy procurement in both the lamps, detailed information about the scheme directed by the department was given. On the occasion, MP representative Alok Sahu said that a total of 21 paddy procurement centers including two FPOs and 19 LAMPS have been identified in Lohardaga district for purchasing paddy from farmers.

Any farmer of the district can deposit his paddy at these centers and get better price for it. The government is giving a minimum support price of Rs 2300 per quintal of paddy (ordinary variety) to the farmers and a total price of Rs 2400 per quintal as a bonus of Rs 100 per quintal from the state government. For Grade A variety of paddy, a total of Rs 2420 is being

given including Rs 2320 per quintal and bonus amount of Rs 100 per quintal. MLA representative Nishith Jaiswal said that farmers should take full advantage of paddy procurement centres. If you sell your paddy in the open market through middlemen at throwaway prices, you get only Rs 1700-1800 per quintal, which is much less than the price given by the government. Therefore, farmers should give their paddy only at the paddy procurement centers selected by the government and get a fair price for it.

\*Target of procurement of 2 lakh 50 thousand quintals of paddy\* This year, the government has set a target of purchasing 2 lakh 50 thousand quintals of paddy in Lohardaga district. A total of 4068 farmers have been selected to achieve this target. Public surveyors have been deputed as observers at all 21 paddy procurement centres. Kamala Devi Rice Mill Lohardaga, Lohardaga Rice Mill Bhandara Lohardaga and Shreya Rice Mill Industries Nagari Ranchi have been selected to carry out the milling work of the procured paddy.

\*Two FPOs and 19 lamps made paddy procurement center\* Two Farmer Producer Groups (FPOs) and 19 LAMPS have been selected as paddy procurement centers for purchasing paddy in the district. A total of 21 paddy procurement centers are Hesal Lamps Ltd., Ningani Lamps Ltd., Manho Lamps Ltd. in Lohardaga Sadar block, Kolsimri Lamps Ltd.

# Jail court, legal awareness camp

PNS : LOHARDAGA

Jharkhand State Legal Services Authority, Ranchi and in the light of the recently issued Honorable High Court Judgment and under the guidance of Principal District and Sessions Judge cum Dalsa President Rajkamal Mishra, this time along with Jail Court cum Awareness Camp in Mandal Jail Lohardaga, Medical Camp was also organized. District Legal Services Authority Secretary Rajesh Kumar, Civil Surgeon Dr Shambhunath Chaudhary, Dentist Dr Rajesh Kumar, LADCS Deputy Chief Narayan Sahu, Jailor Subodh Kumar and other health department personnel were present in the event. After organizing the legal awareness camp, health checkup of a total of 19 prisoners was done in the jail. In which after hearing about the health related problems of five female prisoners, they were given medicine. Besides, health checkup of 14 male prisoners was also done and medicines were given in the camp itself. The medical camp was led by Civil Surgeon Dr. Shambhunath Chaudhary. Dr. Rajesh Kumar and other medical teams were also present with him. Giving information about the event, DALSA Secretary Rajesh Kumar said that on the instructions of Jhalsa Ranchi, various types of awareness programs are being run inside and outside the jail. Inside the jail, special care is being taken of those prisoners who are above 70 years of age or who have serious diseases. Apart from this, various types of awareness programs as well as various programs are organized to keep other prisoners healthy, which also includes medical camps. It was also informed that now every jail court which is held on the third Sunday of every month, along with it a medical camp will also be organized. A team of doctors has been formed for this. Many people expressed their problems during the health check-up and many legal information was also given.



# Fit India Cycling at Morhabadi on 17th

PNS : RANCHI

Union Minister of Youth Affairs and Sports Dr. Mansukh Mandaviya will flag off the Fit India Cycling Tuesday initiative in New Delhi on December 17. A cycling event will also be organized by the Sports Authority of India (SAI) at Birsra Football Stadium in Morhabadi, Ranchi.

The event will be led by Olympian Manohar Topno, who will start a 5 km cycling joy ride from Gate No. 16 of the Sports Authority of India (SAI) Football Stadium Morhabadi and will pass through the Morhabadi Ground and end at the same venue.

The event will be attended by top athletes from Jharkhand, including Sumrai Tete, a former international hockey player. Along with local fitness enthusiasts and sports lovers.

The Ministry of Youth Affairs and Sports is organizing these events in direct collaboration with the Cycling Federation of India (CFI), My Bharat, SAI Regional Centers, National Centers of Excellence (NCOE), Khelo India Centers (KICs) and the District Administration.

The Fit India Cycling Tuesday initiative will expand to over 1000 locations across India on December 17, with simultaneous events at SAI regional centres. After the launch, cycling events will continue every Tuesday across the country. The campaign focuses on holistic health, sports and promoting indigenous sports in the country.

# Railway demolished around 200 illegal shelters



PNS : RANCHI

Railway on Sunday, with the help of district administration, removed encroachment from railway land situated on Bypass Road. Amidst the protest of encroachers, RPF and district administration team demolished more than 75 illegal houses on Sunday.

Bypass road remained jammed during encroachment removal. Earlier on Saturday also, administration had launched encroachment free campaign, in which 117 illegal shops, houses and huts were demolished with bulldozer. In this way, 200 families became homeless in the campaign which lasted for two days. Railway had given

notice a month ago. Administration had announced to remove encroachment on Friday evening.

People living here for more than 20 years started crying on seeing their homes being destroyed. Due to encroachment, their homes were destroyed in one stroke. Goods are also lying scattered on the side of the roads. Some of these people left with their belongings in search of a new home. While some are sitting there worried. The affected families say that they have not found a house on rent anywhere, until some arrangement is made, they are forced to live on the road. They have appealed to the

government for help.

Railway's Senior Section Engineer Line Praful Bada said that the old overbridge at Birsra Chowk has to be demolished and a new bridge has to be built. "The new bridge will be built at a cost of about Rs 15 crore. It has been targeted to be completed in two years. Apart from this, two additional railway lines will be laid under the new bridge and it will be connected to the yard," he added.

A railway bridge was built seven years ago. Through which traffic moves from HEC towards Birsra Chowk and Hinu. But due to the narrowness of the old bridge, there is a situation of jam.

# IIM Ranchi's 16th Foundation Day: A Celebration of Growth and Change



Guest, Dr. Shri Meenesh C. Shah, Chairman, National Dairy Development Board, as the Keynote Speaker; Prof. Deepak Kumar Shrivastava, Director of IIM Ranchi; and Om Prakash Singhania, Member of the Board, IIM Ranchi. The event commenced with the ceremonial lighting of the lamp, accompanied by Saraswati Vandana and the national song, setting a reverent tone for the day.

In his welcome address, Prof. Deepak Kumar Shrivastava reflected on IIM Ranchi's journey, emphasizing its focus on holistic development, social entrepreneurship, and its unique motto, Bahumukha Vikasa Gantavyam. He encouraged the audience to reflect on how responsible management can bring meaningful change to society.

The event also recognized academic excellence, with rank holders for 2023-24 being felicitated, and a special token of gratitude was presented to Prof. Gaurav Manohar Marathe for completing 10 years of service to the institute.

Dr. Shri Meenesh C. Shah delivered a thought-provoking keynote address, highlighting India's progress toward becoming Viksit Bharat. He spoke about the critical role of the dairy industry in India's development, emphasizing its contribution to women's empowerment, economic self-reliance, and compassionate practices. Dr. Shah encouraged students to embrace emerging changes brought by AI and the digital economy while fostering excellence in their chosen fields.

Hon'ble Justice Deepak Roshan, in his address, praised IIM Ranchi's achievements and expressed optimism for its future. He emphasized the unique managerial skills of women and shared insights on self-actualization as a higher goal for individuals.

The event concluded with the dignitaries being felicitated by the Director and Member of the Board, followed by a vote of thanks and the national anthem. The celebrations were capped off with vibrant cultural performances by the talented students of IIM Ranchi, showcasing the spirit and creativity of the institute.

PNS : RANCHI

IIM Ranchi marked its 16th Foundation Day with a grand celebration, bringing together dignitaries, faculty, students, and alumni to honor the institute's legacy and vision for the future. The event featured an engaging mix of speeches, award ceremonies, and cultural performances, reflecting the institute's commitment to holistic development and responsible management.

The celebrations began with a warm welcome to the distinguished dignitaries, including Hon'ble Justice Deepak Roshan, Jharkhand High Court, Ranchi, as the Chief

# Police to take action against Firoz's protector



PNS : RANCHI

Ranchi Police has become active in the case of molestation of girl students outside Kanya Pathshala School located in Upper Bazaar, Ranchi. Police has identified the person who molested the girl students. Police said that action will also be taken against the person who gives protection or shelter to Firoz Ali.

Firoz Ali is a resident of lane number eight of Nala Road, Hindpuri.

The State Police also announced reward to whoever gives information to the police about Firoz Ali. Police will give a reward of Rs 10,000.

On the other hand, under the leadership of Kotwali Dy SP Prakash Soye, the police is conducting raids at possible hide-outs to arrest Firoz Ali. Police has recovered his scooter.

Chief Minister (CM) Hemant Soren has taken cognizance of the molestation of girl students of Kanya Pathshala School. CM has ordered Ranchi Police to take strict action against the accused and inform. After the order of the CM, police officers reached the spot on Saturday to investigate.

It is worth noting that for the past several days, miscreants were harassing the girls outside the Kanya Pathshala School in Ranchi. The miscreants used to take advantage of the silence in the street from seven in the morning and try to misbehave with them. Due to this fear, the girls had stopped coming to school.

The school teachers also went to the police station regarding this matter, but no action was taken. This entire incident has been captured in CCTV. The footage clearly shows how a miscreant is misbehaving with the girls.

# Criminals shot dead land dealer in broad daylight

PNS : RANCHI

A land dealer was shot dead in Namkum, Ranchi. The incident took place on Sunday afternoon in Kawali of Namkum police station area of the district.

Bike-riding criminals shot and killed land dealer Madhu Rai in the middle of the road. Regarding the incident, it is being said that Madhu Rai was going on his scooter. Then the criminals who came from behind opened fire on him. During this, the criminals fired about 12 rounds on Madhu Rai. Due to this, Madhu died on the spot.

After carrying out the incident in broad daylight, the criminals fled. At the same time, as soon as the information about the case was received, the police reached the spot and started investigating the matter. It is suspected that Madhu Rai was shot in a dispute related to land business. But till now the real reason behind this has not been revealed. At present, the police is investigating the matter keeping all the points in mind.



# DGP SUSPENDS IN-CHARGE CHANDIL POLICE STATION

PNS : RANCHI

JHARKHAND Director General of Police (DGP) Anurag Gupta has suspended Varun Yadav, In-Charge of Chandil police station in Seraikela. This action has been taken on the basis of the CID report.

The DGP had already warned that if any policeman misbehaves with the general public, strict action will be taken against him.

Gupta had ordered the DIG and SP of all the districts that the station in-charge and policemen should behave well with the public. For this, guidelines have also been issued to all the police stations of the state.

DGP said that immediate action should be taken in cases related to cyber crime, SC/ST, human trafficking and crimes against women. On receiving the application of any victim, his complaint should be registered without delay, no matter which area the case is from, he said.

Gupta also said that if any police station in-charge does not pay attention to the complaints of the public, then people can register their complaints with senior officials. Officials have been instructed to make such arrangements.



# Lawyers, activists call for extending POSH Act to political parties

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

Legal experts and activists have voiced the urgent need to bring political parties under the ambit of the Sexual Harassment of Women at Workplace (Prevention, Prohibition and Redressal) Act, known as the POSH Act, citing the need for gender equality and accountability. The reaction comes after the Supreme Court on Monday disposed of a plea seeking direction to political parties to follow the procedure for the protection of women in the workplace under the 2013 POSH Act.

A bench of Justices Surya Kant and Manmohan asked the petitioner to approach the Election Commission of India (ECI) with a representation for the application of the POSH Act. Sonal Mattoo, a lawyer and director of NGO Helping Hands, called for a shift in perspective, urging political parties to focus on the spirit of the law rather than its technical definition.

"The problem is they're looking at the letter of the law as opposed to the spirit of the law. If you look at the letter of the law, yes, you will struggle with who is the employer... But if you look at the spirit of the law, it's very easy to implement as every political party has a disciplinary committee," she told PTI.

Similarly, she said, this is a group of people who are entrusted with ensuring that



decorum is followed and no member does anything that brings disrepute to the party.

"Similarly, they can set up a committee that also looks at the behaviour related to inappropriate conduct of party workers and people within the party. So, if you look at the letter of the law and you look at who is the employer, you will struggle.

"But if you look at other bodies within political parties that look at discipline and their conduct or misconduct, it's very easy to create a similar pattern in terms of ensuring appropriate conduct with women colleagues that work with them I think the whole idea is to look at the spirit, rather than the letter of the law," Mattoo said. However, prominent lawyer Shilpi Jain expressed concerns over the internal committees' independence, given the immense power wielded

by politicians.

"An internal committee funded by a political group will lack teeth. For such bodies to function effectively, independence and courage are essential. Unfortunately, given the misuse of power by many politicians, achieving this remains a challenge," she told PTI.

Jain added that courts are better positioned to handle cases of sexual harassment involving politicians, given the inherent biases internal mechanisms might face.

Activists argue that addressing harassment within political parties will set a precedent for improving gender equality across society. Shabnam Hashmi, founder of NGO Anhad, called it a "progressive" move.

"Politicians are expected to lead by example. If they continue to ignore gender equality, it sends the wrong mes-

sage to society. Establishing such mechanisms in political parties will bring gradual but important changes, just as we saw with women asserting themselves after the implementation of 33 per cent reservation in panchayats," she told PTI.

Yogita Bhayana, anti-rape activist and founder of People Against Rape in India (PARI) criticised the "irony" of Parliament exempting itself from a law it enacted.

"If an institution with more than 10 members is required to implement POSH, why are political parties excluded? Parliament itself brought in this law. Their inability to enforce it internally reflects their reluctance to confront harassment within their ranks," she told PTI.

Bhayana also pointed out the larger issue of poor implementation of the POSH Act across various sectors, stating, "We need a framework that is not only expansive but also effective in its enforcement." The legal definition of "workplace" under the POSH Act complicates its application to political parties.

A 2022 Kerala High Court ruling stated that political parties do not have a conventional employer-employee relationship and cannot be mandated to set up Internal Complaints Committees (ICCs).

This ambiguity, combined with the decentralised and informal nature of political party structures, has often

been cited as a reason for non-compliance. Still, many experts believe this should not prevent political parties from taking proactive steps.

"The lack of a traditional workplace structure cannot be an excuse. Political parties must adapt and lead by example," Hashmi emphasised. She added that even minimal initial progress would pave the way for systemic change in the long run.

Lawyers and activists have also highlighted how extending the POSH Act to political parties could improve the participation of women in politics.

Additionally, extending the Act's provisions would address the vulnerability of women working in political settings, who often find themselves in informal roles without clear channels for grievance redressal.

"These women face unique challenges because they are not officially employed. This makes them more vulnerable to harassment, and it's why political parties must implement systems to protect them," Bhayana noted.

While legal experts warn of challenges in implementation, activists stress that this is an opportunity to hold political parties accountable.

"This is not just about legal compliance but about sending a strong message that politics is not above the law," Hashmi said.

# PM Modi invokes Nehru to distract nation's attention from his own failures, claims Congress

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

The Congress hit out at Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Sunday, alleging that defamation of Jawaharlal Nehru and minimum democratic governance was his model. Congress general secretary Jairam Ramesh said PM Modi has an "obsession" with Nehru as he invokes the country's first prime minister to distract the nation's attention from his "own failures" and current challenges on which he maintains a "complete silence".

The Congress attack on the prime minister came a day after Modi attacked Nehru on the First Amendment to the Constitution of India -- which was carried out with effect from June 18th, 1951. Explaining why this amendment was brought, the Congress leader said, it was carried out for three reasons. "One, to deal with communal propaganda at a most sensitive time. Two, to protect Zamindari abolition laws that were being struck down by the courts. Three, to protect reservations in education and employment for scheduled castes, scheduled tribes, and OBCs that had been rejected by the courts" he said.

A select committee, in which Nehru, Rajagopalchari, and Ambedkar were among the members, examined the Bill in detail, Ramesh said, noting that even after the panel tabled its report, Nehru listened to his critics and modified his stance.



In another post on X, Ramesh said, "In his rant in the Lok Sabha yesterday, the PM attacked Nehru on the First Amendment to the Constitution of India -- which was carried out with effect from June 18th, 1951." Explaining why this amendment was brought, the Congress leader said, it was carried out for three reasons. "One, to deal with communal propaganda at a most sensitive time. Two, to protect Zamindari abolition laws that were being struck down by the courts. Three, to protect reservations in education and employment for scheduled castes, scheduled tribes, and OBCs that had been rejected by the courts" he said.

A select committee, in which Nehru, Rajagopalchari, and Ambedkar were among the members, examined the Bill in detail, Ramesh said, noting that even after the panel tabled its report, Nehru listened to his critics and modified his stance.

"Earlier on July 3, 1950, Sardar Patel had written to Nehru on the need for restrictions on freedom of speech, expressing his frustration with people like Syama Prasad Mookerjee. This letter reveals that Sardar Patel himself would have supported the First Amendment had he been alive.

"Granville Austin's masterly Working a Democratic Constitution tells the full story of the amendments carried out till 1980. It is too much to expect of MAs in Entire Political Science or his cheerleaders to have read it?" Ramesh posed while sharing the letter in his X post. Prime Minister Modi Saturday accused the Congress of repeatedly mutilating the Constitution, having "tasted blood" in its "greed" for power, as he asserted that his government's policies and decisions since 2014 have been aimed at boosting India's strength and unity in line with the vision of the Constitution.

# Hakim asks Muslims to outnumber Hindus, TMC backs him

SAUGAR SENGUPTA ■ KOLKATA

The Trinamool Congress has stood up for its senior Minister Firhad Hakim for calling upon the 'minorities' to grow and outnumber the 'majority' community so that "one day we can not only become majority but even more than majority."

Though the opposition parties have vehemently opposed Hakim who has still not explained his statement senior TMC leader Kunal Ghosh said that "he is being misinterpreted by some people why a majority of them have understood the real meaning of what he has said." Holding the bat for Hakim -

-- who apart from being a senior Cabinet Minister is also the Mayor of Kolkata -- Ghosh said that "what he meant is that the minorities (read Muslims) through their effort will one day contribute immensely in the uplift of the society and nation building... which is a fairly good statement and needs no censor."

Hakim while delivering a speech in a social gathering said "while in Bengal, we are 33 per cent in the entire country we are 17 per cent which is why we are called a minority... But we don't want to be called minorities," adding to a big round of applause that "we can become not only majority but even bigger than that if we have the

mercy of Allah."

Though he said that the minorities should work hand-in-hand with the other communities for the cause of nation building he clearly inspired them to achieve the majority status so that "we can wield so much power we don't have to hold candlelight marches for justice ... and that so that our voices are automatically heard, and calls for justice answered."

Curiously there was no comment on the issue from Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee whose office remained as silent as it was when Hakim during an earlier occasion asked the members of his community to work for a situation when "all those who



'unblessed' have not received the mercy (rehmat) of Allah will one day be enfolded in our path."

Referring to Hakim's remarks

as "dangerous" Bengal Opposition Leader Suwendu Adhikari said, "some minority people have been asking the minority people to labour

hard to get better government jobs including those of judges etc but this mentality is quite dangerous ... if they become 50 per cent or more then the Constitution will stop working ... like in Afghanistan, Bangladesh or Pakistan ... they will unleash the Sharia laws."

Bengal BJP president and Union Minister Sukanto Majumdar said that Hakim's speech "smacked of Abrahamic religious trends." "They wanted to occupy a region and make it as their religion liked it to be" Majumdar said wondering why the Chief Minister who was talking big on Bangladesh a few days ago was silent on Hakim's statements.

Another senior BJP leader Sajal Ghosh said that the Muslims can walk Hakim's talk by replicating the Great Calcutta killings of 1946 or by allowing mass infiltration from Bangladesh which his Chief Minister is doing for vote bank politics and third by subscribing to another TMC minister Siddiqullah Chowdhury who recently asked the Muslims to follow "he hum do humare chaar" (four children for every couple) plan ... a time has come for the people to reply to this." While BN Chakrabarty a famed political analyst wondered "why I did not die before having to encounter such a statement," the Left tended to look into it through

a "larger conspiracy angle." Condemning Hakim's statement CPI(M) central committee member Sujana Chakrabarty said that it was a part of bigger ploy to polarize the people of Bengal. "They do not want the secular fabric of Bengal to stay ... so he has made this remark ... I don't think this statement has been made without the nod of RSS because such kind of statements will benefit them and the BJP the most in the present scenario ... Firhad Hakim is not a minnow of a politician not to understand the political implication of this statement in the elections ... it is clear that he has been making such statements as per some instructions."

# Want RS to debate Constitution if BJP does not disrupt: TMC's Derek

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

Trinamool Congress Rajya Sabha Parliamentary Party Leader Derek O'Brien said on Sunday his party wants the House to run and the debate on the Constitution to be taken up "if the BJP does not disrupt Parliament". Blaming the ruling BJP for disruptions after the Upper House last week witnessed multiple adjournments and heated exchanges involving the opposition, treasury benches and the Chair, the TMC leader said they wanted people's issues to be discussed.

After the Lok Sabha, the Rajya Sabha is set to take up on Monday a debate on 75 years of the Constitution in the backdrop of a proposed no-trust motion against Vice President



and Rajya Sabha Chairman Jagdeep Dhankhar by Opposition parties which have submitted a notice for it. The debate on the Constitution has been the key demand of the opposition for the Winter Session of Parliament. Multiple adjournments over the Adani row, Soros issue and the no-trust notice had marred the proceedings of the House last week.

Asked about the debate scheduled to be taken in the House for Monday, O'Brien said, "We

want Parliament to run, we want to raise issues affecting people." "If the BJP does not disrupt Parliament again, we will take up the debate on the Constitution and expose them," O'Brien told reporters on Sunday. According to sources, 10-11 MPs will participate in the debate, and speak for 3-4 minutes each. They said it would also showcase the "diversity" of their party.

The MPs will highlight the essence of ten keywords from the Preamble of the Constitution, speaking on themes like equality, justice, sovereignty, independence, democracy and socialism. The TMC has 12 MPs in the Rajya Sabha. However, MP Sukhendu Shekhar Roy has been sidelined for his criticism of the party during the RG Kar protests.

# Minister Sonowal launches Jalvahak scheme

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI/KOLKATA

The Union government on Sunday launched the 'Jalvahak' scheme to incentivise cargo movement via inland waterways, marking a major step towards promoting sustainable and cost-effective transportation across National Waterways 1 (Ganga), 2 (Brahmaputra), and 16 (Barak river).



Union Minister of Ports, Shipping & Waterways Sarbananda Sonowal flagged off three cargo ships and inaugurated the fixed scheduled service of vessels. He said the scheme aims to unlock the trade potential of inland waterways while reducing logistics costs and decongesting road and rail networks.

Under the scheme, cargo owners transporting goods over distances exceeding 300 km via waterways will receive up to 35 per cent reimbursement on operating costs. The scheme will remain valid for three years and is designed to optimise supply chains for major shipping companies, freight

forwarders, and trade bodies. The scheme is jointly implemented by the Inland Waterways Authority of India (IWAI) and Inland & Coastal Shipping Ltd (ICSL), a subsidiary of the Shipping Corporation of India. The cargo promotion scheme is

projected to facilitate a modal shift of 800 million tonne-kilometres with an estimated investment of Rs 95.4 crore by 2027, a statement said. The fixed-schedule sailing service will ply vessels between Kolkata-Patna-Varanasi and Kolkata-Pandu (Guwahati) routes, demonstrating the readiness of waterways for efficient and eco-friendly cargo transportation. "The Jalvahak scheme incentivises long-haul cargo transport and ensures timely delivery through regular freight services. This initiative provides a positive economic value proposition to trade while advancing Prime Minister Narendra Modi's vision of transformation via transportation," Sonowal said. Sonowal flagged off three vessels - MV Trishul carrying

1,500 tonnes of cement to Guwahati via the Indo-Bangladesh Protocol Route, MV Aai with 1,000 tonnes of gypsum to Patna for a cement company and MV Homi Bhabha transporting 200 tonnes of coal to Varanasi. Highlighting the sector's growth, Sonowal said cargo volumes on national waterways have increased from 18.07 million tonnes in 2013-14 to 132.89 million tonnes in 2023-24, registering over 700 per cent growth. He added that the government aims to achieve 200 million tonnes by 2030 and 500 million tonnes by 2047. Union Minister of State for shipping Shantanu Thakur told the media that there is no concern in bilateral trade despite ongoing Bangladesh unrest and government has been keeping a close watch.

# Assam govt mulling to provide pulses, sugar through ration cards to stabilise price: Himanta

PTI ■ GUWAHATI

The Assam government is mulling to provide pulses and sugar through ration cards to help stabilise the prices of these items whenever there is a spike, Chief Minister Himanta Biswa Sarma said on Sunday. During the day, Sarma launched the first phase of distribution of new ration cards, covering 49 newly delimited assembly constituencies.

The chief minister, who participated in a launch programme covering Jalukbari and Central Guwahati constituencies, affirmed the government's commitment to working for an inclusive society. "Today, HCM Dr. @himantabiswa inaugurated the first phase of new ration card distribution in 49 newly designated assembly con-

stituencies, reaffirming the government's commitment to uplifting vulnerable sections of society," the chief minister's office (CMO) said in a post on X.

It said that by December, each beneficiary will receive 5 kg of free rice, ensuring food security for those in need.

"HCM emphasised that the collective support and cooperation will continue to inspire the government's efforts to build a prosperous and inclusive society for all," the CMO added.

Speaking to reporters later, Sarma said the state government had decided in September to provide new ration cards to 20 lakh beneficiaries.

"Today we are giving new ration cards to 7 lakh beneficiaries. Hopefully by December 28, about 18-19 lakh new beneficiaries will be covered," he said.



With the ration cards now linked to Aadhaar numbers, other benefits such as medical insurance and subsidised LPG

cylinders, are also provided through it, with the ration cards to gradually become a 'family identity document',

the CM said. Sarma said the government is discussing the idea of providing pulses and sugar through

ration cards when the prices of these items increase, as it will help in price stabilisation. "I have asked our department

minister Kaushik Rai to tour other states which have implemented it. We haven't tried it in Assam so far," he said, adding that states like Uttar Pradesh, Tripura, Kerala and Himachal Pradesh have been doing it.

Speaking on 'One Nation One Ration Card' (ONORC), Sarma said, "It is an innovation of our Prime Minister Narendra Modi. The net result of the initiative is that if a particular family lives in two places within or outside the state, ration can be divided and drawn."

"It is through an Aadhaar-enabled, centrally governed portal and Assam is a part of it," he added. Sarma, in a post on X, added, "Our Govt is driven by the principles of Antyodaya, where special emphasis is given to the needs of the poor and marginalised." "Karishma Kashyap is among

the 40 divyang brothers & sisters who have been given ration cards today assuring them of free healthcare and foodgrains," he said, sharing a photograph of the wheelchair-bound beneficiary receiving the ration card.

The chief minister said the distribution of ration cards is part of the government's '12 days of development' initiative, which will benefit 12 lakh people. He said that in Assam, beneficiaries can avail of multiple benefits through ration card, which includes free foodgrains, free healthcare, subsidised LPG, assistance under Orunodoi scheme and free insurance. "In this phase of extending ration cards to the people, another ~20 lakh people will be covered, encompassing 2/3rd of the state's population in this social security net," Sarma added.



# Home Minister Amit Shah urges naxals to surrender, promises rehabilitation as government responsibility

PTI ■ JAGDALPUR/CHHATTISGARH

Union Home Minister Amit Shah on Sunday appealed to Naxals to give up arms and join the mainstream, or else they will have to face the strong action of security forces. He said the rehabilitation of the surrendered Naxals is the responsibility of the government.

Addressing a sporting event - 'Bastar Olympics' - in Chhattisgarh's Jagdalpur, Shah also said the country would be free of Maoists by March 2026. "I appeal to Naxals, please come forward. Give up arms, surrender and join the mainstream. Your rehabilitation is our responsibility," he said. He said if the Maoists do not listen to the appeal of surrender, they will be crushed by the security forces. "Chhattisgarh Police is



committed to fulfilling Prime Minister Narendra Modi's resolve to make India Naxal-free by March 31, 2026," he said. The Union home minister said the Chhattisgarh government's rehabilitation policy is the best in the country. "If you surrender and join the mainstream, you will

contribute for the development of Chhattisgarh and India," he said. Shah said when the Congress was in power in Chhattisgarh before the BJP assumed charge a year ago, the action against the Maoists became slow. "But after our government came to power in Chhattisgarh, action against

the extremists speeded up resulting in killings of 287 Naxals in last one year, arrest of 992 Naxals and surrender of 836 others," he said. Shah said since the Modi government assumed charge, there has been a 73 per cent reduction in the casualties in security forces and 70 per cent decline in civilians' deaths.

"If Naxalism ends in Bastar (Chhattisgarh), it will attract more tourists than Kashmir due to its natural beauty," he said. He further said those who know the process of change taking place within the society also know that it is not limited to only 1.5 lakh people participating in the Bastar Olympics. "Everyone is saying that Bastar is changing. I assure you that when I will come to the 2026 Bastar Olympics, I will say that Bastar has changed," he said, adding that this change has been initiated by the Bastar Olympics. The Union home minister said this event will write a new saga of development of Bastar in the coming days and will become a strong basis for the complete eradication of Naxalism. He also said many development works are being done, through which Naxalism is being defeated.

# Intense debates expected as UP Vidhan Sabha winter session begins today

BISWAJEET BANERJEE ■ LUCKNOW

The winter session of the Uttar Pradesh Vidhan Sabha is set to commence on Monday, lasting four days during which the government plans to table 10 key ordinances approved by the working committee. Though the winter session will be brief, the political atmosphere is expected to be intense. The Samajwadi Party (SP) and Congress have announced plans to confront the government on sensitive issues such as the Bahraich riots and Sambhal violence. They also intend to raise concerns over the by-election process, accusing the ruling Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) of misusing administrative machinery. Meanwhile, the BJP, emboldened by its recent electoral success, is prepared to counter the opposition's charges. The ruling party is likely to highlight its achievements, including the Prayagraj Kumbh preparations and the



first anniversary of the Pran Pratishtha ceremony at the Ram Jambhoomi temple in Ayodhya. Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath may use the assembly platform to address allegations raised by Congress leaders Rahul Gandhi and Priyanka Gandhi Vadra in the Lok Sabha. His government's victory chant "Batenge toh kateng" is expected to resonate within the House as a symbol of BJP's dominance. SP Deputy Legislative Party Leader Kamal Akhtar said that a meeting for SP MLAs was held on Sunday evening while party president

Akhilesh Yadav will hold another meeting on December 17 to finalize the party's stand on key issues, including law and order, healthcare services, and the electricity privatization policy. The Congress party is also gearing up for a robust debate. Senior leaders have vowed to expose what they describe as "appeasement politics" and "policy failures" of the Yogi government. As the winter session unfolds, fiery debates and legislative maneuvering are expected to dominate proceedings. While the government will push for swift passage of the ordinances, the opposition aims to put the administration on the back foot through pointed questions and public-interest motions. The coming days will determine whether legislative business can move ahead or whether political drama will overshadow this crucial session in the Uttar Pradesh Vidhan Sabha.

# Travellers beware, Kerala roads are graveyards



KUMAR CHELLAPPAN ■ KOCHI

Four more lives were lost in Kerala's Pathanamthitta district on early Sunday morning as a speeding car crashed into a bus carrying Sabarimala pilgrims. Nikhil and Anu, newly married couple who were returning home after a honeymoon trip to Malaysia and their fathers Mathai Eapen and Biju George respectively died on the spot. Nikhil and Anu who had got married on 30th November were returning after their Malaysian trip and their parents had picked them up from the international airport at Thiruvananthapuram. The accident occurred hardly seven kilometers from their residence. This is the latest of the series of mishaps which shocked the people in the State as it was on Thursday four girls were crushed to death in Palakkad by a speeding lorry. Two days prior to the Palakkad accident, six students of Government Medical College, Alappuzha

died while the car in which they were traveling lost control and had a head-on collision with a bus. Over the years, Kerala roads have graduated into graveyards. Travellers coming to Kerala from North India are advised to be doubly cautious while undertaking journeys in the roads. The State administration blames the Centre for every accidents even of the roads belong to the State Express Highways, said officials of State transport department. Just two days before the death of the medics, five migrant workers from Tamil Nadu were ran over by a speeding truck in Thrissur. "All these deaths were gruesome and there were many factors that contributed to these accidents," said Upendra Narayanan, advisor to the Road Safety Committee of Kerala Government. He told The Pioneer that enforcement system of road safety rules were weak in the State which is facing shortage of cops to monitor movement of vehicles.

More than 4,000 persons get killed in Kerala roads every year, according to the State Crime Records Bureau. "There are drivers related issues, and lack of road safety and etiquettes," said Narayanan. Only accidents in which four or more persons get killed are reported by the media in the State while fatal accidents are the order of the day. Speeding tipper trucks engaged in construction works are playing havoc in Kerala roads, according to P Venu Gopal, a former Group Captain in IAF. "The boulders for construction works are brought to the State from neighboring Tamil Nadu. The owners of the tipper trucks make the drivers go for as many trips as possible to make fast bucks even at the cost of other people's lives," said Narayanan, who was a race driver for an international brand SUV. Most of the accidents occur in the wee hours of the day underscoring the fact that drivers of the ill fated vehicles were not trained to drive during the odd hours. "Liquor too plays a major role in these mishaps. Above all, the Kerala Government should give extra care in the construction of roads, especially those with curves and bends," said Narayanan. The chief minister and highways minister have expressed shock and sorrow over the accidents which mark the closure of the topic till the next accident happens.

# Economic boon: Maha Kumbh 2025 promises spiritual and financial revival

BISWAJEET BANERJEE ■ PRAYAGRAJ

Mahakumbh Mela 2025 is set to be more than just a spiritual event; it promises to be a major economic driver for Uttar Pradesh. Historical records from the 1882 Kumbh Mela show that the event cost Rs 20,228 to organize while generating Rs 49,840 in revenue, resulting in a net profit of Rs 29,612. This legacy of economic gain continues, with the upcoming Mahakumbh expected to generate Rs 25,000 crore in revenue for the state. Covering approximately 4,000 hectares, the Mahakumbh is projected to attract 40-45 crore pilgrims, making it the largest religious gathering in the world. The event's estimated budget stands at Rs 6,382 crore, with Rs 5,600 crore already allocated for event management and infrastructure development. In comparison, the government had spent Rs 3,700 crore in the 2019 Kumbh Mela. "Mahakumbh 2025 is not just a spiritual gathering; it's a massive economic engine," said Manoj Kumar Singh, Chief Secretary of Uttar Pradesh. "Our focus is on enhancing infrastructure, tourism, and job creation while ensuring a seamless experience for pilgrims." KV Raju, economic advisor to the UP government, claims that with an expected crowd of 45 crore pilgrims,



Mahakumbh could generate no less than Rs 2 lakh crore. Advisor to Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath and former IAS officer Awanish Awasthi provided an economic projection: "The worth of this financial activity could be an understatement of the actual figure. If one pilgrim spends Rs 8,000 during Mahakumbh, the total could surpass Rs 3.2 lakh crore based on the expected footfall." Experts, however, caution that the state's net economic benefit may be difficult to gauge, as much of the financial activity will occur in the informal sector, involving small transactions like renting boats, transportation, and street food. Still, individuals engaged in these services are likely to see significant gains. The event's economic impact extends beyond Prayagraj, benefiting nearby religious hubs like Varanasi, Ayodhya, Mathura, and Vindhyavasini Dham, creating thousands of new jobs. The Uttar Pradesh Tourism Department reports that preparations for the event

have already provided employment to 45,000 families. Local vendors and service providers are equally optimistic. Rajesh Tiwari, a street food vendor in Prayagraj, said, "The Mahakumbh is a blessing for small businesses like mine. We earn what we typically make in six months during this event." Similarly, Ramesh Kumar, a boat operator on the Ganga, shared his excitement: "With millions of tourists expected, our income will multiply. We are also receiving special training to enhance our services." The government is actively training service providers, including tour guides, street vendors, and drivers, through specialized programs conducted by the Manavara Tourism Management Agency in Lucknow and Prayagraj. "This training will improve our skills and help us provide better services to tourists," said Neha Mishra, a trainee

tour guide. In a first, the temporary tent city at the Mahakumbh will be visible on Google Maps, thanks to a memorandum of understanding signed between Google representatives and the Mahakumbh Mela Authority. "We are committed to using technology to improve the pilgrimage experience," said an official from the authority. Infrastructure development is at the heart of the preparations. Major projects completed include a six-lane bridge over the Ganga and a Rs 275-crore four-lane railway overbridge, aimed at improving connectivity and easing traffic flow. Even after Mahakumbh 2025 concludes, Prayagraj is expected to remain a tourism hotspot. "We believe that the infrastructure and global visibility created during the event will drive tourism for years," said a senior tourism official. Common people also see this as a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity. "I have attended several Kumbh Melas, but this time, it feels like the entire world will be watching," said Meera Devi, a pilgrim from Bihar. "We come for spiritual fulfillment, but we can see how it benefits the locals as well." Mahakumbh 2025 promises not just spiritual enrichment but also lasting economic prosperity, creating a sustainable legacy for Uttar Pradesh and its people.

# Bangladeshi Mukti Jodhas to attend Vijay Diwas celebrations in Kolkata

PIONEER NEWS SERVICES ■ KOLKATA

A small delegation of Mukti Jodhas from Bangladesh will arrive in the city on Sunday evening for the Vijay Diwas celebrations on Monday, which will be attended by West Bengal Governor C V Ananda Bose and Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee, a Defence official said. Bangladesh delegation comprising Mukti Jodhas, who were part of the guerrilla resistance force in East Pakistan opposing the Pakistan rule there, and serving officers of the Bangladesh Armed Forces attend the Vijay Diwas celebrations held by the Indian Army's Eastern Command in Kolkata every year. A small delegation of Mukti Jodhas will attend the Vijay Diwas celebrations in Kolkata on December 16, which marks Indian Armed Forces' historic victory over Pakistan in the 1971 war, the Defence official said. He, however, did not give details of the size of the delegation of the Mukti Jodhas. Governor C V Ananda Bose will attend the wreath-laying ceremony in the morning at Eastern Command headquarter Fort William, said the official. Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee will attend the military tattoo, a display by the Armed Forces, in the afternoon at the Military Training Centre here, to honour the indomitable spirit of the 1971 war heroes defeating the Pakistani armed forces that led to the creation of Bangladesh. The Defence official said that war veterans of the Indian Armed Forces who had taken part in the 1971 war will be attending the events on December 16, the day on which Pakistan's Eastern Army surrendered at Dhaka in 1971. The Eastern Army Command, which is headquartered at Fort William here, will hold a series of programmes on Vijay Diwas to mark the historic victory of the Indian Armed Forces

# Man arrested for Parbhani violence dies in police custody: sparks call for Maharashtra bandh

T N RAGHUNATHA ■ MUMBAI

In a disturbing incident, a 35-year-old man - who was arrested for his alleged involvement in the violence that took place at Parbhani last week over the vandalism of the replica of Indian Constitution - died in police custody on Sunday, prompting the Republican Sena call for a "Maharashtra bandh" on Monday. The deceased - Somnath Veyankat Suryawanshi - died

at Parbhani district civil hospital where he had been rushed from the Parbhani jail after he complained of chest pain. Suryawanshi, who used to work as a labourer in Pune district, had come to meet his family members at Parbhani on Wednesday when mobs protesting against the desecration of the replica of Indian constitution resorted to large-scale violence, arson and stone-pelting, amid a bandh called by the Ambedkarite activists.

He was placed under arrest with the incidents of violence. He hailed from the Wadar community. The incident sent shock waves through the Ambedkarite circles. Vanchit Bahujan Aghadi (VBA) founder-president Prakash Ambedkar and his brother and Republican Sena founder Anandraj Ambedkar came down heavily on the police for the circumstances leading to the death of

Suryawanshi. Prakash Ambedkar, who is the grandson of late B. R. Ambedkar said: "The custodial death of Somnath Suryawanshi - a Bhim Sainik belonging to the Wadar community - in Parbhani is gut wrenching, sickening and intolerable to say the least. What is more intolerable that his death happened in judicial custody despite his bail application being approved." "Since his death happened in

judicial custody, our lawyers will be urging the Court that the post-mortem (CT scan, MRI, forensic and pathological) examination takes place in a government hospital which has a forensic department, and that the post-mortem is filmed and undertaken by both the forensic and pathology department," the VBA founder-president said. "Many Ambedkarite people were arrested after the Parbhani accident.

It is a shocking incident for Bhim Sainik. There should be immediate action against the concerned police personnel," Anandraj Ambedkar said. Anandraj, who is the president of the Republican Sena, called for a bandh across Maharashtra to demand among other things adequate compensation for the family of the deceased, withdrawal of all cases against the Republican activists who staged protests

at Parbhani on December 11 against the vandalism of the replica of the Indian Constitution. It may be recalled that a glass-encased replica of the Indian Constitution was vandalised by some miscreants near Dr. B.R. Ambedkar's statue located outside the local railway station, protesters resorted to large-scale violence, arson and stone-pelting, amid a bandh called by the Ambedkarite activists.

# Mayawati slams Congress, Samajwadi Party on reservations, backs 'one nation, one election' bills

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ LUCKNOW

BSP chief Mayawati on Sunday attacked the Congress and the Samajwadi Party, saying they should not speak on reservations as they colluded in opposing legislation giving quota in promotions to Scheduled Castes (SC) and Scheduled Tribes (ST) when the Congress-led UPA was in power. Addressing a press conference, she also backed the Centre's bills on 'one nation, one election', stressing it will reduce expenses and ensure public

welfare works continue uninterrupted. She urged other parties to also support the measure. Mayawati demanded that reservations for SC, ST and OBC be included in the Ninth Schedule of the Constitution to prevent any tampering. Central and state laws listed in the Ninth Schedule are exempt from judicial review. During the discussion on the Constitution in Lok Sabha, the ruling side and the opposition, especially the Congress and the Samajwadi Party, to woo Dalit and OBC voters, have said a lot of "baseless" things about reservation issue in which

there is "not even an iota of truth", she told reporters. "And it would have been better if these two parties (Congress, SP) had remained silent on this issue in Parliament, because during the time of the Congress party's government at the Centre and with the connivance of this party, SP had strongly opposed the Constitutional Amendment Bill related to reservations in promotion of SC and ST communities. "This bill was torn and thrown away by SP in the Parliament itself and... Is still pending in the Parliament," she lamented.

# Father of Bengaluru techie who died of suicide demands justice, refuses to immersed ashes

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ PATNA

The father of Bengaluru techie Atul Subhash, who died by suicide recently, on Sunday called for strict punishment for those who "harassed" his son, asserting that his ashes will not be immersed till justice is served. Subhash, 34, was found hanging in his house at Bengaluru's Munnekolalu on December 9. He left behind lengthy videos and notes, blaming his wife and in-laws for driving him to suicide through "false" cases and "persistent torture." "I thank the Karnataka Police for arresting them (Subhash's estranged wife and in-laws). All



those who harassed my son should be punished so that he gets justice, and his soul rests in peace. I will not immerse the ashes of my son till we get justice," Pawan Kumar told the media. "My son was being harassed and tortured for money, and humiliated by his

wife... I request Prime Minister Narendra Modi and all concerned... please give us justice," he said. Subhash's estranged wife Nikita Singhania was arrested in Gurugram, Haryana, while her mother Nisha Singhania and brother Anurag Singhania were picked up from Uttar Pradesh's Prayagraj, police said on Sunday. Kumar also sought the custody of his four-year-old grandson. "My son was broken from inside... Even after torture by his wife and in-laws, he didn't tell anyone about it. His suicide note also mentioned that his parents be given custody of his child," Kumar said. He said Subhash had also received a maintenance order for his son, amounting to Rs

40,000 per month. "She (Subhash's estranged wife) filed several false cases against us and my son. Strict action must be taken against all those who mentally tortured my son," Kumar said. Bikas Kumar, the brother of Subhash, also spoke to mediapersons in Samastipur, demanding that the "false cases" registered against them be withdrawn. "The others behind this incident should also be arrested. We will not get justice till all false cases registered against us are withdrawn. We will not immerse the ashes of my brother till we get justice. Our fight will continue," he asserted. "I am equally concerned about my nephew (son of Subhash).

His safety is a matter of serious concern for us. We have not seen him in recent photographs. I want to know his whereabouts through the media. We want his custody as early as possible," added Bikas Kumar. Earlier in the day, Karnataka Home Minister G Parameshwara said Subhash's wife, mother-in-law and brother-in-law have been apprehended and are in judicial custody. The investigation will follow. Addressing reporters in Bengaluru, Parameshwara said, "He (Subhash) had left behind about a 40-page death note and he has raised several issues, most importantly about the misuse of provisions in the law that were meant for protection of women."





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PAPER WITH PASSION

## Modi's mantra

PM Modi's resolutions give roadmap for progress but its realisation requires collaborative efforts from the government and civil society

During the Constitution debate in the Lok Sabha on December 13, Prime Minister Narendra Modi articulated 11 resolutions to guide India's future development. These resolutions, inspired by the spirit of the Constitution, aim to address critical aspects of governance, societal values and national development. PM Modi emphasised the need for citizens and government officials to uphold their duties. This aligns with the Constitution's emphasis on Fundamental Duties, but its implementation requires widespread public awareness and institutional accountability. The Prime Minister reaffirmed the government's commitment to inclusive development through his vision of "Sabka Saath, Sabka Vikas." While significant progress has been made in sectors like infrastructure and digital access, challenges like regional disparities and social inequality persist. Addressing these requires targeted policy interventions and efficient resource allocation. Corruption, which undermines public trust and economic efficiency, was also highlighted by PM Modi, who called for societal rejection of corruption. His stance complements ongoing measures like digital transparency and anti-corruption legislation. However, robust enforcement mechanisms and judicial efficiency are essential for achieving this goal. Fostering respect for laws and traditions was another critical resolution aimed at strengthening social cohesion. This requires not only stricter enforcement of laws but also cultural campaigns to educate citizens about the value of India's legal and cultural heritage.

In a similar vein, PM Modi's call to instill pride in India's heritage seeks to dismantle colonial-era mindsets. This involves promoting indigenous knowledge systems, decolonising education curricula and celebrating India's achievements globally. Modi also stressed the importance of respecting the Constitution and avoiding its exploitation for political gains. This underscores the need for political integrity and constructive discourse in legislative processes. Another pivotal resolution was the preservation of reservations without introducing religion-based quotas. PM Modi's emphasis on the importance of maintaining the status quo while opposing religion-based reservations. Balancing social justice with meritocracy remains a contentious issue, necessitating careful policy considerations to address evolving societal needs. The mantra of "development of the country through the development of states" underscores the importance of cooperative federalism. Strengthening state capacities and ensuring equitable resource distribution are critical for this resolution's success. The feasibility of these resolutions hinges on several factors such as upholding duties and require active citizen engagement. Effective implementation of these resolutions largely depends on robust institutions and governance mechanisms and efficient use of resources by the government itself along with a civil society which is alert and aware.

### PICTALK



A woman protects her child from cold during a foggy winter morning, in Nadia

# A forgotten crisis amid global turmoil



SUDHIR HINDWAN

In a world dominated by geopolitical rivalries, economic uncertainties and environmental degradation, food security concerns are relegated to background

World politics today faces a myriad of challenges, including cyber fraud, widespread corruption, transnational terrorism, and the relentless use of weapons of mass destruction in regional conflicts such as the West Asian crises and the ongoing Ukraine-Russia war. These issues are compounded by a refugee crisis of enormous proportions, environmental degradation, and the growing frequency of natural disasters. Among these pressing concerns, food security remains a critical yet often overlooked challenge that affects nations worldwide.

Food security, as defined by the Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) of the United Nations at the 1996 Rome World Food Summit, exists when "all people, at all times, have physical and economic access to sufficient, safe, and nutritious food that meets their dietary needs and food preferences for an active and healthy life." This definition underscores the importance of not only physical availability but also economic access to food, emphasising both quantity and nutritional quality.

According to the FAO's Food Insecurity Scale, over half of the population in low-income countries lives under food-insecure conditions, with about one-third facing severe crises. Globally, approximately 789 million people lack adequate food, and this number rises to an alarming 2.4 billion when micronutrient deficiencies are considered. Food security issues can be categorised into two broad areas: quantity and quality. These challenges encompass five key dimensions: food availability, price volatility, inclusive access, proper utilisation, and stability. Price volatility, particularly in low-income countries, exacerbates food insecurity as most people lack the resources to access nutrient-rich food.

Recognising the severity of global food insecurity, the United Nations included food security among its 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) in the 2015 '2030 Agenda'. The second SDG aims to "end hunger, achieve food security and



improved nutrition, and promote sustainable agriculture." Complementary goals, such as SDG 6 ("Ensure availability and sustainable management of water and sanitation for all") and SDG 12 ("Ensure sustainable consumption and production patterns"), further emphasize the need for sustainable practices in achieving food security. Governments worldwide have been urged to align their food and agriculture policies with these goals to ensure their populations receive adequate, nutritious food in a sustainable manner. Food insecurity leads to numerous problems at both household and societal levels. Household food insecurity, for instance, has been linked to suboptimal sleep patterns and reduced immunity against diseases.

To address these issues, the United Nations reaffirmed its commitment to safe and nutritious food access during the 2012 UN Conference on Sustainable Development. This commitment was encapsulated in the 'Future We Want' document. The conference also saw the launch of the 'Zero Hunger Challenge' (ZHC) by then-UN Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon, aiming to eliminate hunger and malnutrition globally by 2030. A cornerstone of the ZHC is the goal to make "all food systems sustainable," encompassing clean



ACCORDING TO THE FAO'S FOOD INSECURITY SCALE, OVER HALF OF THE POPULATION IN LOW-INCOME COUNTRIES LIVES UNDER FOOD-INSECURE CONDITIONS, WITH ABOUT ONE-THIRD FACING SEVERE CRISES

water, sustainable energy, responsible food consumption and production, and climate action—achievable through national policies and international cooperation. The 1987 Brundtland Report, titled Our Common Future, defined sustainable development as "development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs." India, since its independence in 1947, has made significant strides in building food security by establishing agricultural institutions such as the Indian Agricultural Research Institute under the guidance of the Indian Council of Agricultural Research (ICAR). Advancements in genetic engineering and biotechnology hold promise for addressing agricultural challenges, improving food quality, and increasing global food availability. However, concerns persist about biosafety risks posed by genetically modified organisms (GMOs). Proper handling, transfer, and disposal of these organisms, as recommended by global institutions like the World Bank, are critical to ensuring safety. The world is currently mired in geopolitical rivalries, with nations prioritising dominance over addressing pressing issues such as hunger, poverty, environmental degradation and

unemployment. Biotechnology, if harnessed effectively, can address these challenges by creating opportunities for producing higher-quality food, reducing pollution, generating jobs, and fostering economic growth. This, in turn, could promote international cooperation and reduce global tensions, paving the way for peace. Investments in research and development can yield innovative solutions to hunger, malnutrition and food adulteration, transforming biotechnology into a force for global good.

However, two major apprehensions regarding biotechnology persist. First, it may deepen the divide between developed and developing nations. Second, globalisation could threaten the survival of indigenous food industries. Despite these concerns, the potential benefits of biotechnology in transforming global food and energy systems into a philanthropic movement cannot be overlooked. Food security initiatives must rise above geopolitical rivalries, embracing inclusivity and shared responsibilities. India, with its emphasis on inclusive diplomacy, has the potential to play a pivotal role in this endeavor.

(The author, a recipient of the Bharat Gaurav Award, is a professor, HOD, and an expert on strategic affairs. Views expressed are personal)

## LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

### ONE NATION ONE ELECTION

Madam — It will be the most precious gift to the nation amidst political anarchy and election extravaganza. The people will be stupendously relieved by single elections for multiple reasons. The Model Code of Conduct stalls development projects and decision-making of the governments. The alleged sale of party tickets, defections by politicians, experimenting with the disruptive agendas, noisy debates on TV channels, spoiling harmony in the country, poll violence, foreign interference, the game of opinion and exit polls losing credibility, betting on elections, saving billions of rupees for the government on election machinery including deployment staff and police forces, huge resource mobilisation by the political parties, and people's contribution for multiple elections, etc., are a few to quote in favour of one nation, one election. The former President, Ram Nath Kovind's recommendation of holding municipal elections along with the Lok Sabha and State Assembly elections should also be considered by the Union Government in the next phase.

It may also be contemplated by the government that those candidates who lose elections in parliamentary or Assembly elections and are rejected by the people should not get entry in the Rajya Sabha and legislative councils where only elected representatives are allowed to vote. In fact, the state assemblies don't need legislative councils. The number of Lok Sabha and state assembly seats should be optimally increased so that there is wider and appropriate representation of people. There should be a dedicated cadre of the Civil Services for elections. It will facilitate the continuity of updating electoral rolls, EVM maintenance, election reforms as and when required, create a data bank and an archive on elections, training, delimitation, dedicated teamwork to contest election-related litigation, and work on a constitutional framework for elections-related issues.

Vinod Johri | Delhi

### SC says no survey of worship places



By halting the surveys of places of worship, the Supreme Court's recent order bars all courts nationwide from registering fresh suits or issuing any interim or final orders, including those permitting surveys in ongoing cases concerning existing structures, until the validity of the Places of Worship Act 1991 is decided. SC's order means that in pending suits such as those pertaining to the Kashi Vishwanath-Gyanvapi mosque and Krishna Janmabhoomi-Ildgah dis-

putes, courts cannot pass any effective or final orders. The order is timely and a welcome move. The 1991 Act was enacted to prevent conflicts that may arise from disputes with historical ties and to protect the equality of faiths, a constitutional value.

The Act also prohibits converting a place of worship to a different denomination or section and mandates that history and its wrongs should not be used to oppress the present and future. But recently many petitioners have approached lower courts as well as the Supreme Court against the 1991 Act, alleging that the law has created an arbitrary and irrational retrospective cut-off date of August 15, 1947, for maintaining the character of the places of worship.

P Victor Selvaraj | Tirunelveli

### REFORMING INDIAN JUDICIAL SYSTEM

Madam — The Indian judicial system has long struggled with the issue of delayed justice, raising concerns about its credibility and effectiveness. The principle that "delayed justice is equivalent to injustice" emphasises the importance of timely and accessible justice. The backlog of cases, complex procedures, and delays in decision-making have caused significant mental, social, and moral harm to victims and society at large. Currently, around 44 million cases are pending in district courts, 6.1 million in high courts, and over 82,000 in the Supreme Court. This backlog has led to questions about the system's efficiency, impacting not just the legal system but also the democratic fabric of the country. The Nirbhaya case highlights the detrimental effects of delayed justice, eroding public trust in the system. To address these issues, the central government has introduced judicial reforms, including three new criminal laws aimed at improving timeliness, transparency, and efficiency. These reforms introduce fixed time limits for

resolving cases and create a framework for expediting the disposal of long-pending cases, offering relief to victims and ensuring justice.

R K Jain | Barwani

### GUKESH DEFEATS DING LIREN

Madam — Carrying on chess dominance, hitting Gukesh displayed a high level and proved that he is not second in the FIDE World Championship 2024 in style. India's D Gukesh achieved the landmark in a crucial game and in a cliffhanger manner, beating titleholder China's Ding Liren in the 14th and last game of the FIDE World Chess Championship 2024 in a clinical way. India's D Gukesh masters moves and makes them in a calculative way. He played to a plan to eat humble pie. The 18-year-old had Gukesh play a great game of chess. Three cheers for golden boy Gukesh.

C K Subramaniam | Mumbai

Send your feedback to: letterstopioneer@gmail.com

## Beyond the screen: The hidden truths of our social media lives

Social media is a tool to make life more connected and interesting, it is not a measure to judge worth and success of family and friends

Ever since social media sneaked into our lives, we have made it a shelf to display our lives' wares. We paint our digital walls with milestones, memories, smiles, and sorrows. It's a vibrant collage of life's varied hues, yet what we post is often a curated version of reality. The smiles are brighter, the love is deeper, the vacations are grander, and the heartbreaks are more dramatic. But behind this veneer of filtered perfection, the raw and unfiltered truth often lurks quietly, hidden from the world's gaze.

For a month, I posted pictures from my holiday—pristine landscapes, cheerful meals, and stylish getups—giving the impression that I was the happiest and luckiest person on earth. From the outside, it looked like life was a seamless tapestry of joy and contentment. But behind each post was a personal battle being waged in silence. While my timeline radiated unbridled joy, I was working on myself to remedy a tough health challenge. Why did I choose to post happy pictures when my reality was tumultuous? Was I pretending? Was I



seeking validation? No, I was trying to reassure myself. I was reminding myself that happiness exists, that moments of beauty and joy still punctuate my life. Those posts were not deceit; they were lifelines. Glimpses of joy that I clung to as I navigated the storm within. And in sharing those moments, I was also hoping to pass on slivers of hope to others who might be fighting unseen battles. This is the duality of social media. The laughter we see might be tears in disguise. The grand celebrations could be cloaked in anxiety. The tears shed publicly may be crafted for effect. What appears authentic can be artifice; what looks carefree can be layered with burdens. This is why we should not judge others based on what we see on their profiles. Why do people disguise their struggles and pre-

sent happy pictures? It's not necessarily deceit or a desire to mislead others. Sometimes, it's a way of keeping hope alive. When life's challenges weigh heavily, projecting happiness can feel like a self-fulfilling prophecy. By sharing joy, even when it feels out of reach, we try to manifest it. We tell ourselves that happiness is not an illusion—it's around the corner and within our grasp. We also do it for others. Social media can be a dark and overwhelming place filled with negativity, comparison, and distressing news. By sharing moments of beauty, love and humour, we offer small doses of positivity to those who might need them. But here lies the trap. When we view others' lives through the glossy lens of social media, we risk falling into the pit of comparison. We measure our own lives against the seemingly perfect lives of others and wonder where we went wrong. We feel envious, resentful, or inadequate. But this comparison is unfair—because it's based on incomplete information. What you see on social media is a highlight

reel, not a documentary. To compare your behind-the-scenes reality to someone else's carefully chosen highlights is to set yourself up for needless suffering. So, how should we approach social media with clarity and kindness? First, partake in others' happiness without envy. Celebrate their joys as you would want them to celebrate yours. Let their happiness be a reminder that good things are possible, even if they haven't yet arrived in your life. Second, lend support in difficult times without judgment. If someone shares their struggles, resist the urge to undermine or dismiss them. Behind their words could be a pain far deeper than what they've expressed. Offer empathy, not assumptions. Be the steady presence that reminds them they're not alone. Finally, take social media for what it is—a tool to make life more connected, more interesting and occasionally more fun. It's not a measure of worth, success, or happiness.

(The author is a columnist and writing coach based in Dubai. Views are personal)



ASHA IYER KUMAR





## FIRST COLUMN

### BRIDGING DIVIDES IN THE WORKPLACE

This growing divide can hinder teamwork, erode trust and undermine organisational effectiveness



SAKSHI SETHI

With the advent of the 21st generation, the division of people into sharply opposing groups has increasingly infiltrated workplaces, reflecting the broader societal divides in politics, culture and values. In professional settings, it is often referred to as polarisation and can hinder collaboration, damage relationships, and undermine organisational effectiveness. Addressing workplace polarisation requires proactive leadership, open communication, and an emphasis on shared goals. Polarisation often stems from various sources such as divergent personal values where the employees bring their political, cultural and social identities into the workplace.

Differences in beliefs particularly on sensitive issues such as gender, race and political ideologies lead to conflicts. On the other hand, media coverage, political campaigns, or social movements heighten tensions among employees with differing viewpoints. A lack of open dialogue within teams fosters echo chambers, where employees interact only with like-minded individuals, reinforcing biases and misunderstandings. Also, differences in work styles, priorities and values between generations can create friction. Younger employees may prioritise social activism, while older colleagues might value traditional workplace norms.

The impact of this kind of polarisation on organisational health and employee wellbeing can be significant. It can hamper teamwork, as employees will become less willing to cooperate with those holding opposing views which will stifle innovation and productivity. Disagreements on personal or political issues can also lead to distrust among colleagues, creating a toxic work environment. Employees who feel alienated or marginalised due to their beliefs may seek opportunities elsewhere, result-



ing in talent loss. Workplace conflicts rooted in polarisation can lead to stress, burnout and decreased job satisfaction.

By encouraging respectful conversations that allow employees to express their perspectives without fear of judgment; by implementing structured initiatives, such as facilitated discussions or conflict resolution workshops; by emphasising organisational objectives that unite employees and by highlighting common ground, such as shared values or team missions, can be a few measures that can reduce the focus on divisive issues and can help bridge divides. Last but not least that play a crucial role in setting the tone for workplace interactions is that of the leader. There is no denying that inclusive leaders model respectful behaviour, encourage diverse viewpoints, and mediate conflicts effectively. Developing guidelines that outline acceptable workplace behaviour, particularly concerning discussions on sensitive topics; making policies that promote mutual respect while preserving freedom of expression or taking initiatives such as team-building exercises, mentorship programs, or cross-department projects can help reduce silos and foster connections between employees with differing viewpoints. Undoubtedly an organisation's culture significantly influences how polarisation manifests and is addressed. A culture that values respect, inclusivity, and open-mindedness can mitigate the effects of polarization.

Conversely, a culture that tolerates favouritism or discrimination can exacerbate divisions. Leaders must prioritise cultivating a culture where employees feel valued and heard, regardless of their beliefs or backgrounds. Workplace polarisation reflects the broader societal divides but has unique challenges and opportunities within professional settings. While it risks collaboration, trust, and productivity, it can also catalyse growth if managed effectively. By fostering a culture of respect, promoting open dialogue, and emphasising shared goals, organisations can navigate polarisation and create environments where diverse perspectives thrive.

(The writer is an educator; views expressed are personal)

# Syria's collapse: Foreign meddling and economic ruin



NILANTHA LANGAMUWA

As allies like Iran pressured Assad for reforms, and Western nations explored conditional sanctions relief, Syria became a battleground of competing geopolitical manoeuvring



By the end of November, the situation in Syria was dire. Government forces were on the brink of exhaustion, stretched thin by an economic crisis that spiralled out of control. Soldiers earned a paltry \$7 a month, with even high-ranking officers receiving only \$40. This was in blunt contrast to militia fighters funded by external powers, who earned up to \$2,000 monthly. This glaring disparity revealed not just economic fault lines but the extent of foreign intervention sustaining these militias. Meanwhile, protests erupted across Suwayda province, historically a stronghold of Assad support, highlighting widespread famine, collapsing services, and the devaluation of the Syrian pound. Discontent was palpable, threatening to upend the regime's fragile grasp on power.

Iran, Syria's long-time ally, reportedly pressured Assad to address these challenges. Tehran's warnings accentuated the erosion of public trust and a crumbling economy, urging decisive action. Yet Assad seemed increasingly aloof, allegedly seeking new alliances with Gulf nations, hoping these relationships would secure his future. By December, reports emerged that the United States and the United Arab Emirates were considering lifting sanctions on Assad—but only if he severed ties with Iran and halted arms transfers to Hezbollah. This diplomatic manoeuvre was a calculated strategy to weaken Assad's regime further. Relief from Caesar sanctions was an unlikely prospect given Washington's decade-long effort to dismantle the Assad family rule. The outcome was preordained: Assad was isolated, and the geopolitical chessboard advanced. The trajectory of Assad's downfall mirrors a broader pattern in Western foreign policy. Leaders once celebrated as reformers—from Saddam Hussein to Muammar Gaddafi—are vilified when their geopolitical utility wanes. Assad, who was once lauded for fostering coexistence among Syria's religious and ethnic groups, became the West's pariah.

In 2010, Syria was a stable nation, ranked seventh on *The New York Times*'s "31 best places to visit." Assad met with Queen Elizabeth, hosted Nancy Pelosi, and welcomed Pope John Paul II. Yet the West's affection was



BY DECEMBER, REPORTS EMERGED THAT THE UNITED STATES AND THE UNITED ARAB EMIRATES WERE CONSIDERING LIFTING SANCTIONS ON ASSAD—BUT ONLY IF HE SEVERED TIES WITH IRAN AND HALTED ARMS TRANSFERS TO HEZBOLLAH. THIS DIPLOMATIC MANOEUVRE WAS A CALCULATED STRATEGY TO WEAKEN ASSAD'S REGIME FURTHER

short-lived. As geopolitical calculations shifted, Assad's regime was recast as the antithesis of democracy, paving the way for intervention. The Syrian conflict was never just a civil war. It was a proxy war fueled by external actors. Over 100,000 jihadists were funnelled into Syria, backed by a coalition of nations. The United States, Israel, Saudi Arabia, and Qatar allegedly provided financial and logistical support. Turkey and Jordan facilitated arms shipments and fighter transport. Western media amplified anti-Assad narratives, while the UK-backed White Helmets shaped public perceptions. Each player pursued its agenda, yet all converged on a singular goal: regime change. The motivations driving this coalition were diverse. The United States and Israel sought regional hegemony, neutralising perceived threats while advancing the Greater Israel project. Qatar's pipeline ambitions clashed with Assad's preference for an Iranian alternative, further entrenching divisions.

These dynamics turned Syria into a battleground for competing interests, with devastating consequences for its people. By late 2013, the influx of foreign fighters intensified. Western nations grappled with their citizens joining extremist groups in Syria. The UK reported approximately 600 fighters, while France contributed around 1,200. Belgium, the Netherlands, and Sweden also faced significant outflows. However, the greatest contributions came from West Asia and North Africa, with Tunisia leading at 3,000 fighters, followed by Saudi Arabia at 2,500.

Russia's involvement, particularly from regions like Chechnya, underscored the conflict's global reach. The arms supply chain further exacerbated the war. Gulf states like Qatar and Saudi Arabia allegedly supplied weapons, supported by over 160 military cargo flights.

These arms, transported through Turkey and Jordan, sustained rebel factions. European nations, such as Croatia, indirectly contributed by routing surplus weapons through Jordan. This complex web of arms smuggling empowered extremist groups, further destabilising Syria. Western hypocrisy was stark. While denouncing Assad's regime, the United States supported "moderate rebels" aligned with Al Qaeda and ISIS. Declassified documents revealed this duplicity. In 2012, General Michael Flynn's memo to the Pentagon warned that the opposition included jihadist factions. Similarly, Hillary Clinton's advisor, Jake Sullivan, acknowledged in an email that "Al Qaeda is on our side in Syria." The West's support for these groups undercut its claims of promoting democracy, revealing a strategy rooted in destabilisation. Atrocity propaganda became a central tool in the anti-Assad narrative. Staged chemical attacks, amplified by the White Helmets, justified military intervention.

Western media perpetuated these fabrications, obscuring the reality on the ground. Idlib province, under "rebel" control, became a dystopian preview of Syria's potential future: public executions, forced veiling of women, and sectarian slogans. This grim reality highlighted the consequences of regime change. Operation Timber Sycamore, the CIA's covert programme, exemplified Western duplicity. Billions of dollars in weapons were funnelled to extremist factions, prolonging the war.

The irony was stark: the West, claiming to combat terrorism, empowered the very groups destabilising the region. Syria's devastation became a witness to the destructive nature of interventionist policies. Syria's collapse parallels other Western interventions. Iraq's 2003 invasion, justified by the false pretext of weapons of mass destruc-

tion, left the nation in tatters. Libya, once Africa's wealthiest country, descended into anarchy following Gaddafi's overthrow—these interventions, framed as humanitarian missions, unleashed chaos, empowering extremist factions and creating power vacuums. The broader motivations behind these actions lie in geopolitics.

Syria's strategic location, its role as a buffer between Iran and Israel, and its proximity to oil-rich regions made it a prime target. The West's desire to reshape the region's political structure has driven decades of intervention, often with catastrophic consequences. Meanwhile, allies like Saudi Arabia and Turkey, despite their human rights abuses, remain central to Western strategy, exposing the moral bankruptcy of interventionist policies. Syria's tragedy is a miniature of a global pattern. The collapse of nations like Iraq, Libya, and Syria reflects a broader system where sovereignty is sacrificed for strategic interests. Foreign interventions, far from promoting democracy or stability, have left legacies of destruction, displacement, and despair.

The narrative of "humanitarian intervention" serves as a veneer, masking the true motives of power and greed. As the 50th anniversary of Iran's 1979 revolution approaches in 2029, the stakes are higher than ever. Iran's defiance of Western hegemony remains a critical factor in the region's future. The forces shaping West Asia—Israel, Turkey, and Western powers—are poised to challenge Iran's resilience.

Syria's collapse serves as both a warning and a call to scrutinise the ethics of intervention. The legacy of these actions is clear: a world shaped by greed, ambition, and the devastating cost of unchecked power.

(The writer is a senior journalist and a policy analyst; views expressed are personal)

# Can INDIA bloc resolve its leadership disputes and put to rest its internal strife

With Mamata vying for the leadership of the INDIA bloc supported by a number constituents, chances of the bloc succumbing to internal disputes are high

The INDIA bloc, a coalition of 26 ideologically diverse parties, was created to counter the BJP's electoral dominance. In the 2024 general elections, the bloc achieved a significant milestone, reducing the BJP's tally to below 240 seats. However, this success has been tempered by internal discord, which now threatens the alliance's fragile unity.

A key figure in this unfolding drama is Mamata Banerjee, the dynamic leader of the Trinamool Congress (TMC). Her aspirations for leadership within the coalition have both galvanised and fractured its members. Mamata Banerjee's National Ambitions Mamata Banerjee's bid for prominence within the INDIA bloc stems from her desire to extend her



K S TOMAR

influence beyond West Bengal and play a decisive role in shaping national politics. Her assertive style has invigorated some allies but has alienated others, exposing the persistent challenge of reconciling regional ambitions with a unified national strategy. Earlier, Banerjee proposed Congress President Mallikarjun Kharge as the bloc's chairperson, a strategic move to diminish

the influence of Bihar Chief Minister Nitish Kumar, one of the coalition's key architects. This proposal, supported by leaders like Akhilesh Yadav and Arvind Kejriwal, showcased Banerjee's ability to consolidate support. However, her growing clout has sparked unease among other leaders. For instance, Lalu Prasad Yadav, a staunch Congress ally, appears to be rethinking his loyalties. Such dynamics highlight the alliance's precarious balance and the potential for further fractures. Lessons from the Past: UPA2 The INDIA bloc's current challenges echo the struggles faced by the United Progressive Alliance (UPA2) during its tenure. In 2012, Mamata Banerjee's dramatic exit from the UPA over policy disagree-

ments underscored the inherent instability of coalition politics. Scandals and policy paralysis plagued UPA2, eroding its credibility and paving the way for Narendra Modi's rise. As Banerjee's ambitions take center stage, the INDIA bloc risks repeating history. If it fails to address its internal contradictions, it could suffer the same fate as UPA2, jeopardising its ability to present a united front against the BJP. BJP's Advantage Amid Opposition Discord The BJP stands to benefit from the INDIA bloc's internal strife. While Banerjee wields considerable influence in West Bengal, Congress retains a broader national presence. A fragmented opposition could split anti-BJP votes, a scenario that would play into the



saffron party's hands. Recent BJP gains in Maharashtra and Haryana underscore the bloc's challenges, particularly for Congress, which has struggled to maintain dominance in key states. Seat-sharing disputes within the bloc further illustrate its lack of strategic coherence. For instance, the Aam Aadmi Party's unilateral candidate announcements in Delhi and Haryana have fueled tensions,

revealing the alliance's inability to present a united strategy. Mamata vs Congress: Mamata Banerjee's leadership ambitions pose a paradox for Congress. Her energy and charisma could revitalise the bloc, but her assertiveness risks overshadowing Congress's central role. This tension is particularly pronounced in states like West Bengal and Kerala, where Congress directly competes with the TMC and the Left. Seat-sharing negotiations in overlapping constituencies could exacerbate divisions, straining the alliance further. For Congress, retaining relevance within the INDIA bloc will require a delicate balancing act: accommodating Banerjee's influence without

compromising its identity. Key Challenges for the INDIA Bloc The alliance faces several hurdles that could determine its survival. Leadership Struggles: The lack of consensus on a prime ministerial candidate risks deepening divisions. Unified Campaign Narrative: A focus on governance, economic policies, and social justice can resonate with voters more effectively than personal rivalries. Effective Coordination: Mechanisms for conflict resolution and decision-making must be strengthened. Balancing Regional and National Goals: Respecting regional aspirations while pursuing a cohesive national agenda is critical. A Test of Political Maturity:

Mamata Banerjee's ambitions underscore her political acumen and the complexities of coalition politics. While her leadership could energise the INDIA bloc, it also risks deepening divisions. Navigating this intricate web of regional and national aspirations will test the bloc's political maturity. The upcoming state elections and the 2029 general elections will be pivotal in determining whether the INDIA bloc can overcome its internal strife and emerge as a credible alternative to the BJP. Resolving leadership disputes, crafting a compelling narrative, and presenting a unified front are critical to its success.

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



# Rebels try to bring normalcy as Syrians vow to speak up

AP ■ DAMASCUS

The new head of security arrived at Damascus' international airport with his men, a bearded fighter who marched with other rebels across Syria to the capital. The few maintenance staff who showed up for work huddled around Maj Hamza al-Ahmed, eager for answers about what happens next. They unloaded all their complaints, pent up for years during the rule of President Bashar Assad, which now, inconceivably, is over. They told him they were denied promotions and perks funneled to pro-Assad favorites, that bosses threatened them with prison for working too slowly. They warned him of hardcore Assad supporters among the airport staff, ready to return whenever the facility reopens. As al-Ahmed tried to reassure them, Osama Najm, an engineer, confessed: "This is the first time we talk." This was the first week of Syria's transformation after Assad's unexpected fall. Rebels, suddenly in charge, met a population bursting with emotions: excitement at new freedoms; grief over years of repression; and hopes, expectations and worries about the future. Some were overwhelmed to the point of tears.

The transition has been surprisingly smooth. Reports of reprisals, revenge killings and sectarian violence have been minimal. Looting and destruction have been quickly contained, insurgent fighters disciplined. On Saturday, people went about their lives as usual in the capital, Damascus. Only a single van of fighters was seen. There are a million ways it could go wrong. The country is broken and isolated after five decades of Assad family rule. Families have been torn apart by war, former prisoners are traumatized by the brutalities they suffered, tens of thousands of detainees remain missing. The economy is wrecked, poverty is widespread, inflation and unemployment are high. Corruption seeps through daily life. But in this moment of flux, many are ready to feel out the way ahead. At the airport, al-Ahmed told the staffers: "The new path will have challenges, but that is why we have said Syria is for all and we all have to cooperate." The rebels have so far said all the right things, Najm said. "But we will not be silent about anything wrong again." **Idlib comes to Damascus:** At a torched police station, pictures of Assad were torn down and files destroyed after insurgents entered the city Dec. 8.

All Assad-era police and security personnel have vanished. On Saturday, the building was staffed by 10 men serving in the police force of the rebels' de facto "salvation government," which for years governed the rebel enclave of Idlib in Syria's northwest. The rebel policemen watch over the station, dealing with reports of petty thefts and street scuffles. One woman complains that her neighbors sabotaged her power supply. A policeman tells her to wait for courts to start operating again. "It will take a year to solve problems," he mumbled. The rebels sought to bring order in Damascus by replicating the structure of its governance in Idlib. But there is a problem of scale. One of the policemen estimates the number of rebel police at only around 4,000; half are based in Idlib and the rest are tasked with maintaining security in Damascus and elsewhere. Some experts estimate the insurgents' total fighting force at around 20,000. Most of the bearded fighters hail from conservative, provincial areas. Many are hardline Islamists. The main insurgent force, Hayat Tahrir al-Sham, has renounced its al-Qaida past, and its leaders are working to reassure Syria's religious and ethnic communities that the

future will be pluralist and tolerant. Syrians remain suspicious. "The people we see on the streets, they don't represent us," said Hani Zia, a Damascus resident. He was concerned by the few reports of attacks on minorities and revenge killings. "We should be fearful." Some restaurants have resumed openly serving alcohol, others more discreetly to test the mood. At a sidewalk café in the historic Old City's Christian quarter, men were drinking beer when a fighter patrol passed by. The men turned to each other, uncertain, but the fighters did nothing. When a man waving a gun harassed a liquor store elsewhere in the Old City, the rebel police arrested him, one policeman said. Salem Hajjo, a theater teacher who participated in the 2011 protests, said he doesn't agree with the rebels' Islamist views, but is impressed at their experience in running their own affairs. And he expects to have a voice in the new Syria. "We have never been this at ease," he said. "The fear is gone. The rest is up to us." **The fighters make a concerted effort to reassure:** On the night after Assad's fall, gunmen roamed the streets, celebrating victory with deafening gunfire. Some security agency buildings were torched. The public stayed

indoors. Hayat Tahrir al-Sham moved to impose order. It ordered a nighttime curfew for three days. It banned celebratory gunfire and moved fighters to protect properties. After a day, people began to emerge. Tens of thousands went to Assad's prisons to search for loved ones, mingling with rebels, some of whom were also searching. Amid celebrations, gunmen invited children to hop up on their armored vehicles, and posed for photos with women, some with their hair uncovered. Pro-revolution songs blared from cars. The transitional government urged people to return to work. The insurgents deployed men to act as traffic police. Volunteers picked up trash, since municipal workers haven't returned to their jobs. Officials say they want to reopen the airport as soon as possible and this week maintenance crews inspected a handful of planes on the tarmac. Cleaners removed trash, wrecked furniture and merchandise. One cleaner, who identified himself only as Murad, said he earns the equivalent of \$15 a month and has six children to feed, including one with a disability. He dreams of getting a mobile phone.

# Sheikh Hasina involved in enforced disappearance: B'desh commission

PTI ■ DHAKA

An inquiry commission set up by the interim government in Bangladesh has said that it found evidence implicating deposed prime minister Sheikh Hasina and top-ranking military and police officials from her regime in alleged incidents of enforced disappearance. The five-member Commission of Inquiry on Enforced Disappearances submitted an interim report titled "Unfolding the Truth" to Chief Adviser Professor Muhammad Yunus on Saturday. The commission estimated that there would be more than 3,500 enforced disappearances. "The commission has found evidence of former prime minister Sheikh Hasina's involvement as the instructor in the incidents of enforced disappearance," the press wing of the office of Chief Adviser said in a statement on Saturday night. It said the deposed premier's defence adviser Major General (ret'd) Tarique Ahmed Siddique, former director general of the National Telecommunication Monitoring Centre and sacked Major General Ziaul Ahsanand senior police officers Monirul Islam and Mohammad Harun-Or-Rashid and several other senior officials were found to be involved in those incidents. The ex-military and police officers are on the run, mostly believed to be abroad since the ouster of Hasina's Awami

League regime on August 5 following a student-led uprising. According to the statement, retired Supreme Court judge Mainul Islam Chowdhury, the chairman of the commission, told Yunus that during investigations they found a "systematic design" that allowed incidents of enforced disappearances to go undetected. "Individuals carrying out enforced disappearance or extrajudicial killing (even) lacked knowledge about victims," Chowdhury said. The report said the police's elite anti-crime Rapid Action Battalion (RAB), which draws men from the Army, Navy, Air Force, regular police and other law enforcement agencies had collaborated with each other to pick up, torture and keep victims in detention and deliberately segmented the operations. The commission simultaneously proposed the abolition of the RAB alongside scrapping or thoroughly amending the Anti-Terrorism Act, 2009. Rights activist and commission member Sajjad Hossain said they recorded 1,676 complaints of enforced disappearances and, so far, have examined 758 of them. Of these, 200 people or 27 per cent of the victims never returned while those who returned were mostly shown on records as arrested. Besides the chairman, the commission comprises Justice Farid Ahmed Shibli, rights activist Nur Khan, private

BRAC University teacher Nabila Idris and rights activist Sajjad Hossain. At a press conference earlier, the commission announced that they had found eight secret detention centres in Dhaka and its outskirts. The panel chairman on Saturday informed Yunus that they would deliver another interim report in March and would require at least another year to complete the scrutiny of all allegations they had received. "You are doing a really very important job. We are ready to give you all kinds of support that you need," Yunus was quoted as saying. TV channels and social media carried interviews with several victims of the alleged enforced disappearance, including former military officers and opposition activists who were active in opposing Hasina's regime. While receiving the report yesterday, Yunus said he would visit some of the joint interrogation cells and secret detention centres as he wanted first-hand knowledge about the sufferings of the victims. The report called for the creation of a new law criminalising enforced disappearances. Commission members also told the government to repeal laws under the Armed Police Battalions Ordinance that grants law enforcers indemnity for acts done in "good faith".

# Constitution will be amended with consensus of all: Nepal minister

PTI ■ KATHMANDU

Nepal's Minister for Home Affairs Ramesh Lekhak on Sunday said a consensus of all political parties will be ensured to amend the Constitution, a media report said. Lekhak, speaking at a press meet, stressed on the need for the Constitution amendment for strengthening the federal democratic republic. The Himalayan Times newspaper reported. "The preliminary dialogue on this issue has commenced. But the constitution amendment will not be determined by two political parties," he said. Lekhak said that the Nepali Congress (NC) and the Communist Party of Nepal (Unified Marxist-Leninist) (CPN UML), the largest parties in Parliament, had decided to form the incumbent coalition government to promote stabil-

ity, prevent corruption, strengthen good governance and economic activities and accelerate the pace of development. The minister further said that the existing political alliance between the NC and CPN (UML) has no issues and it will continue until the next general election. Responding to a question about the arrest of opposition leader Rabi Lamichhane, he claimed that the government is highly aware of the guarantee of human rights for each citizen. He added that the government has no feeling of "revenge" against Lamichhane, the chair of Rastriya Swatantra Party, as the current investigation against him is a legal issue. Meanwhile, Nepali Congress spokesperson Prakash Sharan Mahat advised the government to seek and accept foreign loans only on the need-basis as

it has been very challenging for the country to repay loans taken after Covid-19. In July, KP Sharma Oli was sworn in as Nepal's Prime Minister for the fourth time to lead a new coalition government. The leader of Nepal's largest communist party was appointed as prime minister by President Ram Chandra Paudel to lead the coalition government with Nepali Congress (NC), the largest party in Parliament, apart from other smaller parties. Oli, 72, succeeded Pushpa Kamal Dahal 'Prachanda', who lost the vote of confidence in the House of Representatives (HoR), leading to the formation of the new government. Nepal has faced frequent political turmoil as the country has seen 14 governments in the past 16 years after the Republican system was introduced.

# Pope Francis' makes 1st papal visit to France's Corsica awash in expressions of popular piety

AP ■ AJACCIO

Pope Francis on the first papal visit ever to the French island of Corsica on Sunday called for a dynamic form of laicism, promoting the kind of popular piety that distinguishes the Mediterranean island from secular France as a bridge between religious and civic society. Speaking at the close of a Mediterranean conference on popular piety, Pope Francis, as he is called in Corsican, described a concept of secularism "that is not static and fixed, but evolving and dynamic," that can adapt to "unforeseen situations" and promote cooperation "between civil and ecclesiastical authorities." The pontiff said that expressions of popular piety, including processions, communal prayer of the Holy Rosary, "can nurture constructive citizenship" on the part of Christians. At the same time, he warned against such manifestations being seen only in terms of folklore, or even superstition. During off-the-cuff remarks, the pope relayed his experience attending a festival in northern Argentina before his pontificate where he witnessed the importance of popular piety for the faithful "that seeks a healthy complicity." The visit to Corsica's capital Ajaccio, birthplace of Napoleon, is one of the briefest of his papacy beyond Italy's borders, just about nine hours on the ground, including a 40-minute visit with French President Emmanuel Macron. Francis was joined on the dais by the bishop of Ajaccio,



Pope Francis delivers the Angelus prayer inside the Cathedral of Our Lady of the Assumption of Ajaccio on the occasion of his one-day visit in the French island of Corsica on Sunday. AP/PTI

Cardinal Francois-Xavier Bustillo, who organized the conference that brought together some 400 participants from Spain, Sicily, Sardinia and southern France. The two-day meeting examined expressions of faith that often occur outside formal liturgies, such as processions and pilgrimages. Often specific to the places where they are practised, popular piety in Corsica includes the cult of the Virgin Mary, known locally as the "Maddunuccia," which protected the island from the plague in 1656 when it was still under Genoa. Corsica stands out from the rest of secularized France as a particularly devout region, with 92 confraternities, or lay associa-

tions dedicated to works of charity or piety, with over 4,000 members. "It means that there is a beautiful, mature, adult and responsible collaboration between civil authorities, mayors, deputies, senators, officials and religious authorities," Ajaccio Cardinal Francois-Xavier Bustillo told The Associated Press ahead of the visit. "There is no hostility between the two. And that is a very positive aspect because in Corsica there is no ideological hostility." The visit was awash in signs of popular piety. The pope was greeted by children in traditional garb and was continually serenaded by bands, choruses and singing troupes that are central to Corsican culture

from the airport, to the motorcade route, convention center and cathedral. Thousands stood along the roadside to greet the pontiff and more waved from windows. René Colombani traveled with 2,000 others by ship from northern Corsica to Ajaccio, on the western coast, to see the pope. "It is an event that we will not see again in several years. It may be the only time that the pope will come to Corsica. And since we wanted to be a part of it, we have come a long way," Colombani said. The island, which Genoa ceded to France in 1768, is located closer to the Italian mainland than France. From the conference, the pope traveled to the 17th-century

cathedral of Santa Maria Assunta to meet with clergy, stopping along the way at the statue of the Maddunuccia. Francis will later celebrate Mass at the Place d'Austerlitz park, where it is said Napoleon played as a child. Around 7,000 faithful are expected. He will meet privately with Macron at the airport before departing for the 50-minute flight back to Rome. They are expected to talk about the world's crisis, including wars in the Middle East and Ukraine, and environment and climate-related issues, Macron's office said. The pontiff pointedly did not make the trip to Paris earlier this month for the pomp surrounding the reopening of the Notre Dame Cathedral following the devastating 2019 fire. The visit to Corsica seems far more suited to Francis' priorities than a grand cathedral reopening, emphasizing the "church of the peripheries." It is Francis' third trip to France, each time avoiding Paris and the protocols that a state visit entails. He visited the port of Marseille in 2023, on an overnight visit to participate in an annual summit of Mediterranean bishops, and went to Strasbourg in 2014 to address the European Parliament and Council of Europe. Corsica is home to more than 340,000 people and has been part of France since 1768. But the island has also seen independence violence and has an influential nationalist movement, and last year Macron proposed granting it limited autonomy.

# Pakistanis celebrate Raj Kapoor's 100th birth anniversary

PTI ■ PESHAWAR

Pakistani cultural enthusiasts and film lovers gathered at the iconic Kapoor House in Peshawar on Saturday to celebrate the 100th birth anniversary of legendary Bollywood filmmaker and actor Raj Kapoor. A highlight of the event, reinforcing the significance of Peshawar's ties to cinematic history, was the cutting of a cake to mark the birth centenary of Kapoor — one of the most influential figures of Indian cinema. Participants also welcomed the World Bank's announcement to allocate Rs 100 million each for the restoration of the ancestral homes of Raj Kapoor and fellow Bollywood legend Dilip Kumar. Both homes, located near the famous Qissa Khawani Bazaar, are celebrated as symbols of Peshawar's deep ties to Indian cinema. The gathering, jointly organized by the Cultural Heritage Council (CHC) and the Directorate of Archaeology Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, called for larger-scale events to commemorate the legacy of Kapoor. The attendees emphasized Kapoor's connection to Pakistan, where he was born in Peshawar's Dhaki Nalbandi, and praised his enduring influence on cinema. Muhammad Hussain Haideri,

Secretary of the Pak-Iran Trade and Investment Council, was the chief guest of the event. Born on December 14, 1924, Kapoor was the son of stalwart actor Prithviraj Kapoor. He made classics like "Awaraz", "Barsaat", "Shree 420", "Sangam" and "Mera Naam Joker" during his illustrious 40-year career. He died in 1988. Ibrahim Zia, a renowned writer and researcher on the Indian film industry who has extensively studied film legends with roots in Peshawar and Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, presented rare photographs of Raj Kapoor from his childhood and early adolescence years in Peshawar. He also shared insights into the actor's illustrious career, starting in the 1940s. Zia highlighted Kapoor's versatility across genres, from romance and comedy to tragedy, which solidified his status as the "Greatest Showman of Indian Cinema". The Kapoor House stands near the ancestral homes of Dilip Kumar and Shah Rukh Khan, connecting two generations of Indian film legends to Peshawar. Dilip Kumar, celebrated for his naturalistic acting, and Shah Rukh Khan, a modern-day Bollywood superstar, further underscore the city's historical contribution to Indian cinema.

# Cyclone Chido leaves 11 dead

AP ■ CAPE TOWN

At least 11 people have died after Cyclone Chido caused devastating damage in the French territory of Mayotte in the Indian Ocean, France's Interior Ministry said Sunday. The ministry said it was proving difficult to get a precise tally of the dead and injured amid fears the death toll will increase. A hospital in Mayotte reported that nine people were in critical condition in the hospital and 246 others were injured. The tropical cyclone blew through the southeastern Indian Ocean, also affecting the nearby islands of Comoros and Madagascar. Mayotte was directly in the path of the cyclone and suffered extensive damage on Saturday, officials said. The prefect of Mayotte said it was the worst cyclone to hit Mayotte in 90 years. French Interior Minister Bruno Retailleau said Saturday night after an emergency meeting in Paris that there were fears that the death toll in Mayotte "will be high." Chido brought winds in excess of 220 kph, according to the French weather service, ripping metal roofs off houses and destroying many small structures in Mayotte, which has a population of just over 300,000 spread over two main islands about 800 kilometres off Africa's east coast. In some parts, entire neighbourhoods were flattened, while local residents reported many trees had been uprooted and boats had been flipped or sunk.

# Trump appoints Richard Grenell to serve as special missions envoy

AP ■ WEST PALM BEACH

President-elect Donald Trump announced Saturday that he's picked longtime foreign policy adviser Richard Grenell to serve as an envoy for special missions, tasking him with helping the incoming administration deal with some of the toughest foreign policy challenges. Grenell served as ambassador to Germany during Trump's first administration, special presidential envoy for Serbia and Kosovo peace negotiations, and did a stint as acting director of national intelligence. He was also a contender to serve as secretary of state, but Trump opted to nominate Florida Sen. Marco Rubio. "Ric will work in some of the hottest spots around the World, including Venezuela and North Korea," Trump said in a posting on his social media platform, Truth Social, announcing

the appointment. Grenell during Trump's first term developed a reputation for employing a sometimes contentious approach to diplomacy that rankled allies and the foreign policy establishment in Washington. But his style was appreciated by the president-elect who sees value in blunt talk with allies. Grenell remained close to Trump after he left office in 2021, serving at times as a key adviser on foreign policy. He was in the room when Trump met with Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy in September. Grenell has advocated for a peace deal that would preserve Ukraine's territory while still allowing for "autonomous regions" where Russia could remain in control. He's also advised against expanding NATO to include Ukraine, saying — as Trump has — that the alliance shouldn't grow until current members

meet the alliance's defense spending targets. Members of the transatlantic alliance have committed for years to spending 2% of their GDP on defense, but several countries still fall short of the target. He was an early supporter of Trump's 2024 campaign and held multiple events for the Republican nominee focused on economics and national security. Speaking at the Republican National Convention, Grenell echoed Trump's mantra that "it's time to put America first" on the global stage and argued that China and Russia saw President Joe Biden's administration as weak. Trump raised concerns during the 2024 campaign when he said he would not defend NATO members that failed to meet defense spending targets, and warned he would "encourage" Russia "to do whatever the hell they want" to alliance countries that he

considered "delinquent." Grenell has downplayed Trump's criticisms of NATO and said the only talk of leaving the alliance altogether "was really from the media." "What we're saying is, don't come to the wedding without a gift," Grenell said. Grenell was part of the Trump campaign's outreach to Arab American voters in Michigan, where the president-elect made gains with a traditionally Democratic constituency despite his history of banning immigration from several majority-Muslim countries. Grenell orchestrated pro-Trump events with Arab American voters, like a May meeting held in Troy, Michigan. A US spokesman at the United Nations during the George W. Bush administration, Grenell, like many other Republicans, has his own history of criticizing Trump before embracing him.

Once an adviser to GOP moderates like 2012 presidential nominee Mitt Romney and a supporter of gay marriage, Grenell, who is openly gay, deleted social media posts blasting Trump as "reckless" and "dangerous" once the former reality TV star became the Republican nominee in 2016. Trump also announced Saturday that he's appointing Devin Nunes, the chief executive officer of the president-elect's Truth Social platform, to head a presidential advisory board that will keep tabs on the U.S. intelligence community. Nunes will continue leading Trump Media & Technology Group. Trump is the company's largest shareholder. The former California lawmaker chaired the House Intelligence Committee and was one of Trump's closest allies in Congress during the president-elect's first term.







# FPIs make a strong comeback to Indian equities

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

Foreign investors have made a strong comeback to Indian equities with a net investment of Rs 22,766 crore in the first two weeks of December driven by expectations of rate cut by the US Federal Reserve.

This revival follows significant outflows in the preceding months, with Foreign Portfolio Investors (FPIs) pulling out a net Rs 21,612 crore in November and a massive Rs 94,017 crore in October – the worst monthly outflow on record. Interestingly, September had marked a nine-month high for FPI inflows, with a net investment of Rs 57,724 crore, highlighting the volatility in foreign investment trends.

Looking ahead, the flow of foreign investments into Indian equity markets will hinge on several key factors. These include the policies implemented under Donald Trump's presidency, the prevailing inflation and interest rate environment, and the evolving geopolitical landscape,



Himanshu Srivastava, Associate Director, Manager Research, Morningstar Investment Research India, said. Additionally, the third-quarter earnings performance of Indian companies and the country's progress on the economic growth front will play a crucial role in shaping investor sentiment and influencing foreign inflows, he added. According to the data with the depositories, FPIs have made a net

investment of Rs 22,766 crore in this month (till December 13). This was driven by expectations of a US Federal Reserve rate cut. A shift toward monetary easing has improved global liquidity, drawing capital into emerging markets like India. These inflows reflect sustained interest in India as a growth market, Karthick Jonagadia, smallcase Manager and Founder of Quantace Research, said. Also, the Reserve Bank of India

(RBI) enhanced liquidity by lowering the Cash Reserve Ratio (CRR) that boosted investors' sentiment, Vipul Bhowar, Senior Director - Listed Investments at Waterfield Advisors, said.

Additionally, India's Consumer Price Index (CPI) inflation dropped to 5.48 per cent in November from 6.21 per cent in October, enhancing investor confidence and raising hopes for potential monetary policy easing by the RBI, he added.

Even though FPIs have turned buyers in December, they have been large sellers too on certain days. This indicates that at higher levels, they may again turn sellers since Indian valuations continue to be relatively high compared to other markets, V K Vijayakumar, Chief Investment Strategist, Geojit Financial Services, said.

The rising dollar is another concern which might prompt FPIs to sell at higher levels, he added. On the other hand, FPIs invested Rs 4,814 crore in the debt general limit and pulled out Rs 666 crore from the debt Voluntary Retention Route (VRR) during the period under review. So far this year, FPIs have invested Rs 1.1 lakh crore in the debt market.

# Coal imports up 4 per cent at 162 MT in Apr-Oct period

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

The country's coal import rose by 4.2 per cent to 162.45 million tonnes (MT) in the April-October period of the current financial year compared to 155.87 MT in the year-ago period.

Coal imports in October dropped by 14.4 per cent to 21.84 MT compared to 25.54 MT in the corresponding month of the previous fiscal, according to data compiled by mjunction services, a B2B e-commerce platform.

Of the total imports in October, non-coking coal imports stood at 13.49 MT against 18.82 MT imported in October last fiscal. Coking coal imports stood at 4.45 MT, against 4.31 MT imported in October last financial year.

In September, non-coking coal imports were 13.24 MT and coking coal at 3.39 MT. "There was a modest increase



(month-on-month) in non-coking coal volumes in October as buyers took fresh positions during the festive month, and ahead of the winter season. Going forward, demand is likely to be moderate due to the anticipated growth in domestic supply during the fourth quarter (Q4)," mjunction MD & CEO Vinaya Varma said. Coal and Mines Minister G Kishan Reddy had recently

urged the steel sector to reduce dependence on imported coal and make the required changes in technology.

The minister had said that the import of coal should be reduced in a phased manner. The steel industry uses coking coal.

The minister had also expressed hopes that the coal production target of 1,080 million tonnes for the current fiscal year would be met.

# Markets to be guided by US Fed interest rate decision, WPI inflation, global trends: Analysts

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

The US Fed interest rate decision, inflation data and FIIs are the key factors that are expected to drive stock markets this week, analysts said.

Also, global trends will also be tracked by investors for further cues, they added.

"The Indian stock market's future trajectory will be influenced by a blend of global and domestic factors. Global trends, particularly the performance of US markets and the Fed's monetary policy decision, will play a significant role. Additionally, domestic economic indicators like inflation, will shape the



market sentiment," Pravesh Gour, Senior Technical Analyst, Swastika Investmart Ltd, said. The flow of foreign and domestic institutional

investments will also be a key driver, he said. Gour further said the rupee's exchange rate and crude oil prices will be critical determinants of market

direction. From the domestic macroeconomic data announcement, WPI inflation will be in focus on Monday.

"The key focus will be on the US Federal Reserve meeting, where a 25 basis point rate cut is already factored in. The Fed's commentary on future rate policy will hold significant importance," Ajit Mishra - SVP, Research, Religare Broking Ltd, said. Last week, the BSE benchmark jumped 623.07 points or 0.76 per cent, and the Nifty climbed 90.5 points or 0.36 per cent. Investors will watch out for the domestic WPI inflation to be released on Monday, an expert said.

# Five of top-10 most valued firms together add ₹1.13 lakh Crore in market valuation

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

Five of the 10 most valued firms added Rs 1,13,117.17 crore to their total market valuation last week with Bharti Airtel stealing the show.

While Tata Consultancy Services (TCS), HDFC Bank, Bharti Airtel, ICICI Bank and Infosys were the gainers, Reliance Industries, State Bank of India, Life Insurance Corporation of India (LIC), ITC and Hindustan Unilever took a hit in their valuations. Last week, the BSE benchmark gained 623.07 points or 0.76 per cent and the Nifty advanced 90.5 points or 0.36 per cent. The market valuation of Bharti Airtel surged by Rs



47,836.6 crore to Rs 9,57,842.40 crore. Infosys added Rs 31,826.97 crore to its valuation at Rs 8,30,387.10 crore. HDFC Bank's valuation rose by Rs 11,887.78 crore to Rs 14,31,158.06 crore and that of ICICI Bank increased by Rs 11,760.8 crore to Rs 9,49,306.37 crore. The market capitalisation

(mcap) of TCS climbed Rs 9,805.02 crore to Rs 16,18,587.63 crore.

However, the mcap of Reliance Industries declined by Rs 52,031.98 crore to Rs 17,23,144.70 crore.

The valuation of LIC tumbled Rs 32,067.73 crore and that of Hindustan Unilever slumped Rs 22,250.63 crore to Rs 5,61,423.08 crore. The mcap of State Bank of India dropped Rs 2,052.66 crore to Rs 7,69,034.51 crore and that of ITC by Rs 1,376.19 crore to Rs 5,88,195.82 crore.

Reliance Industries remained the most valued firm followed by TCS, HDFC Bank, Bharti Airtel, ICICI Bank, Infosys, State Bank of India, LIC, ITC and Hindustan Unilever.

# India seeks strong WTO subsidy rules for high seas fishing

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

India has pitched at the WTO for stricter regulations on subsidies granted by countries that are engaged in high seas fishing activities, an official said.

Highlighting the stark disparity, an Indian document submitted at the World Trade Organization (WTO) has noted that it provides a modest USD 35 per fisher annually, compared to subsidies as high as USD 76,000 per fisher per year in some European nations.

India also suggested that historical subsidisers should seek permission of the Committee on Fisheries Subsidies for grant of subsidies in future.

The country has made these remarks in the meetings of the Negotiating Group on Rules (Fisheries subsidies), which are going on in Geneva.

"India has pitched for strong disciplines for historical fisheries subsidisers which are engaged in distant water fishing (200 nautical miles from sea shore) and has asked for a moratorium on subsidies at the present level for 25 years," the official said. On these demands, India was supported by countries like Indonesia and other developing countries, the official added.

"Blaming India for stalling the decision at the GC (General Council) is merely an excuse and a tactic to push for weak disciplines, allowing business as usual to continue," the official said adding WTO members engaged in distant water fishing should stop providing any kind of subsidies for 25 years as they provide significantly higher support measures and are indiscriminately exploiting the fisheries resources. The General Council is the WTO's highest-level decision-making body in Geneva, meeting regularly to carry out the functions of the WTO.

It has representatives (usually ambassadors or equivalent) from all member governments and has the authority to act on behalf of the Ministerial Conference. India has also called for adopting a 'per capita distribution of subsidies' criteria to address concerns over overfishing and capacity under the WTO framework, according to the document.

# Airlines are price takers, they do not have influence on prices they pay: IATA Chief Economist



PTI ■ GENEVA

Airlines are price takers as they do not have an influence on the prices they pay, IATA Chief Economist Marie Owens Thomsen has said and highlighted that carriers' need to diversify their revenues is complicated by slim profit margins as well as weak balance sheets.

In a fast-growing aviation market like India where the air traffic demand is on the rise, there are persistent concerns about airfare trajectory and suggestions from various quarters to make air tickets more affordable. Discussing overall airfares and the costs of airlines, Thomsen said airlines do not have any influence on the prices they pay.

"There are too few aircraft manufacturers and oil companies. Whatever supplies we are looking at upstream, we are price takers and downstream, we have the

hyper competitive environment where all customers can see all fares from all airlines at all times. So, we always compete in price," she told PTI in an interview in Geneva earlier this week. Thomsen, who is the Chief Economist and Senior Vice President for Sustainability, said as airlines are price takers upstream and downstream, it leaves them with very little in the middle. A study published in November by the International Air Transport Association (IATA) showed that airfares have risen at a slower pace than consumer prices (measured by the Consumer Price Index, CPI) over the past decade. "This indicates that air ticket prices have not fully kept up with inflation, especially in comparison to jet fuel costs, which have significantly outpaced consumer inflation," the study said. Currently, jet fuel accounts for around 30 per cent of

airlines' operating costs. To a question on whether there can be more transparency in pricing of air tickets, Thomsen argued that if airlines were profiteering, the per passenger profit would have been much higher.

"When you have high ticket prices and low airline profits, then the money is going somewhere else," she said, pointing out that a third and a 50 per cent of the airline industry's costs are administrative costs.

"The rest (of the costs) is actually for services of flying people or cargo," Thomsen noted.

As per IATA's latest outlook for 2025, airlines are projected to have a net profit of USD 1.8 per passenger while the overall net profit expected to be USD 3.6 billion.

"You can have a lot of activity and a big market and make no profit because your cost base is too high. Lot of them come from various types of regulatory fees and charges levied on airlines," Thomsen pointed out.

According to her, there is a need for revenue diversification by airlines but the situation is complicated by slim profit margins and weak balance sheets most airlines suffer from.

IATA represents around 340 airlines globally, including Indian carriers. The member airlines account for more than 80 per cent of the global air traffic.

# India's import of Russian oil drops in Nov on shrinking discounts

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

India's import of Russian crude oil dropped in November to its lowest level since June 2022 but the Kremlin continues to be the biggest source of oil for India, according to a monthly tracker report of a European think tank.

India became the second biggest buyer of Russian crude oil since Moscow invaded Ukraine in February 2022, with purchases rising from less than one per cent of the total oil imported to almost 40 per cent of the country's total oil purchases.

The rise was primarily because the Russian crude oil was available at a discount to other internationally traded oil due to the price cap and the European nations shunning purchases from Moscow.

"India's imports of Russian crude oil dropped by a massive 55 per cent in November - the lowest figure since June 2022," the Centre for Research on Energy and Clean Air (CREA) said its latest report.

Russia remained India's top oil supplier, followed by Iraq and Saudi Arabia.

"China has bought 47 per cent of Russia's crude exports, followed by India (37 per cent), the EU (6 per cent), and Turkey (6 per cent)," CREA said without giving absolute numbers.

In November, there was a 17 per cent month-on-month



increase in the discount on Russia's Urals grade crude oil to an average of USD 6.01 per barrel compared to Brent crude oil. The discount on the ESPO grade narrowed by a massive 15 per cent and was traded at an average discount of USD 3.88 per barrel while that on the Sokol blend narrowed by 2 per cent to USD 6.65 per barrel, it said.

Russia predominantly sells ESPO and Sokol grades of crude oil to India. Besides crude oil, India bought smaller quantities of coal from Russia.

"From December 5, 2022 until the end of November 2024, China purchased 46 per cent of all Russia's coal exports - India (17 per cent), Turkey (11 per cent), South Korea (10 per cent), and Taiwan (5 per cent) round off the top five buyers list," according to CREA.

All fossil fuels taken together, "India dropped to third in the list of largest buyers of Russian fossil fuels in November,

contributing 17 per cent (EUR 2.1 billion) to Russia's monthly export earnings from its top five importers. There was a significant 22 per cent drop in Russian revenues from crude oil exports to India in November," it said.

While there was an 11 per cent month-on-month decline in the total volume of India's imports of crude oil in November, Russian volumes suffered the most, dropping by a massive 55 per cent. India imports more than 85 per cent of its crude oil, which is refined into fuels like petrol and diesel refineries.

In an attempt to restrict funds for Russia's war machine, The Group of Seven (G7) rich nations, the European Union and Australia put an embargo on Russian crude and introduced a USD 60 per barrel price cap in December 2022. Over the next 12 months, the price cap and embargo had a significant impact on revenues, and

forced Russia to find new markets and ways to transport its oil.

Russia did this by offering deep discounts on its Urals grade crude.

"It has been two years since the imposition of the price cap. CREA estimates that in this period, the sanctions have forced Russia to drop the price of Urals by an estimated 15 per cent. Since the sanctions, Russia has lost an estimated EUR 14.6 billion in revenues from Urals grade crude exports," the report said.

In the second year of the sanctions, CREA estimates that sanctions impacted Russian Urals crude revenues by 10 per cent resulting in losses of EUR 4 billion.

This impact was felt heavily for the first half of 2024 when Russian revenues were hit by EUR 2.5 billion.

"The price cap has had an impact but has failed to live up to its potential. A lack of enforcement and desire to lower the price cap has meant Russia has found a way to circumvent the cap and find new markets as time has gone by, especially in the second year of the sanctions," it said.

In the first year of the sanctions Russia was losing, on an average, 23 per cent of its Urals crude export revenues every month due to the price cap and embargo. This figure has fallen sharply to a mere monthly average of 9 per cent in the second year of the cap.

# Auto Expo to see highest-ever participation of vehicle manufacturers: SIAM

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

The upcoming edition of Auto Expo will see participation of 34 vehicle manufacturers, the largest number of participants till date, since the first edition of the marquee event in 1986. The Society of Indian Automobile Manufacturers (SIAM) would be organising the 17th edition of Auto Expo, 'The Motor Show', under the aegis of the Bharat Mobility Global Expo 2025 from January 17-22 at Bharat

Mandapam, in partnership with ACMA and CII.

"Around 34 vehicle manufacturers would be participating at the exhibition and showcasing technologies with respect to multiple powertrains," SIAM Director General Rajesh Menon told PTI.

It is the highest-ever participation in the history of the event so far, he added. Automakers participating in the event include Tata Motors, Maruti Suzuki, Mahindra & Mahindra,



Toyota Kirloskar Motor, Hyundai Motor India, Kia

Motor India, JSW MG Motor and Skoda Auto Volkswagen India, he stated.

Luxury carmakers like BMW, Mercedes, Porsche India, and BYD would also be showcasing their products during the event.

In the two-wheeler segment, there would be participation from TVS Motor Company, Bajaj Auto, Hero MotoCorp, Honda Motorcycle and Scooter India, Suzuki Motorcycle, and India Yamaha.

Similarly, Volvo Eicher

Commercial Vehicles, Ashok Leyland, JBM and Cummins India would be participating in the event.

Menon said some of the pure EV players like Ather Energy, TI Clean Mobility, Eka Mobility, Ola Electric and Vinfast would also be participating this time in the Auto Expo.

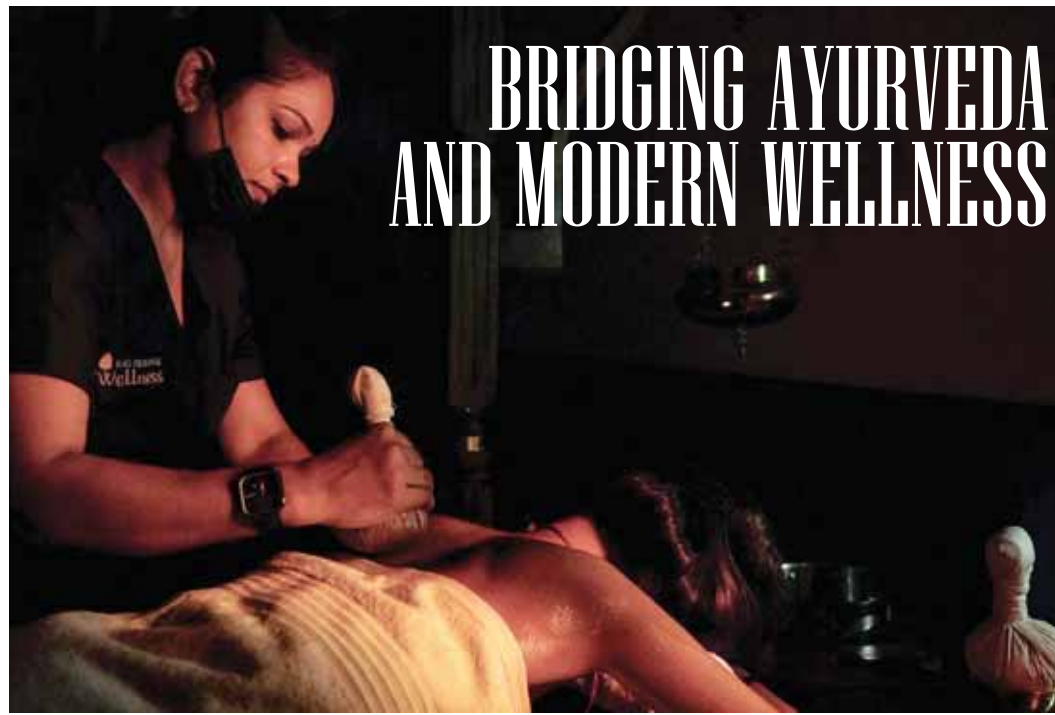
SIAM would also be setting up separate thematic pavilions on decarbonisation, circularity, electrification and road safety at the Expo.

The Bharat Mobility Global Expo 2025 will be held between January 17 and 22 next year at Bharat Mandapam, Yashobhoomi (India International Convention and Expo Centre) Dwarka, and India Expo Centre & Mart, Greater Noida, simultaneously. The last edition of the Auto Expo was held from January 11-18, 2023, at the India Expo Mart, Greater Noida. The inaugural Bharat Mobility Global Expo 2024 was held from February 1-3.



Rajgopal Swaminathan won awards in six categories for his contributions in multi discipline field viz Adtech, Martech, Digttech, Sales and Execution etc pertaining to the organisations like Amazon Pay, Upstox, Aditya Birla, PhonePe, Stock Market and Angel One at the prestigious FINIXX SUMMIT & AWARDS in Mumbai on Friday night.





## BRIDGING AYURVEDA AND MODERN WELLNESS

BIO RESURGE WELLNESS IS A BLEND OF ANCIENT AYURVEDIC THERAPIES AND CONTEMPORARY WELLNESS PRACTICES DESIGNED TO REJUVENATE MIND, BODY, AND SOUL, WRITES ABHI SINGHAL

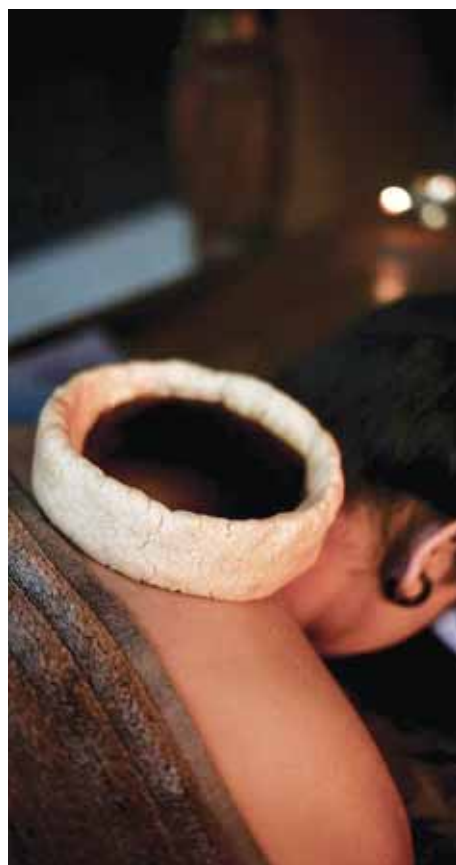
In a world where the pace of life grows faster and stressors more complex, the fusion of ancient Ayurvedic healing with modern wellness practices offers a profound and timely solution. Rooted in the timeless principles of balance, prevention, and natural healing, Ayurveda provides a foundation for holistic well-being. When paired with cutting-edge advancements like Ayurvedic therapies, mindfulness techniques, nutritional science, and fitness innovations, this blend not only bridges centuries of knowledge but also caters to the unique challenges of contemporary living. Together, they empower individuals to reclaim their health, offering a sustainable approach to physical, mental, and emotional harmony. For the same has *Bio Resurge Wellness* is a destination for holistic well-being has entered into the game to provide solution to the people. Designed as a sanctuary for those seeking physical and mental balance, *Bio Resurge Wellness* offers a curated selection of therapies aimed at rejuvenating the body, calming the mind, and promoting long-term vitality. Among their signature treatments are *Shirodhara*, *Abhyangam*, *Nasya*, and other time-honoured Ayurvedic therapies, each tailored to individual



needs for optimal healing. The therapies give a soothing and a calm experience making them feel comfortable. *Abhyangam*, which basically means a massage that, can be given in two ways. One is *Sarvanga Abhyangam*, which is basically full body massage, and the next is *Ekanga Abhyangam*, which is basically done on a particular part of the body. The wellness centre also offers *Janu Vasti*, a therapy that stands for staying to him. The purpose of the vasti is making sure that the selected area for the therapy gets a constant amount of heat, temperature, which is basically needed to counter the disorders. *Vasti* can be done at any part of the body. It's not just limited to the knees. Offering a range of signature Ayurvedic treatments designed to promote relaxation, healing, and rejuvenation another one is *Shirodhara*, a deeply calming therapy

that helps reduce stress, clear the mind, and improve mental clarity by continuous dropping of oil on your head that makes you feel deep sleep and major relief in stress and sleep disorders. For respiratory health, *Nasya* therapy clears the sinuses and supports mental focus, while *Elakizhi* and *Podikizhi*, herbal poultice treatments offer relief from pain, inflammation, and muscle stiffness, making them ideal for conditions like arthritis and sciatica. "There is a pressing need for a reliable, high-end health facility, one that is accessible to everyone and delivers effective results from day one. This facility will offer modern, proven Ayurvedic treatments with no side effects, transforming well-being by making wellness both easily accessible and readily available," said *Sonal Rathi*, Co-Founder of *Bio Resurge Wellness*. The holistic wellness centre offers a

*Panchakarma* that is five actions or five treatments. It is a set of Ayurvedic detoxification procedures. At *Bio Resurge Wellness* Centre, individuals can undergo these traditional Ayurvedic detoxification and rejuvenation therapies under the guidance of experienced practitioners and therapists. *Panchakarma* therapies aim to balance the doshas (bioenergies) in the body (Vata, Pitta, Kapha) and remove accumulated toxins (ama) through a series of treatments that include preliminary therapies (*Purvakarma*) like oil massages (*abhyanga*), steam therapy (*swedana*), and herbal treatments to prepare the body for the main detoxification therapies, and main therapies. The main *Panchakarma* treatments involve five primary procedures provided by the wellness centre are *Vamana* (Therapeutic Vomiting), *Nasya* (Nasal administration of medicated oils), *Raktamokshana* (Bloodletting), *Virechana* (Purgation) and *Basti* (Enema). With its comprehensive range of therapies blending ancient Ayurvedic wisdom with modern wellness practices, *Bio Resurge Wellness* serves as a beacon for those seeking a transformative and rejuvenating journey.



# GUILT-FREE CHRISTMAS RECIPES

By TEAM VIVA

The holiday season is synonymous with indulgence, but who says festive treats can't be both delicious and healthy? This Christmas, we've curated four mouth-watering recipes that bring the joy of the season while keeping nutrition in mind. From crispy rolls to decadent chocolate delights, these recipes are perfect for health-conscious foodies looking to celebrate without compromise.

Each recipe promises to surprise your guests with its unique flavours and thoughtful ingredients. Let this season be one of joyous celebrations and mindful indulgence.

### APPLE AND PECAN DONUTS BY CHEF AJAY ON BEHALF OF AMERICAN PECAN



**Ingredients:** □ A handful of American Pecans □ Apples □ 250 gm dark chocolate □ Peanut butter  
**Instructions:**  
□ Dry roast the American Pecans, coarsely chop them, and set aside.  
□ Cut apples into thick, round slices and remove the centre to create donut-shaped slices.  
□ Melt the dark chocolate in a microwave or double boiler.  
□ Dip each apple slice into the melted chocolate, ensuring it's evenly coated.  
□ Drizzle peanut butter over the chocolate-coated apple slices and sprinkle with chopped roasted pecans.  
□ Place the prepared slices in the refrigerator to set.  
□ These treats can be stored in the fridge for 1-2 days. Enjoy!



### NO-SUGAR ENERGY BOOSTER CARROT WALNUT MILKSHAKE BY CHEF MEGHNAON BEHALF OF CHILEAN WALNUTS

This milkshake is a wholesome and delicious option for Christmas mornings or as a healthy snack during the holidays. Packed with the natural sweetness of dates and the goodness of carrots and walnuts, it's the perfect festive energy drink!

**Ingredients:** □ 6-7 walnuts □ 6 soaked seedless dates (along with the soaking water) □ 1 medium-sized grated carrot □ 2 cardamoms (or a pinch of cinnamon or dry ginger powder for a festive twist) □ 2 cups of milk  
**Method:**  
□ Prepare the Base: In a blender, combine walnuts, soaked dates, grated carrot, and cardamom powder. Blend until a smooth paste forms.  
□ Mix with Milk: Add the paste to 2 cups of milk and blend again until creamy and frothy.  
□ Serve with Style: Pour the milkshake into glasses and garnish with a sprinkle of grated carrot and a few walnut pieces for a festive touch.  
This nutritious milkshake can be enjoyed at any time of the day, but it's especially satisfying as a quick, energy-packed Christmas breakfast.

### AVOCADO AND LIME CHRISTMAS CAKE BY CHEF BRISTI ON BEHALF OF WORLD AVOCADO ORGANISATION

**Serving:** 8-10 people  
**Ingredients:** □ 300g cream cheese □ 300ml liquid cream □ 2 avocados □ 2 limes □ 200g sugar □ 3 teaspoons gelatine powder □ 250g biscuits □ 100g butter □ Topping options □ Rosemary sprigs □ Redcurrants □ Christmas sprinkles  
**Equipment:** Cake mould  
**Instructions:**  
□ Crush the biscuits; add the melted butter and mix.  
□ Cover the base of the mould with the biscuit dough.  
□ Hydrate the gelatine in water and set aside.  
□ Grate the limes and squeeze.  
□ Peel the avocados and scoop out the flesh.  
□ Mix the cream cheese and sugar until creamy.  
□ Add the avocado, lime juice and lime zest and beat until smooth.



□ Heat the gelatine in the microwave until dissolved.  
□ Add the cream and gelatine to the cream cheese and mix until well blended.  
□ Pour over the biscuit base.  
□ Place in the fridge for a few hours until firm.  
□ Remove from the mould and decorate to taste.

### CHOCOLATE CAKE WITH PRUNES BY CHEF VIJAY ON BEHALF OF CHILEAN PRUNES



**Ingredients:** □ 2 cups heavy cream □ 2 cups powdered sugar □ 1/2 cup cocoa powder □ 2 1/4 cups superfine blanched almond flour □ 1/2 cup plus 2 tablespoons sweet rice flour □ 2 1/4 cups whole milk □ 6 large eggs □ 5 soft Prunes, roughly chopped □ 2 1/2 tablespoons sugar □ 2 1/2 tablespoons sugar □ 2 tablespoons salted butter, melted and cooled, plus more for pan □ 1 1/2 teaspoons pure vanilla extract □ 3/4 teaspoon coarse kosher salt □ Optional garnishes: toasted slivered almonds, chopped dark chocolate, cocoa powder  
**Preparation:**  
**Chocolate Cream Filling:** □ Whip thick cream to stiff peaks in a standing mixer. □ Sift powdered sugar and cocoa, then fold into whipped cream until fully combined. □ Prepare up to 2 days in advance and refrigerate.  
**Crepes:** □ Set up a cooling rack with parchment paper nearby. □ Blend all crepe ingredients in a high-speed blender for 30 seconds; let rest for 5 minutes. □ Heat a 10-inch nonstick pan over medium-low heat, brush with butter, and pour 1/3 cup batter into the center. □ Tilt the pan to spread batter evenly. Cook for 1.5 minutes until bubbles form and edges lighten. □ Loosen edges with a spatula, flip, and cook the other side for 1 minute. □ Transfer to the rack. Repeat to make 16 crepes.  
**Assembly:** □ Layer a crepe on a plate, spread 2-3 tbsp chocolate cream, and repeat until all crepes are stacked. □ Top the final crepe with remaining cream, smoothing it into peaks and valleys. □ Chill for 15 minutes. Decorate with toppings like almonds, dark chocolate, or cocoa powder before serving.



## Yoga for Pregnancy Journey

By JYOTI SINGH

Pregnancy is a transformative journey filled with joy, anticipation, and physical changes. For many expecting mothers, yoga offers a gentle, supportive way to stay active, alleviate discomfort, and connect with their growing baby.

### YOGA IS IDEAL DURING PREGNANCY

Yoga is uniquely suited for pregnant women because it combines gentle movement, breathing techniques, and mindfulness, which cater to the evolving needs of an expecting mother.



### PHYSICAL BENEFITS

□ **Strength and Flexibility:** Prenatal yoga helps strengthen the core and pelvic floor muscles, which play a crucial role during childbirth and postpartum recovery.  
□ **Improved Posture:** As the baby grows, the added weight can strain the lower back. Yoga postures improve alignment and relieve discomfort in the back, hips, and legs.  
□ **Enhanced Circulation:** Gentle yoga sequences boost blood flow, reducing swelling and promoting overall health for both mother and baby.  
**EMOTIONAL WELL-BEING:**  
□ **Stress Relief:** Deep breathing and mindfulness practices help calm the mind, reduce anxiety, and combat pregnancy-related mood swings.  
□ **Connection with the Baby:** Yoga fosters a deeper bond with the baby by encouraging mindful breathing and self-awareness.  
□ **Better Sleep:** Many women find it easier to rest and sleep after practicing yoga, which is essential during pregnancy.

### RECOMMENDED YOGA POSES FOR PREGNANT WOMEN

The author suggests a range of gentle, safe yoga poses that promote strength, relaxation, and

comfort throughout pregnancy:

**Cat-Cow Pose (Marjaryasana-Bitilasana):** This pose improves spinal mobility and alleviates back pain. By alternating between arching and rounding the back, expecting mothers can ease tension in the lower back and pelvis.

**Bound Angle Pose (Baddha Konasana):** Sitting with the soles of the feet pressed together and knees gently opening outward helps stretch the inner thighs and hips, preparing the body for childbirth.

**Wide-Legged Child's Pose (Balasana):** A variation of Child's Pose, this posture provides relaxation and stretches the hips, lower back, and thighs. It's also an excellent pose for calming the mind.

**Side-Lying Shavasana (Rest Pose):** Lying on the left side with a pillow under the head and between the knees promotes deep relaxation and improves circulation.

**Anulom Vilom (Alternate Nostril Breathing):** This breathing technique balances energy, reduces stress, and enhances oxygen flow that is beneficial for both the mother and baby.

### SAFETY TIPS FOR PRACTICING YOGA DURING PREGNANCY

□ **Consult a Doctor:** Always get medical clearance before starting yoga.  
□ **Avoid Intense Poses:** Skip deep backbends, twists, or poses that involve lying flat on the back after the first trimester.  
□ **Use Props:** Props like cushions, bolsters, and blocks can provide additional support and comfort.  
□ **Stay Hydrated:** Drink plenty of water to stay hydrated during practice.

### EMBRACE THE JOURNEY

Yoga during pregnancy is more than just physical exercise, it's a holistic practice that nurtures the mind, body, and soul. With expert guidance from practitioners, expecting mothers can navigate pregnancy with confidence, strength, and serenity.

— The author is the Founder and CEO of Sparsh Yog



# Head dominates Indian attack for back-to-back centuries

**PTI ■ BRISBANE**  
India's nemesis Travis Head smashed his second hundred in as many games to help Australia gain a distinct advantage in the third Test here on Sunday. Australia, who were put under pressure by India in the morning session, gathered 130 runs in the afternoon without the loss of a wicket. Head (103 batting off 118) made the difference in Adelaide and his successive hundred took the hosts to 234 for three at tea on day two. Returning to form, Steve Smith (65 batting off 149) stood solid at the other end as the duo shared an unbeaten 159-run stand for the fourth wicket. The southpaw, who made a match-winning 140 in the previous Test, once again



lorded over the Indian bowlers who ran out of ideas against him. Even the field placements were questionable with the visitors having a deep point and deep square leg early in Head's innings, allowing the explosive batter pace his innings. The short balls were attempted when Head was well set and he duly put them away with disdain. His unconquered effort comprised 13 fours. Akash Deep bowled well, especially to Smith, but could not get a breakthrough. Struggling for runs, Smith reverted to his trademark exaggerated shuffle, to keep the Indians at bay. He found it tough to get going initially before gaining the confidence to go for horizontal bat shots. Earlier, India's pace spearhead Jasprit Bumrah extended his

dominance over the Australian openers before Nitish Reddy got into the act to leave the visitors at 104 for three at lunch. Despite the pressure exerted by the Indian pacer, Australia were able to muster 76 runs in the session. With the majority of day one lost due to rain, play started half an hour earlier than scheduled time and it did not take long for Bumrah what he has done thus far in the series. Resuming at 28 for no loss, Australia lost Usman Khawaja (21 off 54) in the fourth over of the day when Bumrah had him caught behind with a ball that straightened slightly to take a faint outside edge. It was the third time Bumrah had got rid of the left-handed opener in the series. In the following over, Bumrah

sent back Nathan McSweeney (9 off 49) for the fourth time in three Tests, drawing a thick outside edge from an angle that travelled fast to Virat Kohli at second slip. India were able to maintain pressure after the early breakthroughs with under pressure Smith and Marnus Labuschagne (12 off 55) looking to occupy the crease. Smith, batting with a different stance for the third time in as many games, was tested by the Indian pacers repeatedly as they tried to target his stumps. Akash Deep and Mohammed Siraj did a pose a few questions to both Smith and Labuschagne but could not get the desired results. Reddy, who got the ball to swing, ended Labuschagne's vigil in the 34th over of the innings. The India all-rounder drew the Australian number three to drive off a full ball and Labuschagne took the bait only to be caught by Kohli at second slip, leaving Australia at 75 for three. Two overs later, there was a major scare in the Indian camp as Siraj walked off the field after feeling discomfort in his left leg in the middle of his over. He was seen holding his left knee but returned to the field much to India's relief. The injury scare came after Siraj and Labuschagne shared a light moment as the Indian pacer walked towards the batter to swap the bails only for them to be swapped back. Runs started flowing with in-form Head joining Smith in the middle. His cover drive off Bumrah was easily the shot of the morning.



## New Zealand leads England by 340 runs in the 3rd test

**AP ■ HAMILTON**  
New Zealand showed off its presumptive new ball attack as it took control of the third test against England on the second day Sunday. Matt Henry and Will O'Rourke shared seven wickets as New Zealand bowled out England for 143 in a session and a half to take a 205-run first innings lead. O'Rourke then had to bat for the second time in the day as nightwatchman when Will Young was out for 60 within 20 minutes of the close. He couldn't last to stumps at which New Zealand was 136-3, having increased its lead to 340. Kane Williamson completed his 38th half century just before the close and was 50 not and Rachin Ravindra was 2. Henry and O'Rourke likely will become New Zealand's new ball attack when Tim Southee retires at the end of this, his 107th test. They previewed that partnership Sunday as Henry took 4-48 and O'Rourke took 3-33 in an outstanding New Zealand bowling performance. Left-arm spinner Mitchell Santner took 3-7 including the wickets of Ollie Pope and Ben Stokes after leading a defiant last wicket stand with O'Rourke which occupied the first hour of the day until New Zealand's last wicket fell at 347. O'Rourke, a classic No. 11 with only 13 runs in nine

## Money isn't the reason I play chess: Gukesh on being 'new multi-millionaire'

**PTI ■ SINGAPORE**  
The "multi-millionaire" tag does "mean a lot" to new world champion D Gukesh but he doesn't play the game for material gains but for that unbridled joy, which he has been able to retain since the time a chess board used to be the "coolest toy" for him. Gukesh, the 18-year-old from Chennai, is now richer by Rs 11.45 crore which he will receive from FIDE as prize money for beating Ding Liren of China in the final. Gukesh's father Rajnikanth gave up his career as an ENT surgeon to accompany his son on the circuit while mother Padmakumari, who is a microbiologist, became the sole earner of the family. Asked what exactly does being a multi-millionaire mean to him, Gukesh said, "It means a lot. When I got into chess, we (as a family) had to make some hard decisions. My parents had gone through financial and emotional hardships. Now, we are more comfortable and parents don't need to think about those



things," Gukesh told FIDE in an interview. "Personally, money isn't the reason I play chess," he said. He always tries to remember why he started playing the game when he got his first chess board. "I am still the kid who loves chess. It used to be the coolest toy," the reticent world champion explained. For him, his parents mean the world. Gukesh's dad doubles up as his manager by taking care of all the off-board activities and allowing him to concentrate on the game, while his mother is the emotional and spiritual pillar of strength. "She (mother) still says, I will be happy to know that you are a great chess player but I would be happier to hear that you are a greater person," Gukesh said. Still in his teens, Gukesh feels that as a student of the game, the more he learns about chess, the more aware he will become of how little he knows. "Even the greatest of players make a lot of mistakes. Even though technology is so advanced, there is still a lot to learn about chess. I strongly

believe that the more you learn something, more you realise that you don't know that thing. "Whenever I am on the chess board, I feel I learn something new. It's a process of unlimited beauty. Journey and Destination both are "important". The process of the journey is very important but for Gukesh, it is even more important to be clear about the destination. "For example, I played a beautiful game and lost, I will feel sad. And if I win despite not playing a great game, I will be happy. I tend to look at the result," he said. Desire to win is more than the fear of losing. The quality of games in the final was found to be pretty drab by experts but Gukesh doesn't believe that his desire to win is trumped by fear of losing. "My desire to win is stronger than the fear of losing," he said, while expressing a bit of surprise as to how Liren easily agreed to a draw in the second game.



## India needs to get better with old ball between overs 50-80, accepts bowling coach Morkel

**PTI ■ BRISBANE**  
Bowling coach Morne Morkel on Sunday accepted that Indian bowlers failed to execute plans against Australian century-maker Travis Head and exhorted them to tidy up their act with the old ball between overs 50 and 80. Head and fellow centurion Steve Smith helped the hosts to clobber 171 runs in 31 overs in the third session on the second day of the third Test here, adding to a wicketless post-lunch segment. Australia closed the day at a highly satisfying 405 for seven. "First of all, we can say he's (Head) in pretty good form. But I think for us with the ball, if you look at it from overs 50 to 80, even in the last game, is where we fall short, leaking (runs) a little bit. So, that's one area I think we need to get better at," Morkel said in the post-day press conference. Morkel said the Indian bowlers could not sustain the momentum after taking three wickets in the morning session. "First up with the ball this morning, we were pretty good, at 3 for 70, but took nothing away from two world-class players, Smith we know, he's a guy who also can bat long and score runs. They (Smith and Head) put a partnership there and put us under pressure with a softer ball. It's definitely an area that we need to focus on, maybe

deeper in the innings. Yes, we've got the game plans, but are we executing those game plans with a softer ball from both ends? That's something we need to get better at," getting added. The former South African quick explained the pre-set plan against Head, though it eventually fell flat on its back. "Our plan going into this game was to bowl a little bit more over the wicket, a straighter line. We felt he played it quite nicely in Adelaide when we came around (the wicket). The margins to him are just so small and like I said, once he's in, what is the best way for the team and for you (is) to maybe slow down the scoring rate because you know he's going to be aggressive. "The best way (of controlling Head) is bringing a little bit of control into the game and like I said, from over 50 with that softer ball, that's where we're leaking (runs). When Head comes on straight, the pitch kind of feels to (be favourable) a side," he added. "I'm not taking anything away from that, but it is a venue where getting used to bowling the right length and trusting that, it does take a bit of time." Pacer Jasprit Bumrah singlehandedly shepherded India's bowling with a fiercer and Morkel did not read too much into the rather underwhelming efforts of the other seamers Mohammed Siraj and luck-less Akash Deep.

## Siraj is getting stick from 'saints' of Australian cricket, writes sarcastic Sunil Gavaskar

**PTI ■ BRISBANE**  
Indian legend Sunil Gavaskar has lashed out at the double standards of the Australian cricket pundits for their criticism of Mohammed Siraj's aggressive send-off to Travis Head in the Day/Night Test in Adelaide. Siraj and Head were at loggerheads after the Indian pacer got the Australian centurion bowled and gave him a send-off. While Head said that Siraj's reaction was uncalled for, the Indian pacer on his part countered that the southpaw never said "well bowled" which he claimed to have told the media. ICC warned Head and Siraj was fined 20 percent of his match fee but what has irked Gavaskar is the holier than thou attitude of some former Australian players. "Siraj is getting the stick from all the "saints" in Australian cricket who, of course, were known for their



impeccable behaviour on the field. It may have incensed Australian fans that Siraj's fiery send-off was directed at Head, who scored a magnificent century and was also the local boy," Gavaskar wrote in his column for

Sydney Morning Herald. Gavaskar took a dig at the double standards about how the same people support boorish behaviour from their own. "But the same people will cheer if an Aussie quick gives a similar send-off to an English batter during next summer's Ashes. "There were some suggestions in the media that the Australians should get back to being the mongrels they once were. So, do mongrels simply purr, or do they bark, too?" He was however surprised at Siraj's outburst considering that IPL had lessened the animosity among players. "Siraj's outburst was surprising because if the Indian Premier League has done one thing, apart from making Aussie cricketers and coaches millionaires, it has also taken away to a huge extent the animosity that previously existed in the game."

# India to host maiden World Athletics Continental Tour event on August 10 next year

**PTI ■ NEW DELHI**  
India will host its maiden World Athletics Continental Tour event - a bronze level global meet - in Bhubaneswar on August 10 next year, the national federation said on Sunday. The announcement was made by the Athletics Federation of India (AFI) while releasing the competition calendar for 2025. The Continental Tour is an annual series of track and field competitions held under the aegis of World Athletics and it forms the second tier of international one-day meetings after the prestigious Diamond League. "The Continental Tour will be a good opportunity for the Indian team to showcase their potential on home ground before the World Championships in September," AFI President Adille Sumariwalla said. The meet will be a chance for Indian athletes to earn world ranking points (category C) in home conditions for the 2025 World Championships to be held in Tokyo from September 13-21. The bronze level Tour meet is below the gold and silver levels. This will be the first global athletics meet to be hosted by India after the international permit meets, held in the early 1980s and early 1990s. India has also hosted World Half Marathon Championships in 2004 in New Delhi. "This will be the first time and most prestigious global athletics event after the permit meets in the 80s and 90s and the World Half Marathon in 2004. This is a big achievement

and will help athletics grow in the country," an AFI official told PTI. He said that India is also likely to host a "big" global level javelin meet next year. "We are trying for a big global javelin event and hoping to get it," he added. Riding on Olympic gold and silver medallist Neeraj Chopra's success, India is emerging as a global javelin powerhouse in the world. Currently, the country has more than half a dozen javelin throwers who can throw more than 80m. A World Athletics Continental Tour Bronze Level Meet can only be held in a facility which has a minimum sitting capacity of 3000 with a minimum class 2 certified track with six lanes. The equipment to be used will have to be World Athletics-certified.



There will have to be fully automatic timing obtained from a Photo Finish System, two clocks, two electronic infield boards and minimum one video screen. The warm up area will have to be adequate for all disciplines. The Kalinga Stadium in Bhubaneswar is one of the best facilities in the country and it has hosted several national championships and the Asian Championships in 2017 during which it had earned praise from the current World Athletics President Sebastian Coe. To host a Continental Bronze Level Meet, the organisers shall

provide adequate medical and emergency services on site, including ambulance service, and minor stitching; physiotherapy facilities at the stadium and at the Athletes' hotel. A minimum of five dope tests must be conducted at the event and samples shall be collected in strict accordance with World Athletics Anti-Doping Regulations using qualified doping control personnel. Samples shall be shipped to and analysed by a WADA-accredited laboratory. The organisers must stage a minimum of 12 events, with minimum five per gender including at least one jumping and one throwing event. They shall make every effort to stage the main programme within two and a half consecutive hours. The participating athletes will

have to be kept at a minimum three-star hotel and a total prize money purse of USD 25,000 must be offered for the meeting. Regarding the 2025 calendar, the season will start with the National Cross Country championships on January 12. The national race walking competition will be organised on April 19 in Chandigarh. The Senior National Federation Cup is scheduled for April 21-24 in Panchkula, Haryana, and will act as a qualification event for the Asian Athletic Championships to be held from May 27 to May 31 in Korea. The National Inter-State Senior Championships will be held from August 20 to 24 in Chennai, while the National Open Championships will be organised either in Pune or Bengaluru from September 27

to 30. The AFI president said elite Indian race walkers will not compete in the Asian Race Walking competition in Nomi, Japan in March as the main focus will be the World Athletics Championships in Tokyo. "The core group of Indian race walkers clocked a good time in March but aren't able to repeat the performance later in the season," Sumariwalla explained. "Since the main focus in 2025 is the global competition in September, we have decided not to send the elite team to Japan in March." The national team will also compete in international events to prepare for the World Athletics World Championships from September 13-21, the AFI president said.