



# the pioneer

Established 1865

INSIDE

**MONEY 10**  
HISTORIC MILESTONE: DELHI AIRPORT FIRST IN INDIA TO CONNECT 150 DESTINATIONS

RANCHI, TUESDAY DECEMBER 17, 2024; PAGES 12 ₹3

www.dailypioneer.com

PUBLISHED FROM: DELHI | LUCKNOW | BHOPAL | BHUBANESWAR | RANCHI | RAIPUR | CHANDIGARH | DEHRADUN | HYDERABAD | VIJAYWADA



Photo: PTI

## One Nation, One Election Bills in Parliament today

RAJESH KUMAR ■ NEW DELHI

The Narendra Modi-led Government is likely to introduce two Bills in the Lok Sabha paving way for simultaneous elections 'One Nation, One Election', on Tuesday. The Constitution (One Hundred and Twenty-Ninth Amendment) Bill, 2024, the legislation seeks to synchronise elections for the Lok Sabha, State Assemblies, and possibly local bodies. While the Union Territories Laws (Amendment) Bill 2024, is to amend the Government of Union Territories Act, 1963, the Government of National Capital Territory of Delhi Act, 1991 and the Jammu and Kashmir Reorganisation Act, 2019. Union Law Minister Arjun Ram Meghwal will introduce the Bills in the Parliament. The BJP has issued a three-line whip to all its Lok Sabha MPs to be present in the

house on December 17, 2024. The Union Cabinet has already approved two Bills to facilitate simultaneous elections to the Lok Sabha and State Assemblies, though the decision on local body polls has been deferred for now. According to the statement of objects and reasons of the Constitution ((One Hundred and Twenty-Ninth Amendment) Bill, 2024), the Bill proposes to insert a new article 82A (Simultaneous elections to the House of the People and all Legislative Assemblies) and to amend article 83 (Duration of Houses of Parliament), article 172 (Duration of State Legislatures) and article 327 (Power of Parliament to make provision with respect to elections to Legislatures). According to Section 2 sub clause 5 of the Constitution (129th) Amendment Bill, "If the Election Commission is of the opinion that the

elections to any Legislative Assembly cannot be conducted along with the general election to the House of the People, it may make a recommendation to the President, to declare by an order, that the election to that Legislative Assembly may be conducted at a later date." The General Elections to the House of the People and all State Legislative Assemblies were held simultaneously in the years 1951-52, 1957, 1962 and 1967. However, due to premature dissolution of some Legislative Assemblies in 1968 and 1969, the cycle of holding Polls simultaneously with the House of the People got disrupted. The Law Commission of India in its 170th report, on "Reform of the Electoral Laws", inter alia, suggested that holding separate elections for State Legislative Assemblies should be an exception rather than the rule.

## Gear up NCR, GRAP-IV is back

RAJESH KUMAR ■ NEW DELHI

As Delhi's average AQI rose to 399 at 9 Apm on Monday, and breached the 400 mark at 10 PM, the Commission for Air Quality Management (CAQM) on Monday invoked Stage IV of the Graded Response Action Plan (GRAP) to curb air pollution. As a result, entry of truck traffic into Delhi (except for trucks carrying essential commodities/ providing essential services) banned. All LNG/CNG /Electric/BS-VI Diesel trucks shall however be permitted to enter Delhi and NCR. Light Commercial Vehicles registered outside Delhi, other than EVs/CNG/BS-VI diesel, can't enter Delhi, except those carrying essential commodities/ providing essential services. Delhi-registered BS-IV and below diesel-operated medium and heavy goods vehicles will be prohibited from operating, except for those carrying essential services. The NCR State Governments/Delhi government will decide whether to permit 50 per cent of employees in Government, municipal, and private offices to work from home. All construction activities, including highways, roads, flyovers, power lines, pipelines and other public projects, have been suspended. Schools are closed. Employees are asked to work from home. Considering the steep rise in the AQI of Delhi owing to highly unfavourable meteorological conditions and absolute calm wind conditions, the CAQM Sub-Committee on GRAP called for an emergency meeting. The Sub-Committee decided to impose Stage-IV ('Severe+' Air Quality) of the GRAP schedule (issued on 13.12.2024) in the entire NCR, with immediate effect", the CAQM said in its order. The GRAP-IV is the highest level of restrictions and is intended to reduce the public health impact of hazardous air quality. "Considering the highly unfavourable meteorological conditions including calm winds and very low mixing height leading the AQI of Delhi into the higher end of the very poor category, the panel's sub-



Photo: Ranjan Dimri/The Pioneer

## Coldwave conditions sweep across NCR

SAUMYA SHUKLA ■ NEW DELHI

Coldwave conditions swept several parts of the national Capital for a second consecutive day on Monday as the minimum temperature dropped to 4.5 degrees Celsius, four degrees below normal. This is the joint lowest minimum temperature so far this season after the city recorded 4.5 degree Celsius on December 12 as well. In the coming days, Delhi may witness a further increase in the coldwave with shallow fog in various parts due to calm winds and high humidity. In its weather bulletin, the India Meteorological Department (IMD) has also issued a cold wave warning for certain states of northern India, including Jammu and Kashmir, Punjab, Haryana, and western Uttar Pradesh, among other states that would persist till Saturday in Delhi and several other states. The temperature in certain areas of Delhi went even below 4.5 degrees Celsius. The minimum temperature in Pusa was recorded at 3.5 degrees Celsius, while in Ayanagar, the minimum temperature was recorded at 4 degrees Celsius.

committee on Graded Response Action Plan decides to impose Stage 3 of the revised GRAP schedule (issued on Friday) in the entire NCR, with immediate effect," an official order said. According to the revised GRAP plan, non-essential diesel light commercial vehicles of BS-IV or older standards, registered outside Delhi, are also not allowed to enter the city. Construction and demolition activities which generate dust leading to air pollution are restricted. Additionally, the ban on construction work extends to all non-essential projects, though exceptions are made for national security, healthcare, and specific public infrastructure projects. To further combat the pollution, the authorities have ramped up efforts to suppress dust by deploying mechanised road-sweeping and water-sprinkling machines across the city. As a result, schools and colleges in Delhi, Gurugram, Faridabad, Ghaziabad, and Gautam Budh Nagar are mandatorily required to shift classes up to Class V to hybrid mode under GRAP Stage III. Students and parents will have the option to choose online education wherever it is available. Diesel generator sets, another significant contributor to air pollution, will be restricted to emergency use only during this phase.



## Yes. I am upset: Chhagan Bhujbal

T N RAGHUNATHA ■ MUMBAI

Making no bones about his displeasure over his exclusion from the Maharashtra Cabinet, a miffed The Nationalist Congress Party (NCP-AP) leader and a popular Other Backward Classes (OBC) face in the State, Chhagan Bhujbal said on Monday that he would decide on his next move after talking to his constituents and members of a Phule organisation of which he is the president. "Yes. I am upset... I may or may not have been given a ministerial post but Chhagan Bhujbal is not finished," Bhujbal said, when media persons button-holed him for comment on his exclusion from the State Cabinet. Talking to media persons on the first day of the Winter Session of the State Legislature in Nagpur, Bhujbal said, "I will take a call on my future course of action after consulting the people in the constituency and also the members of the Samata Parishad." Seventy-seven-year-old Bhujbal, who is an influential leader from OBC's Mali community, is the founder-president of the Akhil Bharatiya Mahatma Phule Samata Parishad.

## Wanted to keep fighting but Russians evacuated him, says Assad

AP ■ DAMASCUS

Ousted Syrian leader Bashar Assad says he had no plans to leave the country after the fall of Damascus a week ago but the Russian military evacuated him after their base in western Syria came under attack. The comments are the first by Assad since he was overthrown by insurgent groups. Assad said in a statement on his Facebook page that he left Damascus on the morning of December 8, hours after insurgents stormed the capital. He said he left in coordination with Russian allies to the Russian base in the coastal province of Latakia, where he planned to keep fighting. Assad said that after the Russian base came under attack by drones, the Russians decided to move him on the night of Dec 8 to Russia. "I did not leave the country as part of a plan as it was reported earlier," Assad said. "At no point during these events did I consider stepping down or seeking refuge nor was such proposal made by any individual or party," Assad said in the English text of his statement. "The only course of action was to continue fighting against the terrorist onslaught."

## V FOR VICTORY



Union Defence Minister Rajnath Singh pays homage at the National War Memorial on the occasion of Vijay Diwas, marking India's victory in the 1971 Bangladesh liberation war. Chief of Defence Staff (CDS) Gen Anil Chauhan, Chief of Army Staff Gen. Manoj Pande, Navy Chief Admiral Dinesh K Tripathi and IAF Chief Air Chief Marshal AP Singh are also seen

## Priyanka's Palestine bag, sets cat among pigeons

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

In a show of support for the people of Palestine, Congress Member of Parliament (MP) Priyanka Gandhi Vadra, on Monday, carried a bag to Parliament that had "Palestine" emblazoned on it. The Congress general secretary has been raising her voice against Israel's actions in Gaza and expressing solidarity with Palestinians. Priyanka was seen carrying a



handbag emblazoned with the word "Palestine" and Palestinian emblems, including a watermelon, seen as a symbol of Palestinian solidarity. "It is the moral responsibility of every right-thinking individual, including all those Israeli citizens who do not believe in hatred and violence, and every government in the world to condemn the Israeli government's genocidal actions and force them to stop," she had said in a post on X.

## Why should the letter not be made public? BJP asks Sonia

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

The Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) on Monday asked former Congress president Sonia Gandhi to return the correspondences of first Prime Minister Jawaharlal Nehru with a host of personalities, to the Prime Ministers' Museum and Library, saying the historical documents belonged to the country and were not anyone's personal property. Lok Sabha Member of Parliament (MP) and BJP spokesperson Sambit Patra cited reports of the PMML's deliberations on the issue to note that Nehru's correspondences with Edwina Mountbatten, wife of the last British Viceroy to India, and leaders Jayaprakash Narayan and Gajjivan Ram lay with the erstwhile Nehru Museum and Library Society, which returned them to Sonia Gandhi in 2008. Patra also raised the issue earlier in the day in the Lok Sabha during Question Hour when Union Culture Minister Gejendra Singh Shekhawat was replying to questions related to his ministry.

## Meet Manoj Gahlyan, the matrimonial conman

SAUMYA SHUKLA ■ NEW DELHI

Thirty-five-year old Manoj Gahlyan, seemed like a perfect match listed on matrimonial apps including Shaadi.com and Jeevansathi.com. He presented himself as a charming, well-paid Delhi Metro Rail Corporation (DMRC) employee. But the real man behind the online listing was a former security guard, who had turned matchmaking into a nightmare for over 50 women, whom he had duped for over seven years. According to police sources, the man posed as a General Manager of DMRC and claimed to earn Rs 15 to 20 lakhs. Gahlyan, a native of Jorashi Khalsa village in Haryana's Panipat district, has been using this claim to dupe women since 2017. However, he was exposed when a 35-year-old woman, who works in a nationalised bank, on November 23, stated in her police complaint that she had created a marriage profile on Jeevansathi, through which she had met Gahlyan online. "After they connected through the app, he lured her to talking and meeting to get to know her better for marriage, and then obtained her bank account number and credit card details, and made unauthorised transactions without her knowledge," Deputy Commissioner of



Representative photo

Police (West) Vichitra Veer said. The DCP added that after receiving the information through the complaint, the police team swung into action and found, through sources and information openly available on the internet, that the person named Manoj Gahlyan had been duping innocent and gullible women of their money. The police suspect that about hundreds of women have been lured by him in a similar manner and have also contacted three to four victims. "However, due to shame or guilt, they are not coming and giving us the information and are unlikely to report. Investigation regarding the number of victims and the probable amount that he might have defrauded, is underway," the DCP said, adding that they will now trace his bank accounts to ascertain the exact amount of money he has

cheated from the women. He was arrested after a raid in Northeast Delhi's Usmanpur area and five debit cards and a mobile phone bought using the complainant's card were recovered from him. However, this is not the first case of the manner reported this year in the National Capital. The Delhi Crime Branch arrested a 38-year-old man, identified as Mukeem Ayyub Khan, in September for allegedly duping over 50 women across several States. He would pose as a government official on various matrimonial sites to deceive high-profile professional women. Khan told police that he allegedly created multiple fake identities on popular matrimonial sites targeting unmarried, widowed, or divorced Muslim women. He would tell them that he is a government servant, struggling to raise his daughter after the death of his wife.

# Land grabbers must be dealt with iron hand: SC

STAFF REPORTER ■ NEW DELHI

The Supreme Court on Monday said, as it promised to "go deep to find the truth" on how a century-old building housing a public library at Karol Bagh was demolished. A Bench of Justices Surya Kant and Ujjal Bhuyan was irked after being informed it was not the Municipal Corporation of Delhi (MCD) that demolished the building in 2018, but an official who had acted on an oral order. The SC was further displeased when it found no one from the Delhi Library Board was present to contest the case and no counsel was authorised to appear in the matter.

"Land grabbers must be dealt with iron hand," the Bench told senior advocate S Muralidhar, appearing for private firm Dimple Enterprise, which is the owner of the property and reportedly wanted to construct a commercial complex in place where once the building stood. Justice Surya Kant told Muralidhar, "We will go deep to find the truth. We will pass orders even without the petitioner (Delhi Library Board) contesting the case." The Bench added, "You (private firm M/s Dimple Enterprise) must have colluded with the MCD and library officials. You must have bribed them." The first Delhi Public Library was started by then Prime

Minister Jawaharlal Nehru near the old Delhi railway station in 1951. The Delhi Public Library, an autonomous body, is funded by the Ministry of Culture and has around 45 branches and mobile libraries in the National Capital. The Bench issued a show cause to the officials of Delhi Library Board why they were not appearing in the matter. It asked the MCD to file a better affidavit giving complete details of the property; who resided there and the current owner after terminating the affidavit filed by the civic body as "misleading". The Bench said it would enlarge the scope of its investigation to include the possibility of collusion of



library board officials with the private firm. Muralidhar said the dilapidated building, housing the public library, was a 100-year-old structure demolished by the MCD. He said there

was no material on record to suggest collusion of any kind between the officials of library or MCD officials with the firm and there was no mention of any bribe being paid.

Justice Surya Kant read out the affidavit filed by the MCD and said the civic body had accepted it had no record of any demolition of the building whereas an official executive engineer acted on oral orders. "Mr Muralidhar, you know very well how these things work. It is surprising that you are defending the land mafias. Do you think that the MCD official acted on his own? He must have acted on the oral direction of the MCD commissioner. Within days of the order of the high court, the building was demolished without giving them space to approach the high courts for relief," Justice Surya Kant said. The judge went on to add, "Thankfully, on the first

hearing of the matter, the Bench comprising Justice (ret'd) M B Lokur ordered for status quo on the property." Denying any collusion, Muralidhar said the firm had nothing to do with the demolition exercise. The Bench posted the matter on January 8, 2025. On November 25, the SC came down heavily on the MCD for demolishing the building that housed a public library, without giving a chance to the affected party to seek relief, and said "there is no divine power which can wake you up". It had questioned how the civic body demolished the building that housed the library since 1954, without waiting for the parties to approach the SC.

The SC had noted that the Delhi High Court passed an order on September 10, 2018, in the matter and without even giving a breathing time to the tenants and other occupants of the building to approach the SC, the MCD demolished the building at around 8.30 am on September 18, 2018. The SC had further sought to know the "hidden circumstances" for which the MCD denied the party the right to approach it. The SC said its interim order of September 18, 2018, would continue till further orders. On September 18, 2018, the SC ordered that no portion of the property at Karol Bagh would be demolished.

# Steel City swings into festive cheer with Christmas buzz

PNS : JAMSHEDPUR

As the calendar edges closer to Christmas, Jamshedpur has embraced the festive season with open arms. The Steel City is abuzz with celebrations, as streets, markets, and establishments come alive with vibrant decorations, joyous activities, and a palpable spirit of camaraderie.

The Christmas spirit is being ushered in by Church choirs across the city, organizing carol singing events to spread the message of peace and goodwill. Cold December nights are warming up as residents prepare to mark the birth of Lord Christ with enthusiasm and devotion.

Retailers and market spaces are decked out in festive flair, with shops displaying Christmas decorations, colorful stockings, and glittering ornaments. Markets



are teeming with customers, creating a lively atmosphere as people shop for Christmas trees, bells, gift boxes, and Santa figurines to adorn their homes. The demand for

Christmas trees and decorative items has surged, making it one of the busiest seasons for vendors. Bakery shops across the city are working tirelessly to meet the over-

whelming demand for Christmas cakes and pastries. From traditional plum cakes to custom orders, bakers are racing against time to ensure every household has a

sweet treat to celebrate the festivities. The unmistakable aroma of freshly baked goodies fills the air, drawing customers to these bustling establishments.

Hotels and restaurants in Jamshedpur are also gearing up for the dual celebration of Christmas and New Year. Many have installed large, beautifully decorated Christmas trees in their lobbies, with some even featuring lively Santa Claus mascots to entertain guests. Special menus featuring mouth-watering delicacies are being prepared to delight visitors, and the hospitality sector is leaving no stone unturned to create a festive ambiance. Several hotels have gone a step further, planning grand New Year's Eve parties with renowned DJs and dance troupes from Mumbai to ensure unforgettable celebrations. With the promise of delicious food,

vibrant music, and energetic performances, these events are expected to draw large crowds, adding to the city's festive buzz.

The community spirit in Jamshedpur is also evident, as churches and social groups come together to spread joy among the underprivileged. From distributing warm clothes to sharing festive meals, the city's residents are embodying the true essence of the season—giving and sharing.

"As the Steel City continues to dip in the festive spirit, the coming days promise a blend of tradition, celebration, and togetherness. Whether it's the dazzling decorations, the delectable treats, or the joyous gatherings, Jamshedpur is all set to bid farewell to 2024 on a high note, with hopes and prayers for a brighter 2025," said an official of Catholic Diocese of Jamshedpur.

# Har Har Mahadev Seva Sangh embarks on blanket distribution drive



PNS : JAMSHEDPUR

Staying true to its 24-year-old tradition of serving the underprivileged, the Har Har Mahadev Seva Sangh commenced its annual blanket distribution drive on Sunday. The initiative, blessed by the sadhus (spiritual leaders), was inaugurated at the organization's office with great devotion and commitment to service. Amarpreet Singh Kale, the founder of the Har Har Mahadev Seva Sangh, expressed gratitude for the blessings of Lord Mahadev and the unwavering support of volunteers. Speaking at the event, he said, "With Mahadev's grace and the collective efforts of our team, this service project is successfully conducted every year. Our volunteers identify needy individuals across various areas to ensure the blankets reach those who need them the most. This initiative aims to bring positive change by extending support to all sections of society."

Highlighting the philosophy behind the drive, Kale remarked, "Every individual in need embodies divinity.

Serving them is the greatest pilgrimage. This work not only gives us peace but also fulfills our responsibility towards society." He expressed heartfelt thanks to all the supporters and members whose contributions and dedication make this noble endeavor possible.

The event witnessed active participation from the Sangh's core members, including Jitendra Chawla, Raju Marwah, P.N. Pandey, Raghavendra Sharma, Akhilesh Pandey, Vishwanath Rao, Jugun Pandey, Bibhash Mazumdar, Prince Singh, Ranjit Kumar, Kamlesh Pathak, and many others. Together, they pledged to continue this sacred mission of service. The blanket distribution initiative is not only a source of relief for the needy during the harsh winter months but also a powerful message of unity and compassion. By reaching out to the less fortunate, the Har Har Mahadev Seva Sangh inspires society to embrace the values of empathy and selflessness, strengthening the bonds within the community.

# First Tejas Cup U-13 Boys' Football tournament kicks off

PANKAJ : DHANBAD

Tata Steel Foundation's Jharia Division kicked off the first Tejas Cup Under-13 Boys Football Tournament at Sijua Stadium today. The event drew esteemed dignitaries and participants from Odisha, West Bengal, and Jharkhand.

The tournament was inaugurated by the chief guest, Vikash Kumar, Chief (Sijua Group), Jharia Division, Tata Steel, joined by Rajesh Kumar, Unit Lead, Tata Steel Foundation. Vikas Kumar expressed his pride in hosting the tournament, praising the organisers and emphasising the importance of sports in youth development. He highlighted the vital role of sportsmanship in fostering discipline, teamwork, and perseverance.

The tournament features six teams from various Tata Steel units (Jamadoba, Noamundi, Joda, Jamshedpur, and Bishnupur), providing a platform for young footballers to showcase their talent. The palpable excitement promises a thrilling competition for spectators.

Also present on the occasion were Bipin Singh Chaudhary (Manager, Community Development, TSF), Sayan Bose (Assistant Manager, Sports, TSF), Samir Nath (Manager, Infrastructure, TSF), and Central Coordination Committee members Neelkanth Narayan Mahato and Manu Mahato.

# NIT JAMSHEDPUR GETS SCIENTIFIC COMPUTING LAB

PNS : JAMSHEDPUR

The Scientific Computing Lab, funded by the Department of Science and Technology (DST) under the FIST scheme, was inaugurated today at the National Institute of Technology (NIT) Jamshedpur.

The inaugural ceremony was attended by esteemed guests, including the Director of NIT Jamshedpur, Prof. Gautam Sutradhar, and other dignitaries. The event was also graced by the presence of Prof. R. V. Sharma, Deputy Director of NIT Jamshedpur, Prof. R V Sharma, Deputy Director of NIT Jamshedpur, Prof. Prabha Chand, Dean Faculty welfare and Dr. Raj Nandkeolyar, Head of the Department of Mathematics.

In his welcome address, Dr. Raj Nandkeolyar emphasized the importance of scientific computing in today's world and expressed his gratitude to the



DST for funding the project. Prof Goutam Sutradhar congratulated the Mathematics Department for get-

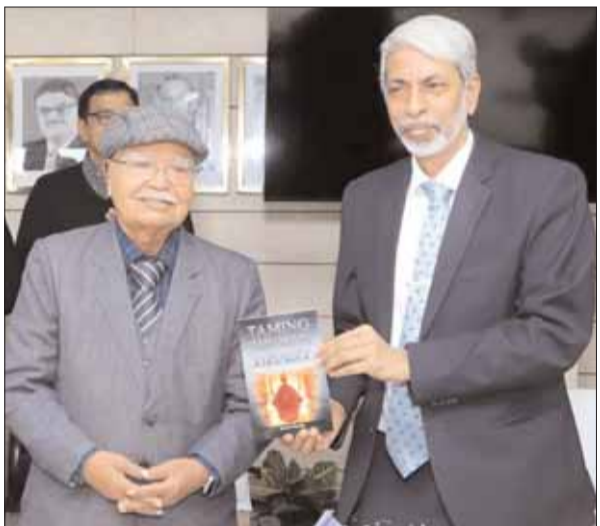
ting funds for developing such a lab and emphasized the importance scientific computing

The ceremony also included a vote of thanks, delivered by Dr Rajat Tripathi, a faculty member of the Department of Mathematics. In his speech, Dr Tripathi thanked the DST for providing funds, guests, faculty members, and students for making the event a success.

The Scientific Computing Lab is expected to provide a platform for students and researchers to work on cutting-edge projects in scientific computing. The lab is equipped with state-of-the-art infrastructure and software, and will offer courses and training programs in scientific computing.

The inauguration of the Scientific Computing Lab marks a significant milestone in the growth and development of NIT Jamshedpur, and is expected to have a positive impact on the academic and research community in the region.

# SAIL Chairman Amarendu Prakash launches 'Taming The Iron Beast'



PNS : BOKARO

'Taming The Iron Beast', a book authored by Suresh Pandey, former Managing Director of Bokaro Steel Plant-SAIL, was launched at Steel Authority of India Limited's (SAIL) Corporate Office in Lodi Road. The event was graced by Amarendu Prakash, Chairman of SAIL, along with senior officials, industry experts, and members of the SAIL community.

The book provides a compelling insight into the intricate world of steel production, shedding light on the complex technical and managerial challenges encountered in operating large-scale steel plants. With rich professional experiences, Suresh Pandey shares an in-

depth exploration of the dynamic and demanding processes of the industry.

'Taming The Iron Beast' is not just a technical narration but also a reflection on leadership, innovation, and problem-solving, offering readers a unique perspective on managing heavy industrial operations. It aims to serve as an invaluable resource for professionals, engineers, management leaders, and anyone interested in understanding the multifaceted workings of the steel industry.

The launch event highlighted the book's significance in contributing to industry knowledge, drawing praise from attendees for its potential to inspire future generations of professionals and leaders.

# DC holds Consultative Committee meeting

VINOD PRASAD : LOHARDAGA

The meeting of the District Level Consultative Committee (DLCC) was held under the chairmanship of Deputy Commissioner Dr. Waghmare Prasad Krishna in the Collectorate Hall on Monday. The performance of all the banks of the district was discussed in detail in the meeting. During the review, the current work of all the banks was reviewed. The DC took information from the representatives of all the banks about the status of applications related to banking loans.

He directed that positive efforts should be made to approve the applications received in bank branches and the work of loan payment should be done. Check the applications properly and forward them. In the meeting, it was asked to improve fisheries, dairy and other loans. To increase the number of Kisan Credit Cards, instructions were given to open a new sector so that more and more farmers can get Kisan Credit Card.

The online statement of the Prime Minister's Employment Generation Program (PMEGP) for the

financial year 2024-25 was also reviewed in detail by the Deputy Commissioner. In this, it was told by the Industries Department that the target of the district, the number of beneficiaries sanctioned online loan by the bank and the number of beneficiaries paid were informed. The Deputy Commissioner gave instructions to provide loans to the youth from time to time. The meeting was mainly attended by Deputy Development Commissioner Dilip Pratap Singh Shekhawat, representatives of RBI, leading bank managers and representatives of various banks.



# 'AYUSHMAN CARD HOLDERS SHOULD BE TREATED IN ALL HOSPITALS'

PNS : DHANBAD

District 20-point Vice President cum All India Congress Committee member Brajendra Prasad Singh has told the Deputy Commissioner of Dhanbad that such complaints are being received in Dhanbad district as well as in the whole of Jharkhand that in many hospitals, Ayushman card holders are asked for money after getting admitted to the hospital and there have also been reports of mistreatment of patients.

He has said that the government should take strict action on this because the hospitals are also paid money by the government. In such a situation, the operators of private hospitals should ensure that Ayushman card holders or senior citizens above 70 years of age are treated properly in every hospital and no kind of reluctance should be shown by the operators. Mr. Singh has requested Dhanbad Deputy Commissioner Madhavi Mishra to identify such hospitals and take action against them and remove them from that purview.

# DPS Ranchi students excel in RMO 2024



PNS : RANCHI

DPS Ranchi students shined in the Regional Mathematical Olympiad (RMO) 2024. Five students from the school have successfully qualified for the prestigious event, showcasing their exceptional mathematical skills and dedication. The qualifiers are Naman Modi (Class XII), Rudransh Ranjan (Class IX), Payal (Class XI), Parth Sharan (Class XI) and Aditya Pratap (Class XI). These students have now earned the opportunity to compete in the Indian National Mathematical Olympiad (INMO) 2024, a gateway to representing India at international platforms. Additionally, nine stu-

dents from the school achieved the RMO cut-off marks, reflecting the institution's consistent efforts in nurturing talent. The students who reached the cut-off are Naman Modi, Rudransh Ranjan, Payal, Parth Sharan, Aditya Pratap, Tavish Vats, Ojas Kumar, Shubham Jha and Abhinav Dubey. Expressing his pride and joy, Principal Dr. R.K. Jha congratulated the achievers. He said, "This remarkable achievement is a testament to the hard work and determination of our students and the unwavering support of their mentors. I am confident that they will continue to excel in the upcoming INMO and bring laurels to the school."

# School Education and Literacy Dept readies for annual action plan & budget for holistic education

PNS : RANCHI

The Department of School Education and Literacy has geared up for the preparation of the upcoming annual work plan and budget of holistic education. A State level team was formed on Monday for identification of out of school, drop out children and monitoring of child register in schools.

Apart from the officials of the School Education and Literacy Department, this team also includes representatives of 13 voluntary organizations. All the officials and representatives were given

special training in a one-day meeting on December 16.

The team will monitor the schools of all the districts of the State in two phases. The first phase of monitoring will be done on December 19 and December 20, 2024. Under this, a team of two to four members will visit different districts and find out the ground reality of child registration, out of school and drop out children. Preparations are underway to take departmental action against schools and officials who are negligent in child registration work.

The issues that emerge in the monitoring of the team



will be placed in the meeting to be held on January 3, 2025 under the chairmanship of the State Education Project Director, after which action will be taken against the negligent officials. In this regard, State Program Manager Binita Turkey said that the Child Register Survey is an opportunity, during which we can get accurate information about out of school and drop out children. The reasons for drop out will also be ascertained and coordination with other departments is also established to ensure that drop out children and their parents benefit from govern-

ment schemes. As per the provisions laid down under the Right to Education, special training is given to such children who have dropped out or are out of school. This is an important effort of the School Education and Literacy Department to connect these children with the mainstream.

All district and block level officials have been instructed to quickly execute the updated works of child register, drop out, out of school and the information will also have to be uploaded on the UDISE portal. Guidelines and program calendar related to this have been sent to the districts

on November 19, 2024. The work of child registration survey is scheduled between December 4, 2024 and January 4, 2024 and for this District Education Officers have been made nodal officers. In the child registration survey, cooperation of government schools as well as non-government aided minority schools will be taken. Teachers of these schools have been tagged with the tolas and have been instructed to complete this work soon. Teachers of non-government aided minority schools will work closely with government schools of the

area and block level officials will be responsible for its monitoring. It is mandatory for the members of Mata Samiti and Saraswati Vahini to cooperate in the work of child registration. The State level team will also check whether AAPAR ID (Automated Permanent Academic Account Registry) of children is being created by the schools or not, how many children's APAAR ID has been created and also if the Aadhar Card is verified for APAAR ID or not. Schools that are negligent in making APAAR ID will be identified and action will be taken against them.

# Agriculture Minister conducts surprise inspection of fisheries facilities

PNS : RANCHI

Now the scope of settlement of government pond in Jharkhand will be limited to the Panchayat level only. Now the people of the same Panchayat will get a chance to bid in the government pond under the Panchayat and then do fish farming. Now people of other districts will not be able to participate in the settlement of government pond in any Panchayat. Very soon a rule will be made regarding this. The state's Agriculture, Animal Husbandry and Cooperative Minister Shilpi Neha Tirkey has given these guidelines to the departmental officers during the surprise inspection.

Tirkey suddenly went out for a surprise inspection in Ranchi on Monday evening. During this, she made a surprise inspection of the fisheries directorate centre, fish park in Doranda and the fisheries research centre in Dhurva. She was very angry



Agriculture, Animal Husbandry and Cooperative Minister Shilpi Neha Tirkey went out for a surprise inspection at the fisheries directorate centre, fish park in Doranda and the fisheries research centre in Dhurva in Ranchi on Monday. PNS



on seeing the mismanagement during this time. Seeing the dirt spread in the fish park, use of polythene, and the problems faced by the visitors, Tirkey has directed to improve it within 10 days.

During the surprise inspection, the Minister also

checked the attendance register. The workers who remain absent during working hours have also been directed to improve their work culture. The Minister has sought district-wise data of government ponds across the state from the departmental officers. There are about 12 thousand 580 government ponds in the state. Out of which about 1 thousand government ponds are in Ranchi. Tirkey has directed the departmental officers to now make such a rule in which the government pond

falling under the Panchayat can be given to the cooperative society of the same Panchayat. No other district should get the opportunity to settle the pond. By doing so, employment can be provided to local people by linking them with fish farming. The

Minister has also instructed to make amendments in the requirement of 300 people for a cooperative society. The minister has asked to give benefits to the people of the village by forming small cooperative societies. During the surprise inspection, it was

learnt that the target of releasing 2500 lakh fish seeds was set this year. Against this target, only 1646 lakh seeds could be distributed. The least amount of 60 lakh seeds has been distributed in Lohardaga. Tirkey has asked to increase it and

submit a report by tomorrow. There is also a preparation to link the women self-help groups associated with JSLPS in fish farming. Instructions have been given to link the women self-help groups of Ranchi and Hazaribagh districts with fish farming first. Tirkey also visited the training center running in the Fisheries Research Center located in Dhurva. The minister took various kinds of information from the women taking training on fish farming. During the information, it was learned that the women who returned after taking training from the training center told other women of the village how employment opportunities can be obtained from fish farming. In the Fisheries Research Center, information on fish farming is given to farmers from all over the state. She also advised the farmers participating in the training to join fish farming, calling it a means of better employment.

## Accused in molestation case Firoz Ali sent to jail

PNS : RANCHI

Firoz Ali, the accused of molesting girl students of Kanya Pathshala located in Kotwali police station area, was sent to jail on Monday.

Earlier on Sunday evening, on the instructions of SSP Chandan Sinha, a police team led by Kotwali DSP Prakash Soy took action and arrested Firoz Ali from Lower Bazaar area.

Firoz Ali is a resident of lane number eight of Nala Road in Hindipiri. Police had announced a reward for the person giving information about Firoz Ali. But Firoz surrendered himself.

CM Hemant Soren had taken cognizance of this molestation case. The CM had ordered Ranchi Police to take strict action against the accused and inform them. On Monday, City SP Rajkumar

Mehta gave this information in a press conference.

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

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.



Chief Minister Hemant Soren along with his wife and MLA Kalpana Murmu Soren pray at Mahakal Shiva Temple in Ujjain on Monday. PNS

## MERATV Film Festival to kick off from Dec 20 in City

PNS : RANCHI

In order to give the local artists of Jharkhand who have been involved in creating video albums, short films and documentaries for the past several years, the MERATV Film Festival 2024 is being organised from December 20 to December 22 at Audrey House in the State capital.

Organised under the banner of Jharkhand's first OTT platform MERATV, the 3-day film festival will showcase feature films, short films, documentaries and mobile films from across the country. As many as 40 select films will also be screened during the festival. The festival is being organised with an aim to provide a platform for

Jharkhand's artists and filmmakers to not only showcase their talent but also to gain insights in diverse topics, acquire technical expertise and share experiences.

"The three-day film festival will not only include film screenings but also feature panel discussions, camera displays and an art exhibition of Jharkhand's traditional musical instruments. It will conclude with an award ceremony where cash prizes of up to Rs 5 lakh will be distributed," said the organizer Kumar Vivek.

Eminent personalities from the film industry including Ritam Srivastava, Prabal Mahato, Akashaditya Lama and Vishal Verma, to name a few will also be participating in the event. Films from vari-

ous parts of the country like Mumbai, Kolkata, Bihar and Jharkhand have been received while entries for special screenings include Silver Gandhi-winner at SFRA Cannes and Yes Sir-winner at the Dadasaheb Phalke Film Festival.

"It is often observed that many challenges arise in releasing films after they are made. MERATV aims to resolve these issues and give a new direction to the Jharkhand Film industry. The MERATV Film Festival 2024 calls upon all artists of Jharkhand to actively participate in this event and make it a grand success. In the coming years this festival is poised to become a milestone for the film industry here," added the organizer.

## Police resort to lathicharge on protesting students

PNS : RANCHI

Students protesting against the CGL examination, conducted by Jharkhand Staff Selection Commission (JSSC), faced the administration's batons here on Monday. During this, the police used force on the agitating students and drove them away.

JLKM leader Devendranath Mahato has been detained by the police for protesting against the CGL examination conducted by Jharkhand Staff Selection Commission (JSSC). Police took him into custody from Sadabahar Chowk.

Document verification has started at the commission office in Namkum for Jharkhand CGL. But meanwhile some candidates started agitation, after which the police lathicharged and drove away the students. During this, the agitating students were seen hiding in the surrounding colonies.

JSSC had organized the Joint Graduate Level Examination on September 21 and September 22 of 2024. After the examination, the students were demanding cancellation of the examination alleging paper leak.

Meanwhile, the commission released the list of successful students, after which the students became furious and started protesting in many cities. The commission had fixed the date of document verification from December 16 to 20. After which the students had announced to go to the commission office and protest.

On Monday, document verification of 450 candidates will be done. For which the commission and the administration have made full preparations. Barricading and tight security arrangements have



Police lathicharge on protesters outside JSSC office Namkum in Ranchi on Monday. PNS

been made on all the routes leading to the JSSC office. The office premises have also been converted into a cantonment. Vajra vehicles, water cannons and 2500 soldiers have been deployed on the spot. At the same time, the protesting students clearly say that the police are not happy with even peaceful protests. They said that in a democracy everyone has the

right to speak and express their views, but the government is adopting a brutal attitude with all of us. Also, warning the government and the administration, they said that if the police do not release our leader Devendra Mahato soon, then the whole of Jharkhand will burn, there will be a strong movement and the government will be responsible for this.

## BAU students shine again, bag 2nd prize in start-up competition



PNS : RANCHI

In a proud moment for Birsa Agricultural University (BAU), a team of 4 students from the College of Forestry won 2nd prize at a start-up competition 'PRARAMBH' in National Food and Agri-business Conclave 'SAMBHRAMA 5.0' organised by Imperial School of Agri-business, NOIDA, one of the rapid growing B-schools in India.

After two rounds of screening, 13 teams out of 84 participated in final round held on 13th December. Biju Roy, Sumit Kumar, Laxmi Kumari and Kalpana Kumari representing team BIRSAIANS fostered innovation and entrepreneurship with their unique idea and presentation. The idea was hugely appreciated by one of the



jury members, Rahul Lakhmani, CEO and founder, Skiffy Solutions Pvt. Ltd. The team has been awarded with a certificate of excellence and prize money of Rs 15,000.

Students from different institutions from across the country including GBUAT, Pantnagar, Uttarakhnad; NDRI, Karnal; IARI, New Delhi and Symbiosis participated in the event. The stu-

dents paved their entrepreneurial journey under the mentorship of Dr. A.K. Chakraborty of College of Forestry. The win has opened up new avenues for the students to shine and to bring laurels to the University.

BAU Vice Chancellor Dr SC Dubey, Dean Forestry Dr MS Malik and DSW Dr BK Agrawal have congratulated the achievers.

## Meteorological Dept plays crucial role in nation's progress: Guv

PNS : RANCHI

Governor Santosh Kumar Gangwar congratulated and wished all the scientists, officers and personnel for their continuous dedication and services at the 150th year celebration of the Indian Meteorological Department (IMD) held at Ranchi Smart City Auditorium today. Appreciating their dedication and technological advancement, he said that the Indian Meteorological Department has not only reduced the impact of disasters with its accurate predictions and technical capabilities, but has also made significant contributions in various sectors such as agriculture, disaster management, climate change and national security.

The Governor said that the efforts of the Meteorological Department and Meteorological Center, Ranchi have played an important role in reducing the effects of severe natural disasters such as lightning, floods, heavy rainfall and cold wave in the state. He said that the confidence of the public towards the Meteorological Center has increased, as it has strengthened disaster management by



Governor Santosh Kumar Gangwar addresses a gathering during the 150th year celebration of the Indian Meteorological Department (IMD) at Ranchi Smart City Auditorium in Ranchi on Monday. PNS

providing accurate weather forecasts and information up to the Panchayat level. Timely weather warnings were given in the state, which helped local communities and disaster management teams to get effective assistance. Referring to the agricultural economy of Jharkhand, the Governor said that accurate weather information is of utmost importance for the agriculture sector. He said that weather forecast helps farmers in taking important decisions like crop selection, irrigation management and pest control. The Governor also informed that Jharkhand has received the 'Krishi Karman Award', which reflects the agricultural

excellence of the state and the credit for this goes to the continuous efforts of the farmers of the state.

The Governor also mentioned the remarkable progress made in the country in the field of climate change and disaster management under the leadership of Prime Minister Narendra Modi. He said that initiatives like 'Make in India' and 'Atmanirbhar Bharat' have strengthened the technical capabilities, which are directly benefiting the meteorology and disaster management sectors. He also said that through these efforts, timely weather information can be obtained and society can be protected from

the effects of climate change. The Governor appreciated the continuous dedication and efforts of the scientists, officers and personnel of the Meteorological Center, Ranchi, who are continuously engaged in broadcasting weather forecasts. This ensures that timely information and warnings reach the concerned stakeholders, so that the impact of disasters can be reduced. The Governor appealed to all stakeholders in the sector to maintain cooperation and coordination, so that the impact of disasters can be reduced and the society can be better prepared for disaster management.

## Pension Adalat organized in RRD

A Pension Adalat was organized by Ranchi Railway Division under the chairmanship of ADRM Hemraj Meena here on Monday. During the meeting, Meena said, "If you face any problem related to pension after retirement, then you can come to the Pension Adalat with it."

The Railway Administration is always trying to solve your problems." On this occasion, ADPO Alok Kumar Rai welcomed everyone. In the Pension Adalat, all types of matters related to the pension of retired employees were discussed and necessary steps were assured to be taken for their solution. On this occasion, ADFM Sunil Kumar Das from the Division and retired pensioners Jagjit Singh Bahli, Chanchal Singh and others were present.



# PM Modi holds talks with Sri Lankan President

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

India and Sri Lanka on Monday here adopted a futuristic vision to expand their partnership, resolved to soon conclude a defence cooperation pact and decided to ramp up energy ties by establishing electricity grid connectivity and multi-product petroleum pipelines. The decisions were taken during wide-ranging talks between Prime Minister Narendra Modi and Sri Lankan President Anura Kumara Dissanayaka. Modi said both sides decided to emphasise investment-led growth and connectivity for the India-Sri Lanka economic partnership, and it was decided that physical, digital and energy connectivity will be key pillars of the cooperation. Work will be done to establish electricity grid connectivity and multi-product petroleum pipelines, Modi said, adding India will supply liquefied natural gas to the island nation's power plants. The prime minister also announced that a ferry service will be started between



Rameshwaram and Talaimanar to boost connectivity between the two nations.

"We both agree that our security interests are interconnected. We have decided to soon finalise the defence cooperation agreement. There has also been an agreement for cooperation on hydrography," Modi said. The vexed fishermen issue also figured in the talks. "We also discussed issues related to the livelihood of fishermen. We agree that we must proceed with a humanitarian approach

to this matter," Modi said. Referring to the Tamil issue, the Prime Minister said India hopes that the Sri Lankan government will fulfil the aspirations of the community. The prime minister also noted that India has so far provided Lines of Credit and grant assistance worth USD 5 billion to Sri Lanka. "We have cooperation in all 25 districts of Sri Lanka and selection of our projects is always based on priorities of our partner countries," he said.

# Why Govt not acting against SEBI chief, asks Congress

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

The Congress on Monday levelled conflict of interest allegations against the SEBI chairperson Madhabi Buch and claimed that Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman's "failure" to act decisively on it has not only tarnished the credibility of the government but also jeopardised the financial governance framework. Attacking the government over the Adani issue during the discussion on the supplementary demands for grants in Lok Sabha, Congress MP KC Venugopal said a joint parliamentary committee must probe the entire matter. He alleged it is a government "by Adani, of Adani, for Adani".

Venugopal said between 2017-2024, Buch allegedly received over Rs 16.4 crore from ICICI bank while serving as a Securities and Exchange Board of India (SEBI) official regulating that bank. "This was five times her salary from SEBI, presenting a blatant conflict of interest," he said. She received rental income from entities linked to a firm under SEBI investigation, said Venugopal, who also heads the Public Accounts Committee (PAC).



"What does it mean sir, SEBI is investigating the company and the chairperson is renting out property to entity linked to that company," he said. Venugopal also alleged that the SEBI chairperson traded in securities worth of Rs 36.9 crore while holding access to unpublished price-sensitive information which he said was a direct violation of SEBI code of ethics. She failed to disclose assets in Singapore and the US between 2017-21 despite being obligated to do

so, Venugopal said. Despite these allegations, the finance minister neither initiated an independent inquiry nor has taken any disciplinary action, Venugopal said. "Inaction undermines the government's claim of transparency and commitment to investor confidence," he said. Posing questions to the Finance Minister, Venugopal asked why has the Finance Ministry not initiated any disciplinary and legal proceedings against the SEBI

chairperson despite clear evidence of conflicts of interest that undermines the integrity of the regulatory body. "Doesn't the finance minister take note, acknowledge and take responsibility for the damage to investor confidence, both domestic and foreign, due to the lack of timely action against SEBI chairperson?" he said. Can the Finance Minister clarify whether the government is willing to accept responsibility for the uncertainty and

volatility of stock market, stemming from the conflict of interest involving the SEBI chairperson, he said. What steps does the finance minister intend to take to ensure transparency and accountability in SEBI leadership especially in the light of the allegations, Venugopal asked. "Does the Ministry believe that retaining the chairperson under such circumstances send a wrong signal to India's commitment to corporate governance and regulatory transparency?" he said. "The Finance Minister's failure to act decisively not only tarnished the credibility of the government but also jeopardised the national financial governance framework. What is the complicit interest of the government and the SEBI chairperson?" Venugopal said. Why the Government is not taking any action, he asked. He alleged that the name of Adani group figured in stock manipulation and questioned how the SEBI chairperson can investigate that when "she is part of the scandal". He demanded that a JPC inquiry be initiated in the entire matter. In the country, 11 crore people are dependent on stock markets, most of them from middle income groups, he said.

# Debate on Glorious Journey of 75 Years of Constitution of India: Treasury, Opp benches trade charges

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

Rajya Sabha on Monday saw treasury and opposition benches trading charges during the discussion on the 'Glorious Journey of 75 Years of the Constitution of India.' Initiating the debate, Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman said the Congress party carried out major amendments to the Constitution to brazenly help the "family" and the "dynasty". Leader of Opposition in the Rajya Sabha and Congress President Mallikarjun Kharge accused Prime Minister Narendra Modi of misleading the country by "twisting facts" about Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru's letter on reservation to states and demanded an apology. The Upper House will debate on the issue on Monday and Tuesday. Sitharaman also termed the Congress party as "anti-women" for not passing the Women's Reservation Bill under pressure of its coalition partners. The senior BJP leader said the economic policies of the previous Congress governments for about 50 years did not strengthen the Indian economy. "Each time the Congress brazenly (amended Constitution)... Only to help the family, the dynasty... Kept

amending the Constitution," she said. Citing various amendments, including the 42nd Constitutional Amendment and one related to the Shah Bano case, the Finance Minister said none of the amendments passed the test of four criteria -- economic good, social intent, due process, and constitutional spirit. She said the amendments were not to strengthen democracy but to protect those in power and strengthen the family. In her speech, she said renowned lyricist Majrooh Sultanpuri and actor Balraj Sahni were both jailed in 1949. Congress' record of curtailing freedom of speech was not just confined to Sultanpuri and Sahni, she said and highlighted many more instances, including banning of a film called 'Kissa Kursi Ka' just because it questioned the then Prime Minister Indira Gandhi and her son. Sitharaman further said the spree of curtailing the freedom of expression and freedom of press had happened before 1949 and thereafter also during the Congress rule. The Minister said India's first Prime Minister Jawaharlal Nehru adopted the Soviet Model and was carried forward by Indira Gandhi, but

the socialist model did not benefit India. She said the economic policies followed by the Congress governments for 50 years did not strengthen the economy. Referring to the women reservation in Parliament and state assemblies, Sitharaman said a bill regarding it was passed in the Rajya Sabha in 2008, but the ruling Congress did not take it to the Lok Sabha, as its alliance partners were not in favour of the legislation. She said Congress is "anti-women" as it did not pass the Women's Reservation Bill to save "Kursi" (power). Rajiv Gandhi had 426 members in Lok Sabha and 159 members in the Rajya Sabha, they did not have the conviction to pass the Women's Reservation Bill at that time. Very clearly, they have always been anti-women. Shah Bano case is a very clear example, she said. The Congress Party, she said passed the Muslim Women Protection of Rights on Divorce Act, 1986 which denied Muslim women their right to alimony. On the other hand, the Modi government brought the 'Nari Shakti Vandan Adhiniyam' in the first session, which was held in the new building of the Parliament. On the contrary, she said her party, the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP), has always been



committed to women's reservation and increasing women participation in politics. "I myself am a beneficiary of this," the Finance Minister said. At the start of her speech, she paid homage to the 389 members of the Constituent Assembly, including 15 women, who took up the arduous challenge and prepared the Constitution for India in a very challenging environment. The Constitution of India "has stood the test of time," she said. "Today we are extremely proud of the way India's democracy is growing." Stating that India and its Constitution stands out in a separate league of its own, Sitharaman said post the second World War, over 50 countries had become independent

and they had their constitution written. While accusing Prime Minister Modi of misleading the country by "twisting facts" about Pandit Nehru, Kharge also charged the BJP leaders of indulging in 'bhakti' of Prime Minister Modi, asserting that it was leading the country towards dictatorship. The Congress President cited Nehru's speech in which he had said there was no elected government between 1947-1952 and the Congress had illegally amended the Constitution. Kharge said the first amendment was carried out by the Constituent Assembly members which included Syama Prasad Mookerjee and was undertaken to provide reservation to Scheduled Caste, Scheduled Tribes, fix problems related to education,

employment and abolish Zamindari system. "I want to inform the House that the Supreme Court had rejected Madras state's decision on reservation." He said the other aspect of this amendment was to stop communal propaganda and Sardar Patel in a letter on July three, 1950 had suggested to Nehru that constitutional amendment was the only remedy for this problem. "Therefore, Nehru wrote a letter to chief ministers. This has been mentioned in PM's speech after twisting facts to defame Nehru for which he should apologise to the nation. This is my demand. If you twist the facts before the nation and attempt to defame, then you should apologise in this House and other House and before people of this country," Kharge said. He said the prime minister lives in past, not in present and it would have been better had he listed present achievements that strengthened democracy. Kharge claimed erstwhile leaders of RSS were against the Constitution. "In 1949, the entire country knew that RSS leaders opposed the Constitution because it was not based on Manusmriti. RSS mouthpiece Organiser in the edition of November 30, 1949 had written about it," he said.

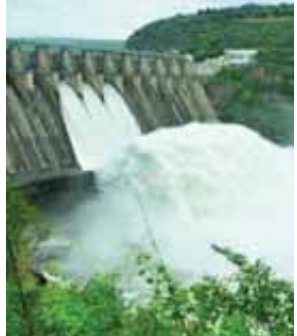
Kharge said it is clear from debates of the Constituent Assembly that erstwhile leaders of RSS were against the Constitution. Those who hated the flag, Ashok Chakra and the Constitution are today giving lessons to us on the Constitution." He said even when many powerful countries were not practising universal adult franchise, women and all sections of societies in India were given the right to vote during the Congress regime through the Constitution. He said that government leaders cut-paste information and present them as per their convenience to twist facts. "Those who did not fight for the country, how will they know the importance of freedom, Constitution?" Kharge asked. BJP has been giving 'jumlas' and befooling people of the country and questioned promises made by Modi to pay Rs 15 lakh, he said adding people are still waiting for the money as well as two crore jobs and doubling of farmers' income. Kharge said that BJP is against reservation and that is why the party is against caste census. He further said the Congress government will implement women reservation faster than BJP. He also raised the issue of

Manipur, which is suffering from ethnic violence for the last one-and-half years. He said the prime minister travels everywhere but has no time to visit the strife-torn state. Some other Opposition MPs accused the government of attacking the federal structure and undermining constitutional bodies while claiming that an Emergency-like situation exists in the country. Debashish Samantary, whose party Biju Janata Dal (BJD) is not a part of either the ruling National Democratic Alliance (NDA) or opposition's Indian National Developmental Inclusive Alliance (INDIA), alleged that Constitutional watchdogs have been converted into "pet-dogs". "What is the situation today, anyone can be sent to jail, chief ministers were put in jail, denied bail. There is definitely an Emergency in the country, I will say it openly," he said. Trinamool Congress Rajya Sabha MP Saket Gokhale alleged that justice is being denied to people under the NDA government and accused it of destroying the Constitution. He alleged that minorities are being subjected to "atrocities every day". DMK's Tiruchi Siva accused the Union government of undermining the federal structure of the country.

# 224 big dams in country over century old, Minister tells RS

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

India has 1,065 large dams that are between 50 and 100 years old while 224 are over a century old, the Union Jal Shakti Ministry said on Monday. There are a total of 6,138 constructed and 143 under-construction dams in the country. Responding to a question in the Rajya Sabha, Minister of State for Jal Shakti Raj Bhushan Choudhary said the government enacted the Dam Safety Act, 2021 to address the challenges posed by ageing dams and to prevent disasters arising from dam failures. He said dams, apart from serving irrigation and power generation purposes, play a significant role in mitigating floods. According to the National Register of Large Dams (NRLD-2023 edition), compiled jointly by the National Dam Safety Authority (NDSA) and CWC, there are 6,138 constructed and 143 under construction dams which aggregate to a total of 6,281 large dams. Of these numbers, only 224 dams are more than 100 years old and there are 1065 large dams which are 50 to 100 years old. Choudhary said the govern-



ment enacted the Dam Safety Act and is also implementing the Dam Rehabilitation and Improvement Project (DRIP) Phase II and III, aimed at rehabilitating 736 dams across 19 states and three central agencies. After China and America, India ranks third in the world in terms of the number of dams. In August, the Government had told Parliament that at least 47 dams—38 commissioned and 9 under construction—have been identified by the Central Electricity Authority as potentially affected by Glacial Lake Outburst Floods (GLOFs) from glacial lakes in India. GLOF studies have been completed for 31 of these projects, the Government said. A glacial lake outburst flood (GLOF) is a type of outburst flood caused by the failure of a dam containing a glacial lake.

# Delhi's groundwater resources heavily strained, says Jalshakti Minister

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

Delhi's groundwater resources are heavily strained, with the overall extraction rate at 99.13 per cent, categorised as "critical", while the situation in Bengaluru is even more alarming with the overall groundwater extraction rate at 150.84 per cent, the Union Jal Shakti ministry said on Monday. Responding to a question in the Rajya Sabha, Minister of State for Jal Shakti, Raj Bhushan Choudhary, said that while desalination technology using reject heat from nuclear reactors is operational at Kalpakkam, Tamil Nadu, it is not widely applicable. Instead, the reverse osmosis (RO) membrane technology is deemed suitable for treating groundwater, the minister said. The government has also assessed groundwater dynamics in urban areas like Delhi and Bengaluru, but similar data for Mumbai is unavailable due to insufficient data collection. Delhi's groundwater resources are heavily strained, with the overall extraction rate at 99.13 per cent, which is categorised as "critical", Choudhary informed. Areas like Vasant Vihar, Mehrauli, and Saket are in



dire straits, recording extraction levels of 153.13 per cent, 117.9 per cent, and 116.31 per cent, respectively. Vasant Vihar topped the chart for overextraction, drawing more than 1.6 times the available resource, he said. The critical zones in Delhi include central and south regions like Karol Bagh (114.47 per cent), Chanakyapuri (131.45 per cent), and Dwarka (99.83 per cent). Shahdara and south-west districts also reported concerning levels, with overextraction exacerbating water stress. The situation in Bengaluru is even more alarming, with the overall groundwater extrac-

tion rate at 150.84 per cent, the minister said. Yelahanka emerged as the most stressed region, extracting over 225 per cent of its available groundwater resource. Other urban areas, including Bangalore North, East, and South, recorded over extraction rates exceeding 200 per cent. Bangalore City itself reported an extraction rate of 217.4 per cent. The minister also emphasised that advanced desalination and groundwater recharge technologies could play a role in water conservation, but their scalability is constrained by infrastructure and feasibility challenges.

# Only 28 per cent of urban wastewater undergoes treatment in India: CSE report

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

Just 28 per cent of about 20,236 million liters per day urban wastewater generated in India undergoes treatment, leaving the remaining i.e. 72 per cent untreated and flowing into rivers, lakes, and land, a report by the Centre for Science and Environment (CSE) has revealed. The largest gap in wastewater treatment is seen in states like Uttar Pradesh, Maharashtra, Karnataka, Rajasthan, Tamil Nadu, Delhi, and Haryana. The untreated water not only causes environmental damage but also presents an opportunity to tackle India's growing urban water crisis due to rapid urbanization, industrial growth, population expansion, and climate change, says the report 'Waste to Worth: Managing India's urban water crisis through wastewater reuse'. It was released recently at a national workshop organized jointly by CSE and the National Mission for Clean Ganga (NMCG), under the Union Ministry of Jal Shakti. Speaking on the occasion, Sunita Narain, director general, CSE said: "India faces significant water scarcity challenges due to rapid urbanisation, industrial growth, population expansion – and most importantly – climate change. Wastewater reuse can be a key part of the strategy to address these concerns and promote



water circularity and sustainability." Rajiv Kumar Mital, director general, NMCG echoed similar views and said that "Using and disposing treated water, without harnessing its potential, means we are losing out on utilising an important resource. The challenge is to scale up and ensure that the work we do in this sector is impactful." The Jal Shakti Ministry has mandated that cities must recycle and reuse at least 20 per cent of the water they consume. The report also highlights good examples -- cases of states that have introduced policies to encourage treated wastewater reuse." Maharashtra, for instance, mandates industries in urban areas to use treated wastewater. Gujarat targets 100 per cent reuse with applications in agriculture and industry, and Tamil Nadu promotes reuse for industrial and urban greening projects. At the national level, the National Urban Sanitation

Policy (NUSP) and the Namami Gange Programme emphasise wastewater management and reuse as key components of water security initiatives. Cities like Nagpur, Bengaluru and Chennai have taken the lead in implementing wastewater reuse practices. Nagpur supplies treated wastewater to power plants, significantly reducing freshwater usage, while Bengaluru utilises it for agriculture, lake revival and groundwater recharge. Chennai has adopted treated wastewater for industrial applications, urban landscaping and groundwater recharge. While advancements in decentralised and cost-effective treatment technologies can address infrastructure deficits, the report also calls for public-private partnerships that can help mobilise investments for scaling up reuse projects, and capacity-building initiatives to improve awareness and acceptance among urban managers and communities.

# Sambhal violence: Yogi accuses Opp of 'misleading' Assembly

**BISWAJEET BANERJEE ■ LUCKNOW**

Uttar Pradesh Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath fiercely defended his government's handling of the recent Sambhal violence during a charged assembly session, accusing the opposition of shedding "crocodile tears" while ignoring past communal killings involving Hindus.

"Since Independence, 209 Hindus have been killed in Sambhal during communal riots, but not a single opposition leader ever spoke out," Adityanath claimed, referencing historical riots that scarred the state.

Leader of Opposition Mata Prasad Pandey hit back, accusing the CM of evading

accountability. "Instead of answering the real issue, the Chief Minister has tried to mislead the House by dragging in unrelated historical events," Pandey said. He urged the government to focus on present challenges rather than deflecting responsibility through historical narratives.

Adityanath questioned why Hindu religious processions face restrictions in Muslim-majority areas, while Muslim processions proceed freely in Hindu-dominated regions. "This discrimination will not be tolerated," he declared, announcing a judicial inquiry into the Sambhal violence to uncover the facts.

Recalling past communal clashes, Adityanath listed violent incidents from the 1970s



in cities like Agra, Azamgarh, Gonda, Prayagraj, Meerut, and Pilibhit. He contrasted this with his administration's record, claiming a 97% reduction in communal riots under BJP rule, citing National Crime Records Bureau (NCRB) data.

"How can chanting 'Ram Ram,' a cultural tradition, be communal?" the CM asked, accusing the opposition of undermining India's religious heritage. He also cited historical texts like "Babar Nama" to assert that several mosques were built by demolishing temples, linking Friday prayers to recent violent clashes. "We have historical evidence supporting our claims," he asserted.

Backing the implementation of

a Uniform Civil Code, Adityanath argued that it reflects the people's will and accused the opposition of resisting court-backed reforms for vote-bank politics. "Our Constitution guarantees equality for all. Why should anyone oppose a law ensuring uniform personal rights?" he questioned.

Reaffirming his government's strict stance against violence, he promised harsh legal action against anyone found involved in riots. "We have zero tolerance for lawlessness," he said, pointing to video evidence showing rioters pelting stones and wielding weapons. "No culprit will escape justice," he added.

The Chief Minister framed recent electoral victories in

constituencies like Kundarki and Phulpur as symbolic wins for "Sanatan Dharma" over divisive politics. He stressed that festivals such as Navratri and processions like Shobha Yatra are central to India's cultural identity.

Adityanath also warned the opposition against inciting communal tension through inflammatory speeches. "If anyone creates anarchy, they will face strict action under the law," he emphasized.

Concluding his speech, Adityanath pledged unwavering commitment to preserving India's religious heritage while maintaining law and order. "We will not allow history to repeat itself. Peace and justice will prevail in Uttar Pradesh," he affirmed.

## Himachal Government exploring proposal to build underwater tunnel

**PTI ■ BILASPUR (HP)**

The Himachal Pradesh government is exploring a proposal for building an underwater tunnel in Gobind Sagar Lake to connect Bilaspur city to four-lane road between Kiratpur and Manali, said Technical Education Minister Rajesh Dharmani on Monday.

Interacting with a group of reporters here, he said the tunnel will be built from Luhnai Maidan to the four-lane road. If the plan becomes fruitful, it will not only prove to be a life-saver for Bilaspur city but will also be the first bridge in the country to be built inside a lake.

Govind Sagar Lake reservoir in Una and Bilaspur districts of Himachal Pradesh is about 56 km in length and 3 km in breadth.

After the construction of Kiratpur-Manali four-lane road, Bilaspur city has lost its connection with the main road. This has resulted in the slowing down of economic activities here. Construction of the bridge will also provide a new path to traders and industrialists.

The underwater tunnel bridge will not only connect the city



directly to the four-lane road but it will also become a centre of attraction for tourists. If there are possibilities of bridge construction, experts and consultants from Germany will be hired for the ambitious project, he said.

"The bridge will be constructed using Germany's advanced immersion tunnel technology and tunnel boring machine. In immersion tunnel technology, parts of the tunnel will be built on land and installed under the lake.

"It will be made safe and durable by digging below the lake bed with a tunnel boring machine," he said.

A team of experts will be formed to assess the possibilities of the project. If the plan is found to be feasible, it will be proposed for budget under the Setu Bharatam scheme of the central government. Several hundred crore rupees are estimated to be spent on the project, the minister said.

Keeping in mind the environmental balance, advanced and sustainable German technology will be used in this project which will write the story of the revival of Bilaspur, Dharmani. If this project comes to fruition, it will become an example not only for the state but also for the entire country, he added.

## BPSC cancels its preliminary examination held at centre in Patna

**PTI ■ PATNA**

The Bihar Public Service Commission (BPSC) on Monday cancelled its preliminary examination held at one of the centres in Patna, where an official on duty died of heart attack following a ruckus created by "unruly" candidates on December 13.

The incident took place at the Babu Pariksha Parisar in Patna's Kumhrar locality, which was one of the more than 900 centres for the Combined (Preliminary) Competitive Examination (CCE). Nearly 5 lakh candidates appeared for the exam held for hiring people in Group A and B posts.

"The BPSC has decided to cancel its preliminary examination held at Babu Pariksha Parisar examination centre due to disruption created by a group of unruly aspirants as part of a conspiracy to disrupt the exam," BPSC Chairman Parmar Ravi Manubhai told reporters.

The Commission will soon announce a fresh date for the examination for that particular centre. Around 6,500 students, who had appeared for the exam on December 13, will be able to



write the papers again, he said. However, those who created trouble at the centre on Friday would be debarred, Manubhai said.

"The commission has identified 30-40 aspirants - who can be described as anti-social elements. They created disruption in the examination process at the centre. More such candidates are being identified by the police. They all will be debarred from appearing in the BPSC exam," the chairman said.

On the date of the exam, a group of candidates at Babu Pariksha Parisar stormed out of their examination halls, alleging that question papers were leaked on social media before the exam started.

A huge crowd had gathered outside the centre as well and the situation was brought under control through police

intervention.

The Patna district administration on Sunday recommended slapping of murder charges on those who had tried to disrupt a recent examination.

Following the ruckus, an additional examination superintendent, Ram Iqbal Singh, died of cardiac arrest and a woman candidate fell unconscious.

The BPSC chairman on Monday said, "The CCE 70th preliminary examination was held in a single shift from noon to 2 pm. The examination was held in 912 centres across the state, and of those, free and fair exams were held in 911 centres," he said.

"CCTV footage of Babu Pariksha Parisar has revealed that some of the candidates snatched question papers from the invigilators and stormed out of the examination hall screaming that the paper had been leaked.

"Snatching question papers from invigilators and showing those to outsiders are tantamount to looting public property. Police action will be initiated against these persons who seem to have acted as a part of a conspiracy," Manubhai said.

## Telangana Assembly adjourned without completing debate on tourism

**PTI ■ HYDERABAD**

Amid sloganeering by opposition BRS MLAs against the Congress government, the Telangana Assembly was adjourned for the day on Monday without completing a debate on tourism policy.

When the House resumed after a tea break, Speaker G Prasad Kumar took up a short discussion on 'Telangana State Tourism Policy', but the opposition party members kept raising slogans against the Congress dispensation. Taking exception to the BRS legislators allegedly not following the rules and traditions of the House, Legislative Affairs Minister D Sridhar Babu said the government is ready to respond to any issue raised by the opposition members.

The Speaker directed BRS MLAs to hand over the pamphlets to the marshals and disapproved of them raising slogans and displaying placards inside the House. Tourism Minister Jupally Krishna Rao began his speech on Tourism sector, but the BRS MLAs continued to raise slogans. The Speaker promised to provide opportunity to BRS MLA T Harish Rao to speak and

urged the main opposition members to return to their seats. As the slogan shouting continued, he adjourned the House for the day. Addressing reporters after the adjournment of the House, BRS Working President K T Rama Rao hit out at the ruling Congress for not taking up debate on the arrest of "farmers" over the November 11 attack on government officials during a public hearing for land acquisition at Lagacharla village in Kodangal assembly segment, represented by CM A Revanth Reddy. Congress whip Adi Srinivas told media that the BRS was not sincere in raising people's issues in the Assembly and was only wasting the precious time of the House. The BRS is raising a hue and cry about the arrest of farmers in connection with the attack on government officials, but peasants were handcuffed during the previous BRS regime in Khammam, he alleged. Later, the BRS members held a protest at the assembly entrance in the legislature premises against the Congress government and held placards condemning a farmer being taken to hospital in handcuffs last week.

## Miscreants target parked car over minor dispute under Shivaji Nagar Police Station

**STAFF REPORTER ■ GURUGRAM**

Few miscreants targeted a parked car near an old jail complex over a minor dispute under the Shivaji Nagar police station area on Monday around 12.00 noon. The parked Maruti Eco car was set ablaze which was parked at old jail complex on Monday. However, in connection with the incident no complaint was filed in the matter. Meanwhile, the Gurugram police has started initial investigation into the matter.

After the incident, locals rushed to pacify fire but by then the car was completely engulfed in fire by the miscreants, however police is looking for the suspects who set ablaze vehicle in the area. It is being said that a minor fight that took place between the two groups on Sunday night of the area which was resulting this incident. On Sunday night the miscreants had also broke widow pain of a swift car.

"A group of few suspects who arrived in the morning created a lot of ruckus and set the vehicle on fire. They also broke a



road side Dhaba and fled the spot," a police officer privy to the matter said. Meanwhile soon after the incident panic prevailed in the area on Monday after parked car was torched by miscreants damaging it badly. The victim however failed to pacify fire after he found that car was set ablaze. Police said they are investigating the matter.

"The investigation teams are scanning the CCTV camera

installed in the area which could help in revealing the details of the miscreants involved in the incident," Sandeep Kumar, spokesperson of the Gurugram police said. During the investigation, locals revealed car was torched due to a fight between two groups but they failed to disclose the motive behind the incident but they suspect that the fight broke out over on food at the Dhaba

on Sunday night. On Monday morning on receiving the information of fire police team reached the spot and along with the locals pacified and controlled the fire. The CCTV cameras at the squares and roundabouts would be investigated. Based on the details provided by the victim the case would be registered. The matter is underway.

## Winter Session in MP Assembly begins with tributes to Tata, other departed leaders

**PTI ■ BHOPAL**

The Winter Session of the Madhya Pradesh assembly began on Monday with the House paying rich tributes to industrialist Ratan Tata, former Union ministers Natwar Singh and SM Krishna and other leaders who died recently. Speaker Narendra Singh Tomar administered oath to newly elected MLAs Kamlesh Pratap Shah from the Amarwada (ST) seat and Ramakant Bhargava from the Budhni constituency. Tomar later mentioned the deaths of industrialist Ratan Tata, former union ministers Prabhath Jha and others and recalled their contributions to the country and the state.

Chief Minister Mohan Yadav said Tata was a simple and decent man. He was not only a renowned industrialist but also a social worker and a nationalist who served humanity. Remembering Jha, Yadav said



the BJP leader was a man of the organisation and a renowned writer and journalist. He was a member of the Rajya Sabha, served as the state BJP president and was a good social worker.

He also paid rich tributes to Natwar Singh and SM Krishna and recalled their contributions.

Yadav condoled the death of Baiga tribal artist and Padma Shri recipient Jodhaiya Bai, who passed away on Sunday. He said Jodhaiya Bai's creative works on clay and wood were exhibited in Milan and Paris. Leader of Opposition Umang Singhar paid tribute to Arif

Aqueel, saying the former minister was known for his simplicity and straightforwardness. He wore rubber slippers his entire life and served people without any discrimination. Speaking about Natwar Singh, Singhar said that as the external affairs minister, he took bilateral relations between nations to a new height and was a renowned diplomat.

The LoP lauded Ratan Tata's efforts in giving a new direction to the corporate social responsibility (CSR) sector and setting an example to show how an industrialist can serve society by forming different trusts to help weaker sections and

youth. The House also paid tribute to soldiers who lost their lives in a road accident in Sikkim and noted Saint Siyaram Baba, who passed away recently. A two-minute silence was observed as a mark of respect to the departed souls, following which the Speaker adjourned the House for 10 minutes.

After Question Hour, the Opposition Congress raised the issue of the shortage of fertilisers and problems faced by farmers across the state and sought a reply from the government.

The Speaker said the government would respond when the House takes up the matter for discussion. However, Congress members insisted on it and staged a walkout when the chair did not relent.

Later, State Urban Administration and Parliamentary Affairs Minister Kailash Vijaywargiya moved a resolution to congratulate the Indian Army for its valour during the war that led to the creation of Bangladesh on December 16, 1971.

## Amid freezing cold, Ayodhya ensures special winter wear for Lord Ramlala

**BISWAJEET BANERJEE/KAMLESH SRIVASTAVA ■ AYODHYA**

Ayodhya is shivering under an intense cold wave, with temperatures plunging to a biting 3°C, six degrees below normal. As residents bundle up with layers of warm clothing, even Lord Ramlala at the Ram Janmabhoomi temple is being dressed in special woolen attire to shield Him from the harsh winter.

To combat the freezing temperatures, Ramlala will don a woolen dhoti made from Kullu wool and an Angavastru crafted from Ladakh's Pashmina wool. These meticulously designed garments were sent from Delhi and have already reached Ayodhya.

"The clothes have been designed with intricate patterns keeping in mind the sanctity and tradition," said Manish Tripathi, designer of Ramlala's attire. "As the cold intensifies, we will adjust the fabric and design accordingly."

Currently, Ramlala is adorned in a Pashmina shawl and silk garments. With winter tightening its grip, these new woolen outfits will provide additional warmth. Two Angavastras—one draped over His shoulder and the other in His hand—will also be made from fine Pashmina wool.

The temple priests are ensuring Ramlala's well-being with meticulous care. "Ramlala is treated like a child," said Santosh Kumar Tiwari, assis-



tant priest of the Ram Mandir. "In the morning, His Abhishek (ritual bath) is done with lukewarm water, and heaters have been installed in the sanctum sanctorum."

The deity's daily offerings also reflect winter's demands. Before the Mangala Aarti in the early morning, peda and dry fruits are offered. At 7:30 a.m., during the Shringar Aarti, fruits and more dry fruits are presented. Later, poha or desi ghee halwa is served at 9:00 a.m., followed by Rajbhog, a full meal including kheer, at noon.

After a mid-day rest, sweets and water are offered at 1:30 p.m. At 4:00 p.m., various snacks and coconut water or fruit juice are presented in turn.

Pilgrims visiting Ayodhya

expressed awe at the elaborate winter care arrangements for Ramlala. "It feels heartwarming to see how the Lord is being taken care of with so much devotion," said Poonam Sharma, a devotee from Kanpur. "This level of dedication makes us feel spiritually connected despite the cold."

Vijay Singh, a pilgrim from Varanasi, shared, "I have visited many temples, but the detailed care here during winter is unmatched. Seeing Ramlala wrapped in warm woolen clothes makes us feel He is among us as family."

Ayodhya has emerged as the coldest district in Uttar Pradesh over the past three days, with temperatures dipping below 5°C consistently.

On Friday-Saturday night, the mercury hit a freezing 3°C.

The Meteorological Department at Acharya Narendra Agricultural Technology University attributed the icy conditions to continuous snowfall in the Himalayas and the chilly western winds blowing across the plains. "This pattern is likely to persist for about a week," a department official said. "However, daytime sunshine will provide some relief."

Amid these frigid conditions, residents are relying on bonfires and heaters to stay warm. As the cold wave continues, Ayodhya's spiritual and human lives intertwine, reflecting resilience in the face of winter's icy grip.



www.dailypioneer.com

facebook.com/dailypioneer | @TheDailyPioneer | instagram.com/dailypioneer/

PAPER WITH PASSION

## Economy slowing down

India, celebrated as the fastest-growing economy in the world, is showing signs of slowdown

India is facing a pivotal moment as it navigates a notable slowdown. Between July and September 2024, the country's GDP growth rate fell to 5.4 per cent, its lowest in seven quarters and well below the Reserve Bank of India's (RBI) forecast of 7 per cent. While this growth rate remains enviable compared to developed economies, it highlights significant structural challenges that could impede India's long-term economic ambitions. The implications of this slowdown are multifaceted. A decline in consumer demand and muted private investment have curtailed economic momentum. Sales of fast-moving consumer goods (FMCG) have dropped, wage bills of publicly traded firms have shrunk, and urban spending has softened. In November alone, car sales plunged by 14 per cent, underscoring the waning strength of urban consumption. Rising inflation adds another layer of complexity. In October 2024, inflation surged to 6.2 per cent, exceeding the RBI's target ceiling of 4 per cent. Escalating food prices, driven by climate disruptions and inefficiencies in supply chains, have inflated costs across sectors, further squeezing disposable incomes. The slowdown has also placed pressure on India's exports, which account for just 2 per cent of global goods trade. A stronger dollar and rising tariffs have eroded the competitiveness of Indian products in international markets. Compounding the issue is stagnant job creation, particularly in agriculture, manufacturing, and small-scale industries. Collectively, these factors are eroding confidence in India's growth narrative, despite the government's optimistic outlook. The roots of this economic deceleration lie in several factors. Demand weakness is a central issue. While rural demand remains relatively resilient thanks to a favourable monsoon, it alone cannot offset the broader slowdown. Restrictive monetary policies have further constrained growth. To combat inflation, the RBI has kept interest rates steady for two years, leading to high borrowing costs that discourage both business investment and consumer spending. Global and domestic challenges compound the problem. Slowing global demand and climate-related disruptions in agriculture have adversely affected exports and food production. Additionally, the RBI's interventions to stabilise the rupee by selling dollars have inadvertently tightened liquidity, slowing economic growth. A stronger rupee, while stabilising in some respects, makes Indian exports more expensive and less competitive internationally. Addressing these challenges requires targeted solutions. Boosting consumption through wage growth could be a key strategy. Policy measures that reduce bureaucratic hurdles, provide tax incentives, and simplify labour and land laws can unlock the potential of small and medium enterprises, which form the backbone of the economy. Tackling inflation and strengthening supply chains will also play a critical role in stabilising the economy.



tors. Demand weakness is a central issue. While rural demand remains relatively resilient thanks to a favourable monsoon, it alone cannot offset the broader slowdown. Restrictive monetary policies have further constrained growth. To combat inflation, the RBI has kept interest rates steady for two years, leading to high borrowing costs that discourage both business investment and consumer spending. Global and domestic challenges compound the problem. Slowing global demand and climate-related disruptions in agriculture have adversely affected exports and food production. Additionally, the RBI's interventions to stabilise the rupee by selling dollars have inadvertently tightened liquidity, slowing economic growth. A stronger rupee, while stabilising in some respects, makes Indian exports more expensive and less competitive internationally. Addressing these challenges requires targeted solutions. Boosting consumption through wage growth could be a key strategy. Policy measures that reduce bureaucratic hurdles, provide tax incentives, and simplify labour and land laws can unlock the potential of small and medium enterprises, which form the backbone of the economy. Tackling inflation and strengthening supply chains will also play a critical role in stabilising the economy.



An artist paints a wall at Lodhi Road area, in New Delhi

## Overcoming fear to unlock limitless possibilities

Embracing the unknown is essential for innovation, resilience and realising our true potential

Humans possess four basic emotions – happiness, sadness, anger and fear. Each has a unique place in our lives and shapes much of our responses to situations. The unknown is probably one entity that invokes all four emotions and spurs us into action. However, it is the fear of what we project onto the unknown that often paralyses us into inaction. Action is built into our psyche. We must necessarily move, even though we do not know the results of our endeavours. Instead of focusing on the happiness we will derive from success, we let this uncertainty bog us down. We procrastinate terrified of failure and refuse to take the next step.

This is an all too familiar phenomenon that we encounter every day of our lives. As we start going up the professional ladder, many of us follow time-tested formulae, handed down to us by predecessors. We hesitate to make decisions contrary to the established norms, even though such decisions may result in sub-



stantial gains, within the framework of certain acceptable risks. All our efforts are guided by that one decision in 10 which did not click. We do not look at the nine that did. We forget that as a child we had no fears when we started exploring the universe around us. We fell, as we tried to get on our two feet, but were encouraged, or even forced, to keep trying till we mastered the art of walking; or for that matter everything. We also forget that we were not scared to take up a job after college, even though we knew nothing about the work we had to do. We learned from our mistakes. The worst was that we failed the first time, and the best

was that we succeeded eventually. Ah! The joy of success! We forget that humans evolved due to an inherent desire to explore the unknown, without a care for failure or success. New worlds were found, and new inventions and scientific discoveries were made. All because a few dared to venture into the unknown. We deny ourselves the endless new opportunities that each new day brings. It is not that we do not possess this spirit. It is just that generations of conditioning have made it dormant, till we are in a situation with our backs to the wall. Nowhere is it more in evidence, than in jugaad, the flexible approach to solve a problem innovatively when one has limited resources. In our personal lives, we are told to pursue our dreams but are often guided towards the more tried and safer options. We do not even try to think of the endless possibilities and the heights that society can reach if everyone is encouraged not to fear the failure of the unknown, but

to think about success, and is free to follow his or her heart! This is the contradiction that most of us from the earlier generation, specifically from the middle class, face when teaching the young. Fortunately for our race, the young of today are better prepared for the unknown with the availability of much better sources of information which were also created by a few who dared to dream. We should teach the young to step out in the rain without an umbrella and get drenched. Let the sky be the roof. They should not regret that they might have led a better life if they had not feared the unknown. Esmeralda Santiago sums it up so well. "How can you know what you are capable of, if you do not embrace the unknown?" (The writer is an author, speaker, coach, arbitrator and strategy consultant. He conducts workshops on creative writing for young adults and corporate executives. The views expressed are personal)



SANJAY CHANDRA

# South Asia: Two decades of turmoil

December marks two pivotal anniversaries — Soviet intervention in Afghanistan and Kandhar Hijacking — that changed South Asia's geopolitics



SANTHOSH MATHEW

December marks two pivotal anniversaries that significantly influenced South Asia's geopolitical landscape: 45 years since the Soviet Union's intervention in Afghanistan and 25 years since the hijacking of Indian Airlines Flight IC-814 from Kathmandu to Kandahar. Despite occurring two decades apart, these events underscore the fragility of South Asia and the profound influence of external powers and non-state actors in shaping the region's trajectory.

On December 24, 1979, Soviet troops entered Afghanistan to support the struggling communist regime in Kabul, led by Babrak Karmal. This intervention, ostensibly aimed at stabilising Afghanistan, set off a decade-long occupation and transformed the country into one of the Cold War's fiercest battlegrounds. The repercussions extended far beyond Afghanistan, triggering global, regional and internal upheavals that persist to this day. The Soviet invasion catalysed a chain of events that hastened the disintegration of the Soviet Union and radicalised South Asia. The mujahideen-fighters armed and financed by the United States, Pakistan, Saudi Arabia and other allies-became a formidable force against the Soviets. This external patronage laid the groundwork for militant extremism, which would later engulf the region. The Soviet intervention underscored Afghanistan's strategic importance as the fulcrum of great power politics. Pakistan emerged as a frontline state in the anti-Soviet effort. Two decades later, on December 24, 1999, South Asia faced another defining moment when Indian Airlines Flight IC-814 was hijacked en route from Kathmandu to Delhi. Five armed men commandeered the aircraft, eventually forcing it to land in Kandahar, then under Taliban control. What ensued was a week-long standoff that exposed the vulnerabilities of regional counter-terrorism strategies and marked a turning point in how nations approached security and terrorism.



The Kandahar hijacking exposed the evolving nexus between terrorism and geopolitics in South Asia. The Taliban's willingness to shelter the hijackers highlighted its transition into a state sponsor of terrorism. For India, this incident was a stark reminder of the threats posed by cross-border terrorism, often enabled by Pakistan's support for extremist proxies in Afghanistan and Kashmir. The release of Masood Azhar not only emboldened groups like JeM but also underscored the growing influence of non-state actors in undermining regional stability. Although the Soviet intervention and the Kandahar hijacking may seem unrelated, they are deeply interconnected in shaping South Asia's trajectory. The destabilisation of Afghanistan during the Soviet occupation created fertile ground for militancy, enabling the rise of networks that facilitated events like the Kandahar hijacking. Pakistan's role as a key US ally during the Soviet-Afghan war empowered its military-intelligence complex, which later exploited jihadist networks to further strategic objectives in Kashmir and Afghanistan. These same networks became instrumental in orchestrating attacks against India, exemplified by the IC-814 hijacking.

ADDRESSING SOUTH ASIA'S FRACTURED SECURITY LANDSCAPE REQUIRES COLLECTIVE ACTION. COUNTRIES IN THE REGION MUST TRANSCEND HISTORICAL ANIMOSITIES TO COMBAT TERRORISM AND ADDRESS SHARED CHALLENGES LIKE EXTREMISM AND SOCIO-ECONOMIC DISPARITIES

Both events marked the ascendancy of non-state actors in South Asia's security dynamics. The mujahideen's success against the Soviets emboldened militant groups across the region, while the Kandahar hijacking demonstrated their ability to exploit state vulnerabilities for political gains. The Kandahar episode underscored the inadequacy of India's counter-terrorism infrastructure at the time. It led to significant reforms, including the establishment of specialised counter-terrorism units like the National Security Guard (NSG) and the strengthening of aviation security protocols. Pakistan's dual role in these episodes-as a US ally during the Soviet-Afghan war and as a sanctuary for groups like JeM-has perpetuated instability in the region. Its support for extremist proxies has strained relations with India and exacerbated internal security challenges. Addressing South Asia's fractured security landscape requires collective action. Countries in the region must transcend historical animosities to combat terrorism and address shared challenges like extremism and socio-economic disparities. Both the Soviet intervention and the Kandahar hijacking highlight the need

for strong democratic institutions and accountable governance. Weak states are particularly susceptible to external manipulation and internal subversion, further destabilising the region. The lessons from these pivotal episodes remain crucial as South Asia navigates the 21st century. The radicalisation fueling terrorism often stems from socio-economic deprivation. Investments in education, healthcare, and employment can help counter extremist ideologies. Strengthened regional cooperation and robust international partnerships are essential to addressing the complex interplay of geopolitics and terrorism. Much like the Grand Trunk Road connecting distant regions and histories, these events remind us of the intersecting paths of interventionism and terrorism in shaping modern South Asia. They were not mere crises but turning points that redefined the region's political, social, and economic trajectories. As South Asia confronts new challenges, the enduring lessons of these anniversaries emphasize the importance of resilience, cooperation, and proactive governance in securing a stable future. (The writer is an associate professor; views are personal)

## LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

### DEBATE ON CONSTITUTION

Madam —The two-day debate on the Constitution, which began on 13th December, has seen heated discussion on the historical and contemporary significance of the Constitution. Defence Minister Rajnath Singh initiated the debate, emphasising the collective efforts behind the creation of the Constitution. Though he accused Congress and Indira Gandhi for imposing an emergency and supersession of Supreme Court judges to charge Congress with violating constitutional principles, he lauded the progressive and transformative nature of the Constitution that allows individuals from humble backgrounds to rise to the highest positions of power in India. The newly elected MP, Priyanka Gandhi, an articulate and combative speaker, accused the government of undermining the constitutional promises of social, economic and political justice over the past decade. Without mentioning the name of Jawaharlal Nehru, she lauded his contribution in creating so many public sector as well as government firms. She also warned the present government that his role in the freedom struggle and Independent India could never be erased from Indian history. Concluding the debate, Prime Minister Narendra Modi hailed the role of women members of the constituent Assembly in making the Indian Constitution. He also hailed Indian democracy and reminded the journey of the Constitution.

P Victor Selvaraj | Tirunelveli

### INDIA'S GDP RISES

Madam — Forbes India estimates India's GDP to be \$3.94 trillion in 2024. Prime Minister Narendra Modi said India rose to the 11th largest economy in the world in seven decades of independence, but in just the last decade, India has risen to the 5th largest economy while addressing a gathering at the Jaipur Exhibition and Convention Centre after the inauguration of the Rising Rajasthan Global Investment Summit 2024. He attributed this growth

### Tabla maestro Zakir Hussain passes away



The four-time Grammy Award winner, Indian tabla maestro and an innovative music fusion creator, Zakir Hussain is no more with us. The silence on his tabla is a huge loss for Hindustani classical music and jazz fusion. Zakir was truly an indelible gem in the world of music. The list of his national and international accolades is really long, as he had always made India proud with his tireless contribution in

taking Hindustani classical music to collaborate and fuse with world music. Like his father, Ustad Alha Rakha, Zakir always attempted to proceed to the legacy footprint of his father. His tabla virtuoso legacy had been curated in the golden letters in the history of Indian music because of his glorious contribution to music. Taking an Indian, 18th-century membranophone percussion instrument (tabla) to the world stage is truly an incredible achievement, and history will credit this legendary maestro, Zakir Hussain, for his pertinacious contribution towards Hindustani classical music. He will always stay alive in our hearts and continue to inspire the upcoming generations of music and instrument lovers. Kirti Wadhawan | Kanpur

to the exceptional efficiency of his government. Nevertheless, the story would be incomplete without a mention of the economic growth across different regions. Southern states, which occupy 19.34 per cent of India's land area and 20.76 per cent of its population, contributed about 30.5 per cent of the GDP. Western states of Maharashtra and Gujarat, which together occupy 15.32 per cent of India's land area and 14.27 per cent of its population, added another 21.4 per cent. On the contrary, the NDA-BJP-ruled states of Bihar, Madhya Pradesh, Rajasthan, Uttar Pradesh and Chhattisgarh, which cover 34.09 per cent of the area and have 38.95 per cent of the population, together contributed only 22.4 per cent to the GDP. This is despite the fact that the five BJP states received a significantly higher share of funds from the central divisible revenue pool. They received a 45.29 per cent share, whereas the five southern states got only 15.81 per cent. Further, according to the IMF World Economic Outlook

(October 2024), India is currently ranked 144th among 194 economies in terms of GDP (nominal) per capita at \$2698 at current prices. This suggests that the standard of living and quality of life in much of India improved at a snail's pace, even though the economy expanded rapidly. Haridasan Rajan | Kozhikode

### PM MODI SLAMS CONGRESS

Madam — Modi lambasted the first pravar as the killers of the constitution during the debate on the constitution in parliament. Right from Nehru's letter in 1951 to the state CM's, Indira's emergency, Rajiv's dealing with the Shah Bano case, and Rahul's tearing of an ordinance, Modi spoke the truth. It is a big blow to the Congress since they were at fault in their earlier tenure. It should introspect. Secondly, Modi has drawn up an 11-point Sankalp like the 20-point programme of Indira Gandhi. N R Ramachandran | Chennai

Send your feedback to: [letterstopioneer@gmail.com](mailto:letterstopioneer@gmail.com)



## FIRST COLUMN

## WORKPLACE SURVEILLANCE

As remote work redefine workplaces, businesses are increasingly turning to employee monitoring



SHAINY SHARMA

In the modern workplace, the rise of remote and hybrid work has led to significant shifts in how businesses operate, manage and monitor their employees. Among the most controversial developments is the growing use of tattleware or brassware, the common nicknames of software applications that monitor employees' activities during work hours.

With the advent of normalised remote work, employer surveillance of workers has accelerated. Today, such tools can track a wide range of data, including keystrokes, mouse movements, screenshots, and even video or audio feeds from an employee's device. Not only this, but the much-advanced systems may also use artificial intelligence to analyse patterns, flag unproductive behaviour, or even detect potential security breaches. Employers claim these tools provide valuable insights into work habits, protect sensitive data, and improve overall efficiency. It allows businesses to track productivity metrics thereby ensuring that the employees meet deadlines and work efficiently, especially in remote setups where physical supervision is absent.

Also, such surveillance tools help prevent data breaches or intellectual property theft by monitoring unauthorised activities. Moreover, these wares provide evidence in disputes about working hours or performance, thereby offering an objective record of employee activity. When implemented transparently and ethically, these tools even foster accountability and help underperforming employees improve. Despite the above-mentioned benefits, the use of tattleware raises significant ethical concerns wherein the most



common one talked about is privacy. Employees believe that privacy is a fundamental right, and excessive surveillance can infringe upon it. A survey conducted recently found that nearly 78 per cent of employers use monitoring software to track employee performance or online activity.

When employees are monitored constantly, they often feel dehumanised, as though they are untrusted or reduced to mere data points resulting in eroding trust between employers and their teams, making it harder to foster collaboration and loyalty. Additionally, the psychological impact often leads them to stress, anxiety, and burnout. Employees may feel pressured to overwork or engage in performative productivity - appearing busy rather than genuinely contributing. Over time, this can harm creativity, innovation, and overall job satisfaction. Not only these, but the use of tattleware has also resulted in legal challenges, including claims of unpaid wages for work performed away from computers or intrusion upon privacy. Some employers face allegations of unfair labour practices if monitoring interferes with protected activities, such as union organising? To adhere to the challenges posed by tattleware, businesses must strive to balance productivity goals with respect for employees' rights. As rightly said transparency is the key to success.

Only when employees are informed about them being monitored, the necessities for the use of such tattleware or how the data will be used can help build trust and foster a sense of shared responsibility. As businesses navigate the complexities of remote and hybrid work, they must adopt a thoughtful and balanced approach to workplace monitoring. Only by prioritising transparency, fairness, and respect for individual rights, companies and business organisations can create an environment that values both productivity and human dignity.

(The writer is an educator; views are personal)

## Call for fast-tracking WTO agricultural negotiations



UTTAM GUPTA

In a recent WTO meeting, India urges prioritisation of issues, including a permanent solution for public stockholding and special safeguard mechanism



In a meeting of the Committee on Agriculture (CoA) of the World Trade Organization (WTO) held in Geneva on December 4, 2024, India insisted that negotiations on unresolved/previously mandated issues in agriculture, including a permanent solution to public stockholding, special safeguard mechanism (SSM) and elimination of trade-distorting cotton subsidies by rich countries etc, be 'prioritised' and 'fast-tracked' by treating them as standalone issues instead of clubbing them with other issues.

The US, on the other hand, criticised the prioritisation of certain issues over others, stating that this was the primary cause of the longstanding stalemate in agriculture. India also rejected a new proposal presented by Guyana to advance agricultural negotiations ahead of the WTO's 14th Ministerial Conference (MC14 tentatively scheduled to take place in Cameroon in 2026) by adopting a so-called 'non-traditional approach based on convergence'. India reiterated that any facilitator-led process should be 'consensus-based' and respect WTO's multilateral principles. It emphasised on Text-based negotiation (TBN). TBN refers to the process of working up the text of an agreement that all parties are willing to accept and sign. Negotiating parties may begin with a draft text prepared by the Chair of the particular committee dealing with the subject.

The draft is based on discussions amongst the member countries and is fine-tuned till all the nations are in agreement with it. This is in sharp contrast to a convergence-based approach that involves superimposition of non-multilateral trade regimes on the multilateral trading system (MTS). The theorists dealing with international trade in particular, WTO-related issues describe it as a process of 'gradually aligning different trade regimes, in particular preferential trade agreements (PTAs) and the MTS'. Others define convergence as requiring 'greater coherence between trade rules and policies, norms and standards in other areas of international cooperation'. Shorn of jargon, this is a well-orchestrated attempt by the developed countries - the US, the European



THE DRAFT IS BASED ON DISCUSSIONS AMONGST THE MEMBER COUNTRIES AND IS FINE-TUNED TILL ALL THE NATIONS ARE IN AGREEMENT WITH IT. THIS IS IN SHARP CONTRAST TO A CONVERGENCE-BASED APPROACH THAT INVOLVES SUPERIMPOSITION OF NON-MULTILATERAL TRADE

Union (EU), the UK, Australia, etc (they exercise disproportionately greater influence during actual confabulations at the WTO), set the agenda of meetings, float proposals more often through small countries such as Guyana and get away with what they want) to scuttle the standard practice of taking decisions by consensus where every member country has an equal voice.

Therefore, India has rejected this approach, rightly so. But, what happens to India's demand for 'prioritising' and 'fast-tracking' negotiations? In a meeting of the CoA held on October 2, 2023, in Geneva, the EU agreed to consider India's demand for a permanent solution to the public stock-holding (PSH) program for food security. Accordingly, India had urged WTO members to start TBN on the issue as soon as possible and get this deliberated at the WTO MC-13 slated to be held in Abu Dhabi from February 26-29, 2024. But, that was not to be. The Ministerial Conference ended in a deadlock. On the issue of finding a permanent solution to the (PSH) for food security, India's stance was vehemently opposed by the USA/EU. Earlier attempts by India also met with the same fate. At the Trade Policy Review (TPR) meeting held at WTO in January 2021, India insisted that the three issues should be taken up on a priority basis at the MC-12. But, in that Ministerial Conference held in Geneva on June 12-17, 2022, the issues were not even put on the table. The deadlock has existed for more than two decades despite India taking up these issues at WTO under what has come to be known as the Doha Development Agenda (DDA). Developed countries had junked DDA at MC-10 held in Nairobi (2015). On the most contentious issue of a permanent solution for PSH, a ray of hope emerged when in the WTO-General Council (GC) meeting in Geneva (July 31, 2014),

India insisted on a time-bound action plan on the subject matter to be executed before the end of 2014 co-terminus with approval of Trade Facilitation Agreement (TFA) - an area of great interest to developed countries. This was a good strategic move but it was abandoned mid-stream. In December 2014, even as the developed countries got away with the TFA, the developing countries got an "extension of the peace clause till a permanent solution was found." Put simply, India had literally surrendered its right to secure a permanent solution; that it was "Ok" with "the benefit of peace clause."

**What is the peace clause?**  
To understand this, let us look at the Agreement on Agriculture (AoA) of the WTO. Under it, a developing country cannot give aggregate measurement support (AMS) - an acronym for subsidies - over 10 per cent of the value of its farm production.

The AMS includes "product-specific" subsidies and "non-product specific" subsidies on agricultural inputs such as fertilisers, seed, irrigation and power. The "product-specific" subsidy is the excess of the Minimum Support Price (MSP) paid to farmers over the External Reference Price (ERP) multiplied by the quantum of agri-produce. Whereas the MSP is taken for the relevant year, say, 2023-24, the ERP is the average of the global price prevailing during 1986-88 fixed in rupee terms. If the subsidy given by a developing country exceeds 10 per cent, it will be treated as a violation of its WTO commitment. This has been a major worry as India could face action in a situation of AMS exceeding the 10 per cent threshold. In this backdrop, the MC-9 in Bali (2013) had agreed to a "peace clause" under which "if a developing country gives AMS in excess of 10 per cent, no member will challenge this until 2017, when the WTO would look for a permanent

solution to address their food security concerns." It came with several riders such as submission of data on food procurement, stockholding, distribution and subsidies. These also include establishing that subsidies are not "trade distorting." Besides, programs implemented after 2013 are not covered under the ambit of the 'peace clause'. In December 2014, the WTO-GC modified the above decision to provide for "extension of the peace clause till a permanent solution was found". Unfortunately, India concurred with this modification. This took away the sanctity of the 2017 deadline by which time members were to find a permanent solution as per the MC-9 mandate.

A decade since then, India is still looking for a solution! In regard to SSM - it allows members to temporarily raise tariffs beyond the "bound levels" (this is the maximum permissible duty that a member country can impose under a bound rate agreement) to counter surges in import or price drops. The 2015 MC-10 in Nairobi recognized that developing countries will have the right to take recourse to SSM as envisaged under the Hong Kong Ministerial Declaration. That was at MC - 6 (December 2005).

Since then, it has been almost two decades. Even now, these countries can't take recourse to SSM. They haven't also been able to prompt developed countries to eliminate their cotton subsidies. To conclude, despite the deft handling of negotiations at the WTO and representing the majority of the developing countries (India leads about 80 countries - the G33 including India, African, Caribbean and Pacific countries or ACP) so far, India hasn't succeeded in securing the intended outcomes. Given the intransigence of developed countries and their clout at WTO, there is little hope from the MC - 14.

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

## Persisting Central Information Commission vacancies challenge transparency claims

## Eight vacancies of Information Commissioners undermine the cause of transparency and accountability

Recently on December 10, Dr. Jitendra Singh, MoS (Personnel, Public Grievances and Pension) made a pitch for Vikashit Bharat, 2047 while addressing the 16th Annual Convention of Central Information Commission at Bharat Mandapam in Pragati Maidan. Ironically, it was the last date allowed by the Supreme Court for the central government to file a status report on the eight posts of Information Commissioners lying vacant out of a total of ten in the Central Information Commission (CIC) for the last year. It might be remembered in October 2023 Anjali Bharadwaj had brought to the notice of the Supreme Court that whereas seven posts were already lying vacant in the



PRIYADARSHI DUTTA

CIC, four incumbents were due to retire within a week. Sadly, the situation has worsened over the last year, notwithstanding the government's claim to transparency and accountability. At present, there are two Information Commissioners viz. Anandi Ramalingam and Vinod Kumar Tiwari in addition to Chief Information Commissioner viz. Heeralal

Samariya. As per the Pending Cases Report available on the website of CIC, there were a total of 3134 cases - comprising 2310 second appeals and 824 direct complaints with the Commission as of November 1, 2023.

A year later on November 1, 2024, the total number of pendency has risen to 20,437 - comprising 17,717 second appeals and 2,720 direct complaints. At the time of writing this piece, the total pendency clocked 22,957. This figure is not quite a compliment to the government's alleged commitment to transparency and accountability. A recent RTI application filed by Commodore Lokesh Batra (Retd) elicited the reply that 161 applications were received for filling eight vacancies in

CIC in response to the DoPT's advertisement dated August 14, 2024. Under Section 12 (3) of the RTI Act, 2005 the appointments are to be made by a committee chaired by the Prime Minister, and comprising the Leader of the Opposition in Lok Sabha and another Union minister nominated by the Prime Minister. Filling these positions before the 16th Annual Convention on the RTI would have been a favourable gesture. However, the government did not prioritize the task. A second appeal from this columnist filed on September 13, 2023, is indicated at no 18162 in the list of pendency. The matter was transferred to IC Vinod Kumar Tiwari, after IC Ms. Saroj Punhani retired on November 11, 2023. The



high amount of pendency incentivizes the CPIOs/Appellate Authorities in the ministries/departments to display a cavalier attitude towards applications filed under the RTI Act, 2005. This columnist, however, was able to obtain the information through a fresh application. Though in both cases, the Appellate Authority within the division, who in an IAS officer colluded with the CPIO,

in one of his decisions he stated that the reason for denying information was that the file was under submission with the Joint Secretary.

The columnist filed a third application under the RTI Act, 2005 asking the CPIO whether the Joint Secretary has been 'exempted' from the obligation to provide information under the RTI Act, 2005. If the Joint Secretary had been 'exempted', the CPIO must produce the necessary official order, and further inform who else in the ministry had been similarly 'exempted'.

Any claim that a Joint Secretary has been 'exempted' from the obligation to provide information would have become controversial for the government. It could have sullied the service record of the

officer attracting a minor if not major penalty for disregarding a Parliamentary statute. The RTI Act, 2005 provides no authority-wise 'exemption'. Exemption under Section 8 of the Act applies only to certain well-defined matters based on merit like security/diplomatic/trade secrets, matters expressly forbidden by court from publication, or cabinet papers etc. This time the CPIO quickly provided the information. The episode, however, underscores a few grievous lapses. First, had the Central Information Commission (CIC) been working at full strength, the second appeal would have been decided within a few months, and the delinquent CPIO might had to pay the monetary penalty for denying information.

Second, it underscores that Appellate Authorities, who are part of the department, actually help the CPIOs to suppress the information, where it is in their interest. Instead of this obligation, they can manipulate the CPIOs in other matters. The high amount of pendency in CIC could be attributed to the devious behaviour of the Appellate Authorities. The RTI Act, 2005 should have provision to penalize not just the CPIO but also the First Appellate Authority if the Information Commissioner declares him/her guilty of deliberate suppression of information.

(The writer is an author and an independent researcher based in New Delhi. The views expressed are his personal)







# Sensex falls 385 points Rupee falls 9 paise to all-time low of 84.89 against US dollar

PTI ■ MUMBAI

Benchmark indices Sensex and Nifty closed lower on Monday due to weak global cues amid caution ahead of the US Fed interest rate decision later this week. The 30-share BSE benchmark Sensex declined 384.55 points or 0.47 per cent to settle at 81,748.57. During the day, it dropped 581.84 points or 0.70 per cent to 81,551.28. The NSE Nifty lost by 100.05 points or 0.40 per cent to 24,668.25. From the 30-share Sensex blue-chip pack, Titan, Adani Ports, UltraTech Cement, Tata Consultancy Services, NTPC, Bharti Airtel, Tech Mahindra, Infosys, Hindustan Unilever and JSW Steel were the biggest losers. On the other hand, IndusInd Bank, Bajaj Finance, Power Grid, Mahindra & Mahindra and Axis Bank were the gainers.



In Asian markets, Seoul, Tokyo, Shanghai and Hong Kong settled lower. European markets were quoting in the red. Wall Street ended mostly lower on Friday. Meanwhile, wholesale price-based inflation declined to a three-month low of 1.89 per cent in November on cheaper food items. Foreign Institutional Investors

PTI ■ MUMBAI

The rupee depreciated by 9 paise to close at an all-time low level of 84.89 (provisional) against the US dollar on Monday, dragged down by a negative trend in domestic equities. Forex traders said the Indian rupee declined on weak domestic markets and rising US bond yields. However, a soft US dollar cushioned the downside. At the interbank foreign exchange, the rupee opened at 84.83 and touched 84.89 against the greenback during intraday trade. The unit finally ended the session 9 paise down at 84.89 (provisional) against the dollar. On Friday, the rupee rebounded from its all-time low level and settled with a gain of 8 paise at 84.80 against the US dollar. The unit's previous all-time low level was recorded on December 12 when it closed at 84.88 against dollar.



"We expect the rupee to trade with a negative bias on rising odds of a rate cut by the Federal Open Market Committee (FOMC) and weak tone in the domestic markets. Elevated crude oil prices may also weigh on the rupee," said Anuj Choudhary - Research Analyst at Mirae Asset Sharekhan. However, FII inflows and

cooling off of inflation may support the rupee at lower levels. On the domestic macroeconomic front, wholesale price-based inflation declined to a 3-month low of 1.89 per cent in November on cheaper food items. Retail inflation declined in November to 5.48 per cent and came within the Reserve Bank's comfort zone mainly due to easing food prices, creating headroom for a rate cut at the central bank's rate-setting panel meeting under new Governor Sanjay Malhotra in February. "Traders may take cues from PMI and Empire State Manufacturing Index data from the US. Investors may watch out for the FOMC meeting decision later this week. USD-INR spot price is expected to trade in a range of 84.65 to 85.05," Choudhary added. Meanwhile, the dollar index, which gauges the greenback's strength against a basket of six currencies, was trading marginally lower by 0.14 per cent at 106.85. Brent crude, the global oil benchmark, fell 0.78 per cent to USD 73.91 per barrel in futures trade. On the domestic equity market front, the 30-share benchmark index Sensex closed lower by 384.55 points or 0.47 per cent at 81,748.57 points. The Nifty was down 100.05 points, or 0.4 per cent, to 24,668.25 points. Foreign Institutional Investors (FIIs) purchased Rs 2,335.32 crore in the capital markets on net basis on Friday, according to exchange data. Meanwhile, India's forex reserves dropped by USD 3.235 billion to USD 654.857 billion for the week ended December 6, the RBI said on Friday. In the preceding week, the reserves had increased by USD 1.51 billion to USD 658.091 billion, ending a multi-week decline in the overall kitty.

## Indian IT services hiring to remain low till growth momentum picks up by H2 FY26: ICRA

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

Hiring in the Indian IT services industry is expected to remain low-key in the near term until the growth momentum picks up by H2 FY2026, according to ICRA. The formation of the new government in the US may create some policy uncertainty in the immediate term and thus will remain monitorable, it said. Lower discretionary tech spends by customers in key markets of the US and Europe, amid an uncertain macroeconomic environment, has led to moderation in demand for Indian IT services companies over the last 6-8 quarters. Factors such as lower employee attrition and a focus on increasing employee utilisation also contributed to the slowdown in hiring. "While there has been some recovery in Q2 FY2025, ICRA expects hiring to remain low in the near term until the growth momentum picks up by H2 FY2026," the agency said.



Moderation in demand coupled with the increase in utilisation of excess manpower added during FY2022-FY2023 exerted pressure on hiring by IT services companies through FY2024 and Q1 FY2025. Coupled with an increase in attrition levels, this also led to negative net employee addition for the seven quarters till Q1 FY2025 for ICRA's sample set companies, which includes HCL Technologies, Infosys, Tata Consultancy

Services, Tech Mahindra and Wipro Ltd. As Gen AI makes rapid inroads, all leading IT services companies are upskilling their employees as they explore AI-driven business opportunities. This is likely to lead to an overall moderation in fresh hiring, as compared to pre-Covid levels, it predicted. ICRA said that the impact of higher adoption of Generative AI (Gen AI) on improving employee productivity is expected to be visible over the next few years. Average revenue in USD per employee for the sample set has largely been stable at around USD 50,000 over FY2020-FY2024. However, this metric will show steady improvement if assessed on revenue in rupee terms due to depreciation of the rupee against some key foreign currencies over this period. The last twelve-month (LTM) attrition rate had peaked at about 23 per cent during Q4 FY2022 and Q1 FY2023, led by significant hiring and subsequent demand-supply mismatch. However, it sequentially tapered with lower hiring by IT services companies amid moderation in demand in key markets of the US and Europe. The LTM attrition rate for ICRA's sample set companies started stabilising from Q3 FY2024 at about 13 per cent, much lower than the pre-pandemic level of about 18 per cent in Q1 FY2020 for the sample set companies.

## Historic milestone: Delhi airport first in India to connect 150 destinations

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

Delhi Airport has achieved a historic milestone by becoming the first airport in India to connect 150 destinations and a preferred gateway for passengers. Thai AirAsia X has launched direct flights between Delhi and Bangkok-Don Mueang (DMK), marking the 150th destination connected to Delhi Airport. The route will operate with Airbus A330 aircraft at a 2x weekly frequency, increasing to 4x weekly by mid-January 2025. In a statement, Delhi International Airport Ltd (DIAL) said it has become the first airport in the country to connect 150 destinations. Over the years, Delhi Airport has added more than 20 exclusive international destinations, including Phnom Penh, Bali Denpasar, Calgary, Montreal, Vancouver, Washington Dulles, Chicago O'Hare, Tokyo Haneda, etc. "Of all the long-haul destinations from India, 88 per cent of destinations are connected from Delhi and 56 per cent of



all long-haul weekly flights departing from India, operate from Delhi. "Almost 50 per cent (42 per cent to be precise) of long-haul passengers from India chose Delhi airport as their gateway," it said. The airport handles around 1,400 flight movements daily. "In the last decade, the airport has experienced a 100 per cent increase in transfer passengers, solidifying its position as a leading transit hub in South Asia. Of all the long-haul destinations from India, 88 percent of destinations are connected from Delhi & 56 percent of all long-haul weekly flights departing from India, operate from Delhi. Almost 50 percent (42 percent to be precise) of long-haul passengers from India chose Delhi airport as their gateway," it added. "This milestone of connecting 150 destinations is a testament to our unwavering commitment to enhancing global connectivity and providing world-class travel experiences. We are proud to lead India into a new era of aviation and remain dedicated to being a hub of choice for travelers worldwide," said Vidheh Kumar Jaipuria, CEO, Delhi International Airport Limited.

## JNPA, DGS ink pact for skill training in Vadhan region

PTI ■ MUMBAI

Leading container port JNPA on Monday said it has signed an initial pact with the shipping regulator DGS for providing skill development training to locals and project-affected people in the Vadhan region, where a new greenfield port is coming up through selected Maritime Training Institutes (MTIs). The facility, being developed near Dahanu in Palghar district of Maharashtra at an investment of Rs 76,200 crore, is being developed by Vadhan Port Project Ltd (VPPL), a special purpose vehicle formed by Jawaharlal Nehru Port Authority (JNPA) holding a 74 per cent stake and Maharashtra Maritime Board owning the remaining 26 per cent. The pact between JNPA and the Directorate General of Shipping (DGS) is aimed at empowering local candidates from the Vadhan Port area by providing recognised mar-



itime qualifications in GP (General Purpose) Rating and certificate in maritime catering, enabling them to pursue careers as seafarers, the port operator said. Supported through JNPA's CSR funding, with an estimated cost of Rs 2-3 lakhs per candidate, the initiative will cover training fees, accommodation, and boarding, it said, adding collaborating with DG Shipping and MTIs, the program ensures high-quality training, including

shipboard experience, to create sustainable career pathways in the maritime sector while contributing to India's growing seafaring workforce. Besides this, another pact was signed between VPPL and the Dye Makers Association at Vadhan to provide exclusive branding opportunities to the Association, it said. "The signing of important Memorandums of Understanding and the start of the Vadhan Port skilling program represent an enormous step in achieving our goal of inclusive growth and community empowerment. These programs are aimed at establishing long-term employment possibilities and promoting economic growth in the Vadhan area, from giving youth skills as per their needs to providing branding, finance, and advanced training to dye manufacturers," said Unmesh Sharad Wagh, Chairman and Managing Director of JNPA and VPPL. The facility, once completed, is expected to create 1.2 million direct and indirect jobs. In addition to this, JNPA and VPPL will also be signing an MoU with Balasaheb Sawant Konkan Krishi Vidyapeeth for developing and implementing an integrated agricultural and horticulture plan for the selected villages in Dahanu and Palghar taluka of Palghar district as a part of the welfare activities for locals in and around greenfield Vadhan port project, it stat-

## Concord Enviro Systems' IPO to open on Dec 19; fixes price band of Rs 665-701/share

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

Concord Enviro Systems, an environmental engineering solutions firm, on Monday said it has set a price range of Rs 665-701 per share for its initial share-sale, which will open for public subscription on December 19. The initial share-sale is scheduled to close on December 23 and the bidding for anchor investors will open for a day on December 18, the company announced. The proposed IPO comprises a fresh issuance of equity shares worth Rs 175 crore and an Offer For Sale (OFS) of 46.41 lakh equity shares valued at Rs 325.33 crore, at the upper end of the price band, by promoters and an investor. Those selling shares in the OFS are, promoters -- Prayas Goel and Prarak Goel, promoter groups -- Namrata



At the upper end of the price band, the company's market capitalisation has been pegged at Rs 1,450 crore. Half of the issue has been reserved for qualified institutional buyers, 35 for retail investors and the remaining 15 per cent for non-institutional investors. Concord Enviro Systems is an integrated solutions provider for industrial waste water reuse and zero liquid discharge solutions, with an in-house position across the value chain. The company's reach extends to diverse regions with exports to countries in North America, Latin America, Africa, the Middle East, and Southeast Asia. Motilal Oswal Investment Advisors and Equirus Capital are the book running lead managers to the issue. The equity shares of the company are expected to be listed on December 27 on the NSE and BSE.

## Project of Rs. 35.5 lakh sanctioned to GNDU's Assistant Professor

PNS ■ AMRITSAR

A research project has been sanctioned to Dr. Amanpreet Kaur, Assistant Professor (Contractual), Department of Mathematics, Guru Nanak Dev University to develop efficient estimators of population parameters of sensitive study character in survey sampling using randomized response technique. The project is sponsored by the Department of Science and Technology, under WISE PDF Scheme that has sanctioned Rs. 35.5 lakh to carry out the research work under the mentorship of Dr. Lovleen Kumar Grover, Associate Professor,

Department of Mathematics, Guru Nanak Dev University, Amritsar. Dr. Palwinder Singh, Dean Academic Affairs said that this research will help in the development of estimators for population parameters of sensitive variables that may be used for government policy making decisions. Vice-Chancellor, Prof. Karamjeet Singh congratulated on her achievement. Prof. Palwinder Singh, Dean Academic Affairs and Prof. K.S. Kahlon, Registrar also congratulated her. Dr. Amanpreet Kaur is thankful to the Vice Chancellor & other officials for providing the infrastructure and support.

## GNDU Music Department pays tribute to Zakir Hussain

PNS ■ AMRITSAR

The Department of Visual and Performing Arts of the Guru Nanak Dev University organized a Tribute Ceremony on the occasion of the eternal departure of the World Renowned legendary Tabla Player of India, Ustad Zakir Hussain Khan Sahib. Dr. Rajesh Sharma, Head of the Department, while gaveling on the picture of late Ustad Zakir Hussain said that although Ustad Zakir Hussain Ji has left us physically but he will remain alive in the hearts and memories of every music lover due to his contribution to the field of music and giv-

ing a special place to Tabla playing as a solo Vadan. Along with this, he also motivated the students to move forward by learning and taking inspiration from the lives of these personalities. After this, the departmental faculty Dr. Murli Manohar, Sh. Siddhartha Chatterjee, Dr. Gavish, Dr. Harmeet Singh, Dr. Priyanka Arora, Dr. Ramandeep Kaur, S. Gunveer Singh and research scholars Satnam Singh, Hasandeep Singh, Krishan Singh and other students also paid their tributes to Ustad Zakir Hussain Ji and prayed that God may grant his soul a place in heaven.

## WPI inflation declines to 3-month low of 1.89 pc on cheaper food, RBI may cut rate in Feb

PTI ■ NEW DELHI,

Wholesale price based inflation declined to a 3-month low of 1.89 per cent in November on cheaper food items, and experts predicted a 0.25 per cent interest rate cut by the RBI in the policy review in February. The Wholesale Price Index (WPI) based inflation was 2.36 per cent in October 2024. It was 0.39 per cent in November, last year. In August, 2024, it was 1.25 per cent. As per the data, inflation in food items eased to 8.63 per cent in November, as against 13.54 per cent in October. The decline was led by a dip in vegetable inflation which stood at 28.57 per cent, as against 63.04 per cent in October.



Inflation in potato, however, continued to be high at 82.79 per cent, while in onion it fell sharply to 2.85 per cent in November. The fuel and power category witnessed a deflation of 5.83 per cent in November, against a deflation of 5.79 per cent in October. In manufactured items, inflation was 2 per cent

are likely to push December WPI inflation higher," Barclays said. As per the consumer price index data released last week, retail inflation moderated to 5.5 per cent in November, compared with 6.2 per cent in October. Barclays said this is within the monetary policy committee's (MPC) tolerance band of 2-6 per cent indicating that CPI inflation will be drifting closer to the 4 per cent target by March 2025. "We expect the MPC to cut the policy repo rate by 25bps in its February meeting. We are mindful of the almost new-looking MPC that will be in charge of this decision," Barclays said.

# Manchester United stuns Manchester City with 2-1 win

**AP ■ MANCHESTER**  
**A**mad Diallo struck a 90th-minute winner as Manchester United staged a stunning late comeback to beat Manchester City 2-1 in the Premier League.  
 Four-time defending champion City led the Manchester derby 1-0 going into the 88th minute at the Etihad Stadium. But the game was turned round in dramatic fashion as Bruno Fernandes leveled from the penalty spot and Diallo sealed victory for United — prompting head coach Ruben Amorim to declare “something magic happened.”  
 “It was a very tough match but we believe until the end. We managed to score. We needed that win. It was important for us and for our fans,” Amorim said. City fans jeered at the final whistle as their once dominant team’s woeeful run of form extended to one win and eight losses in 11 games.  
 “I’m the boss, I’m the manager and I’m not good enough. It’s as

simple as that,” Guardiola said.  
 It was a first derby victory for new United head coach Ruben Amorim, who led Sporting Lisbon to a 4-1 win against City in one of his last games in charge of the Portuguese club in November. But for a long time it looked like being a third-straight league loss for United after Josko Gvardiol’s headed goal in the 36th.  
 Fernandes was guilty of missing the target when through on goal in the second half and United struggled to create chances against a City team that rarely looked like adding to its lead. But in a dramatic end to the match, Diallo raced after an underhit backpass from Matheus Nunes. Nunes then brought down the United forward in the box and referee Anthony Taylor pointed to the penalty spot.  
 Fernandes made no mistake this time — sending Ederson the wrong way.  
 Moments later, Diallo ran onto a long pass from Lisandro Martinez, flicked the ball high and past Ederson before rolling it



into the net from a tight angle. “We have a lot to do but it was massive for our fans,” Amorim said.

United is 13th and five points behind fifth-place City, which has seen its title defense unravel during its losing run.

“This is a big club and in a big club when you lose eight in 10 (11) something wrong is happening,” Guardiola said.

**CHELSEA CHALLENGE**  
 Chelsea, in second, closed the gap on Liverpool to two points after a 2-1 win against Brentford.  
 It’s now seven straight wins in all competitions for Enzo Maresca’s team, which is unbeaten in 10. Its last league defeat was in October — a 2-1 loss to Liverpool.  
 Marc Cucurella scored in the 43rd and Nicolas Jackson made it 2-0 in the 80th for his ninth goal of the season.  
 Bryan Mbeumo scored for Brentford in the 90th and Cucurella was sent off for a second yellow card in added time. Chelsea is four points ahead of third-place Arsenal.  
**MARTIN FIRED**  
 Southampton fired manager Russell Martin after being routed 5-0 by Tottenham.  
 Last-place Southampton is nine points from safety and appears to be heading straight back to the second tier after earning promotion to the top flight last season.  
 The decision came on the same day as another relegation-

threatened team, Wolverhampton, fired head coach Gary O’Neil. Wolverhampton is second to last in 19th.  
 Spurs scored all five goals against Southampton before halftime at St Mary’s Stadium, with James Maddison getting two. Son Heung-min, Dejan Kulusevski and Pape Sarr also scored.  
 Tottenham moved up to 10th and is five points off the Champions League places.  
**SARR DOUBLE**  
 Ismaila Sarr scored twice as Crystal Palace beat Brighton 3-1 in the Premier League on Sunday. The forward also provided an assist for Trevoh Chalobah in the win at the Amex Stadium, which lifted Palace four points clear of the relegation zone.  
 Brighton is ninth and without a win in four matches.  
 Palace went ahead in the 27th minute through Chalobah, and Sarr doubled the lead for the visitors in the 33rd.  
 Sarr scored his second in the 82nd before Marc Guehi’s own-goal pulled one back for Brighton.

## Kerala Blasters sack head coach Mikael Stahre

**PTI ■ KOCHI**  
**K**erala Blasters FC on Monday announced the termination of services of their head coach Mikael Stahre with immediate effect after a string of poor performances by the club in the ongoing Indian Super League.  
 Assistant coaches Bjorn Westrom and Frederico Pereira Morais have also left the club, along with Stahre. “The club sincerely thanks Mikael, Bjorn, and Frederico for their contributions throughout their time with Kerala Blasters FC. We wish them nothing but success in their future endeavours,” the club said in a statement.  
 “The new head coach will be announced in due course.”  
 Till the new appointment is confirmed, reserve team head coach and head of youth development, Tomasz Tchorz, and assistant coach TG Purushothaman will take over the responsibility of managing the first team.  
 The 49-year-old Stahre, appointed ahead of the current season, enjoyed a promising



start in the Durand Cup, but the Blasters suffered a last-minute elimination in the quarter-finals against rivals Bengaluru FC.  
 However, Blasters’ ISL campaign under the Swede has been a challenging one. Kerala Blasters currently sit 10th in the table, with just three wins and two draws from their first 12 matches. They are on a three-match losing streak, managing only one win while losing six of their last seven games.  
 Four of their seven defeats have come at home. In total, the Blasters played 16 matches under Stahre (including four non ISL matches), managing only five wins while suffering eight defeats.

## ‘Completely and utterly blindsided’: Gillespie slams PCB for lack of communication

**PTI ■ SYDNEY**  
**F**ormer Australia pacer Jason Gillespie on Monday slammed the PCB, revealing that he stepped down as Pakistan’s Test head coach after being “completely and utterly blindsided” by the country’s cricket board.  
 Gillespie, whose contract was set to expire in 2026, resigned last week and he expressed his frustration over the lack of communication, which led him to feel that the Pakistan Cricket Board no longer wanted him in the role.  
 “There were certainly challenges. I went into the job eyes wide open, I want to make that really clear. I knew that, you know, Pakistan had cycled through a number of coaches in a pretty short space of time.  
 “The straw that broke the camel’s back, I suppose, was, as a head coach, you like to have clear communication with your employer,” Gillespie told ABC Sport.  
 “I was completely and utterly blindsided by a decision to not have a high-performance



coach,” he added. The PCB didn’t review the contract of Tim Nielsen, who was brought in on the recommendation of the former Aussie quick, as the high performance coach of the team.  
 “Tim Nielsen was told that his services were no longer required and I had absolutely zero communication from anyone about that.  
 “And I just thought after a number of other things that had gone on in the previous few months, that was probably the moment where I thought, ‘Well, I’m not

really sure if they actually want me to do this job or not.”  
 Adding to Gillespie’s frustration was the fact that the feedback given to him regarding Nielsen and the team’s performance was positive.  
 “I developed a really close relationship with the Test captain, Shan Masood, and felt we were certainly going in the right direction and things were going really well,” he said.  
 “All the feedback that I’d got or the feedback the PCB got was just how effective, you



## Women’s Champions League to wrap up group stage

**AP ■ LONDON**  
**T**he competitive imbalance in women’s club soccer in Europe will be underscored this week in the final round of Champions League group-stage matches where little is on the line because of the dominance of the continent’s top teams.  
 The eight teams advancing to the quarterfinals have already secured their spots with one round remaining: Lyon and Wolfsburg from Group A; Chelsea and Real Madrid from Group B; Bayern Munich and Arsenal from Group C; and Manchester City and Barcelona from Group D.  
 All are either established clubs in the women’s game — especially Lyon and Wolfsburg, the winners of nine of the 10 Champions League titles from 2011-2020 — or huge European clubs in men’s soccer who have started to really pour money and extra focus into their women’s teams in recent years.  
 Madrid’s women’s team, for example, was only founded in 2020.  
 The only thing needing to be settled across Tuesday and Wednesday is which teams qualify in first place and which progress as group runners-up, though there might not be any huge benefit either way given the high standard of the teams going through.  
 The qualified teams play each other this week, with only Group A fully decided as Lyon is guaranteed to finish in first place with Wolfsburg second.  
 The two meet in France on Tuesday.  
 In Group B on the same night, second-place Madrid hosts first-place Chelsea and can jump above the English team with a win courtesy of a superior goal difference.  
 On Wednesday, Arsenal hosts Bayern and is one point behind the visitors from Germany in Group C. Bayern just needs to avoid defeat to finish top. Also that night, Barcelona is at home to first-place Man City and must beat the English team by two goals or more to win Group D.  
 Growing gap The lopsided results in the fifth round of games highlighted the gap between the so-called bigger and smaller clubs in the Champions League.  
 The eight teams advancing to the knockout stage all won their games, scoring a combined 33 goals and conceding a combined three.  
 On the same night, Chelsea, Lyon and Wolfsburg each scored six goals.  
 Barcelona, the defending champion, has scored 23 goals in its five group games so far — including a 9-0 win over Hammarby and a 7-0 thrashing of St. Polten in its last two outings.  
 Of the teams in third or last place in their groups, only one — Roma — has more than three points.  
 The Champions League will expand next season to 18 teams in a single standings, with UEFA hoping for same uplift that the men’s Champions League has had since increasing to a 36-team league.

## FIFA apologises to Ukraine for Crimea map error at 2026 World Cup draw



**AP ■ ZURICH**  
**F**IFA apologised to the Ukrainian soccer federation for displaying a map during its World Cup qualifying draw that excluded Russia-occupied Crimea from the country’s territory.  
 “We fully understand the delicate sensitivity of this matter and while the incident was unintentional, we sincerely regret any concern it may have caused,” FIFA’s chief member association officer, Elkhann Mammadov, wrote in a letter

published Sunday by the Ukrainian soccer body. Ukraine was one of 54 national teams included in the draw Friday in Zurich for European qualifying groups for the 2026 World Cup. Russia, which has been banned from FIFA competitions because of the military invasion of Ukraine, has illegally occupied Crimea since 2014. The peninsula was not colored as part of Ukrainian territory in a graphic broadcast during the draw event at FIFA headquarters.

“Are you OK, (at)FIFACOM?” Ukraine government spokesman Heorhii Tykhyi wrote Saturday in a post on the social media platform X, adding: “We fixed the map for you and expect a public apology.”  
 Mammadov replied that the map was provided by an outside supplier and FIFA was reviewing how to “ensure such oversights do not recur in future.”  
 Ukraine was drawn into a qualifying group with either France or Croatia, plus Iceland and Azerbaijan. The group winner will advance directly to the World Cup being hosted by the United States, Canada and Mexico, and the runner-up will enter a playoff in March 2026.  
 FIFA and European soccer body UEFA banned Russian teams from international competitions February 2022, citing expected chaos because some European federations refuse to play games against Russia.

## Edoardo Bove says he’s ‘feeling good’ as he recovers from on-field collapse

**AP ■ FLORENCE**  
**F**lorentina midfielder Edoardo Bove said he is “feeling good” and that the support he received from fans, teammates and opponents helped him recover after being placed in a medically induced coma.  
 Bove collapsed on the field during a game against Inter Milan on Dec. 1.  
 “It’s in moments like these that I understand how genuine this sport truly is and how, beyond the results, competition and rivalries, we are all connected,” Bove posted on Instagram on Monday in his first public comments since the incident. “Connected by a bond that, once created, grows stronger during challenging times becoming almost unbreakable.  
 “I have experienced it firsthand in these last few days: the affection I’ve received, the warmth of the fans, the support from



teammates and opponents and the closeness of the ENTIRE football world gave me incredible strength and courage,” Bove added. “I felt surrounded by positive energy, which helped me stay calm and not feel the loneliness that often comes with situations like this.”  
 The 22-year-old Bove was released from the hospital on Friday but won’t be able to play in Italy again if he needs a defibrillator for his heart. Playing with a defibrillator is

prohibited in Italy. But Bove could follow former Inter Milan midfielder Christian Eriksen, who resumed his career in the English Premier League after he went into cardiac arrest while playing for Denmark at the European Championship in 2021 and had a defibrillator implanted.  
 “I’m feeling good and that’s the most important thing!” Bove said. “See you soon... On the pitch!”

# It’s not just about chess, there’s lot of emotional pressure too: Gukesh on world title

**PTI ■ CHENNAI**  
**H**is history-scripting world title was not just a result of good strategy on the chess board, said Indian Grandmaster D Gukesh on Monday, crediting mental conditioning coach Paddy Upton for helping him tame the “emotional pressure” of competing at the biggest stage.  
 The 18-year-old Gukesh, who defeated China’s Ding Liren to become the youngest ever owner of the world title, arrived here on Monday to a rousing welcome from enthusiastic fans and officials. “In a world championship, it’s not only about chess. There is a lot of mental and emotional pressure to deal with. Paddy’s

teachings helped me in that regard,” Gukesh said in a press meet organised by Velammal Vidyalaya, his childhood school.  
 Upton, a renowned mental conditioning coach, worked with Gukesh in the run-up to and during the the 14-game marathon event in Singapore. “The suggestions and the conversations I have had with him, have been very important for me and my development as a player,” he said.  
 Gukesh also detailed how his association started with the South African, who has the experience of working with the 2011 cricket World Cup-winning Indian cricket team and the national men’s hockey team that bagged a bronze at

the Paris Olympics. “Paddy has been a very important part of my team. After I won the Candidates (April), I asked Sandeep sir (Sandeep Singhal of Westbridge Capital) for a mental trainer,” Gukesh recalled.  
 “He immediately put me in touch with Paddy Upton, who has a lot of experience working with high-performance athletes,” said the youngster.  
 In an interview to PTI a day after Gukesh’s win, Upton had lauded the teenager’s “self-awareness.”  
 “I think that’s the thing that’s really stood out, his ability to recognise his thoughts and manage his mind and his understanding of how to do



so,” Upton said. “...He is a world champion because he was able to manage himself and remain focused and stay in the game even though he’s 0-1 down

right from the beginning. So that really is a mark of a champion,” he had stated.  
 Gukesh also thanked Tamil Nadu Chief Minister MK Stalin and Deputy CM

Udhayanidhi Stalin for supporting him in his chess journey.  
 “Definitely, there was a lot of support from the Tamil Nadu government. Honorable Chief Minister and Deputy Chief Minister invite me home and encourage me whenever I achieve something.  
 “The Tamil Nadu government sponsored me during the Chennai Grandmasters last year. They made all the arrangements. That’s how I won the tournament and qualified for the Candidates.  
 “If we get more support like this, I believe more chess players will come. I am very thankful to the Tamil Nadu government,” he said.  
 Gukesh is only the second Indian after the great

Viswanathan Anand to claim the world title. Anand played a pivotal role in shaping the teenager at his academy here. Accidental chess player Gukesh’s father Dr Rajnikanth, who is an ENT surgeon by profession, said he encouraged his son to join chess sessions in the school as a hobby.  
 “You have to have interest and hard work, otherwise nothing will happen. We did not plan to make him a chess player, but enrolled him in Velammal school chess class as part of the extra-curricular activity.  
 “But we supported him once he showed interest and worked hard. As a parent, we tried to give him as much exposure as possible. That’s

what I can suggest to other parents as well.  
 “We should try to give as much exposure as possible to what your children are interested in,” he added.  
 Rajnikanth said Gukesh likes to continuously play in tournaments to ensure that he always remains in touch with the sport.  
 “Some players play tournaments once in two months — one month preparation and next month playing in tournaments. As far as he (Gukesh) is concerned, games are his practice.  
 “He learns from his losses and wins. If I don’t give him a tournament for a month, he becomes restless.  
 That’s his choice,” he added.

