

31 Naxalites, 2 cops killed in encounter

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■
RAIPUR

In a major crackdown operation against the Left Wing Extremism, security forces gunned down 31 Naxalites, including 11 women during a fierce encounter in Chhattisgarh's Bijapur district on Sunday. Two security personnel were also killed and as many others injured in the face-off. More than 650 security personnel entered the Indravati National Park area from different sides and eliminated 31 Naxalites in their den, Chhattisgarh's Deputy Chief Minister Vijay Sharma said.

Chief Minister Vishnu Deo Sai said the end of Naxalism in the country and the state is certain. Under the leadership of Prime Minister Narendra Modi and Union Home Minister Amit Shah, the state will get rid of Naxalism by March 2026, he added. With this incident, 81 Naxalites have been gunned down by security forces in separate encounters in Chhattisgarh so far this year.

Responding to the operation, Union Home Minister Amit Shah said that Naxals will be eradicated by March 31, 2026 and no citizen of the country has to lose his life due to it. "I also reiterate my resolve that before 31 March, 2026, we will completely eradicate Naxalism from the country so that no citizen of the country has to lose his life due to it," he wrote on "X" in Hindi. The home minister said in the direction of making India Naxal-free, the security forces have achieved a big success in Bijapur, Chhattisgarh. The latest gunfight took place



Security forces during an anti-Naxal operation in Chhattisgarh

at a forest in Indravati National Park area in the morning when a joint team of personnel from different security forces was out on an anti-Naxalite operation, Inspector General of Police, Bastar Range, Sundarraj P said. Personnel belonging to the District Reserve Guard (DRG), Special Task Force (STF) and Bastar Fighters, all units of the state police, were involved in the operation, he said.

"So far, bodies of 31 Naxalites clad in 'uniform' have been recovered from the encounter site. Besides, a huge cache of weapons, including AK-47, INSAS, SLR and .303 rifles and Barrel Grenade Launchers (BGL), and explosives have also been seized from the site," the official said. Two security

personnel, one belonging to the state DRG and the other from the STF, were killed in the gunfight and two others suffered injuries, he said. The two injured jawans, reported to be out of danger, were being airlifted to a better medical facility for treatment, he said. Reinforcement has been rushed to the spot and search operation is still underway in the area, he added. Security forces have been continuously getting success in this direction and moving rapidly towards achieving the goal. The end of Naxalism, which is like "cancer", from the country and the state is certain, he said in a statement.

"The sacrifice of our soldiers will not go in vain. I pray to

God for the departed souls to rest in peace and provide strength to the bereaved families, and for the speedy recovery of the injured jawans," Sai said.

Hailing the security forces, Deputy CM Vijay Sharma said the national park area in Bijapur was considered as a safe haven for Naxalites, where more than 650 security personnel entered from different sides and eliminated 31 Naxalites in their den. All the deceased Naxalites were clad in uniform and automated weapons were recovered from them, he told reporters.

"The IEDs (Improvised Explosive Devices) laid (by Naxalites) on the path of development of Bastar will be

cleared and we are working with full commitment to ensure basic amenities like schools, hospitals, water, road, anganwadis (government-run women and child care centres) and mobile towers reach the entire region," he said.

Out of the 81 Naxalites gunned down in the state so far this year, 65 were killed in the Bastar division comprising seven districts, including Bijapur. Last year, 219 Naxalites were neutralised by security forces in separate encounters in Chhattisgarh, according to police. On October 4 last year, 38 Naxalites were killed following an encounter in Abhujmaad area along the Narayanpur-Dantewada inter-district border in the Bastar region.



Delhi BJP President Virendra Sachdeva, BJP Delhi in-charge Baijayant Panda, BJP National General Secretary BL Santosh, BJP MPs from Delhi and newly-elected MLAs before a meeting after the victory in Delhi Assembly elections, at the Delhi state office in New Delhi
Photo: Ranjan Dimri/The Pioneer

BJP huddles for new Delhi CM

RAJESH KUMAR ■ NEW DELHI

After the party's historic victory in the Delhi Assembly elections, senior BJP leaders began crucial meetings to find its leader to head the next government in the national capital as party president JP Nadda met Union Home Minister Amit Shah on Sunday where key decisions regarding the future of Delhi's governance were discussed.

BJP's strong performance across all regions and communities in the polls has left the party with a wide pool of potential chief ministerial candidates. With larger political messaging often guiding the party's choices in choosing its chief ministers in different states, insiders believe that Delhi would be no exception. The BJP won 48 seats in the 70-member Assembly defeating the AAP which secured 22 seats. This was the BJP's first win in Assembly polls in 27 years and the AAP's first defeat after three successive

victories since 2013.

The BJP is also planning a grand swearing-in ceremony after Prime Minister Narendra Modi returns from his visit to the US after February 13. PM Modi will be on a two-day visit to meet US President Donald Trump on February 12 and 13. The swearing-in ceremony will be a grand event that will mark the BJP's return to power in Delhi after 27 years and BJP is planning to invite all the major leaders and chief ministers of the NDA alliance, celebrities and renowned personalities. Delhi BJP chief Virendra Sachdeva wrote to Lieutenant-Governor V K Saxena, seeking time from him for a meeting with the 48 newly-elected party MLAs. "I along with the BJP MPs from Delhi and our newly elected 48 MLAs wish to meet you at an early date. Please, allow an appointment at an early date according to your convenience," the letter said. Earlier today, AAP leader and Chief Minister Atishi

tendered her resignation to the Delhi L-G, who has asked her to continue till the ruling party stakes claim to form the government. Sachdeva also held

The BJP, which went to the election without announcing a Chief Ministerial face, has started high-level meetings to decide the head of government, with five leaders emerging as key contenders. With larger political messaging often guiding the party's choices in choosing its chief ministers in different states, political watchers believe that Delhi would be no exception. While visible faces such as Parvesh Verma, a leader from the Jat community who defeated AAP supremo Arvind Kejriwal, and seasoned organisational leaders like Satish Upadhyay, Vijender Gupta, Ashish Sood and Pawan Sharma are being talked about, the BJP has a history of elevating leaders with a relatively low public profile.

Manipur ready for change of guard



CM N Biren Singh hands over the letter of resignation from the post of Chief Minister to Governor Ajay Kumar Bhalla at the Raj Bhawan in Imphal accompanied by party MLAs

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■
IMPHAL/NEW DELHI

In a swift turn of events in months of strife-torn Manipur, Chief Minister N Biren Singh on Sunday tendered his resignation to Governor Ajay Kumar Bhalla at the Raj Bhawan in Imphal. Singh's resignation came hours after he returned from Delhi after his meeting with Home Minister Amit Shah. Through his resignation the CM urged the central government "to continue the stringent and fool-proof revised mechanism of Free Movement Regime (FMR) with the biometric being stringently applied time bound and faster border which is underway." He also requested the Centre to continue the "crackdown on

border infiltration and to formulate policy for the deportation of the illegal immigrants and the fight against drugs and narco terrorism."

"It has been an honour to serve the people of Manipur thus far. I am extremely grateful to the central government for time actions, interventions, developmental work and implementation of various projects for safeguarding the interests of every single Manipuri," Biren said in his letter.

"My sincere request to the central government through your good office is to continue with the same. I take the opportunity to enumerate the most important ones of them... To maintain the territorial integrity of Manipur which

has a rich and diverse civilizational history over thousands of years," the letter added.

On Saturday, Singh convened a meeting with BJP-led ruling alliance MLAs at the CM Secretariat. The meeting was held in the wake of the opposition Congress seeking to move a no-confidence motion against the government led by Singh.

More than 250 people have been killed and thousands rendered homeless since ethnic violence broke out in the state in May 2023.

Meanwhile, state BJP president A Sharda confirmed that chief minister N Biren Singh tendered his resignation to governor in the interest of the people of the state. "We are yet to receive further instructions from the party," he told reporters.

Sharda asserted that Singh worked tirelessly for the development and integrity of the state. "He has been trying to bring peace in the state since the ethnic violence broke out on May 3, 2023. The BJP will continue to work hard for the integrity of the state," she added.

Congress termed N Biren Singh's resignation as "belated" and said people of the state were now awaiting a visit by "our frequent-flier Prime Minister" Narendra Modi.

BUDDH SUTRA



Tibetan Buddhist monks participate in Kangyur (the Tibetan name for the Buddhist sutras) procession at Mahabodhi temple in Bodhi Gaya

Atishi quits, Delhi Assembly dissolved

STAFF REPORTER ■
NEW DELHI

A day after Capital's verdict, Aam Aadmi Party (AAP) leader and Chief Minister Atishi tendered her resignation to the Lieutenant-Governor Vinai Kumar Saxena who has asked her to continue till the winning side BJP stakes claim to form the government.

Atishi, who retained her Kalkaji seat, handed over her resignation to Saxena at Raj Niwas. Later, the Lt Governor also dissolved the Seventh Legislative Assembly of the national Capital. The notification, dated February 7, stated, "In exercise of the power conferred upon me by sub-section (2)(b) of section 6 of the Government of National Capital Territory of Delhi Act, 1991, I, Vinai Kumar Saxena, Lieutenant Governor of Delhi, hereby dissolve the Seventh Legislative Assembly of the National Capital Territory of Delhi with effect from 8th February, 2025."

Besides, the Election Commission of India (ECI) officially concluded the process of Delhi Legislative Assembly Election 2025, with the submission of the "Due Constitution Notification" containing the



AAP leader Atishi submits her resignation as Delhi Chief Minister to Lt Governor VK Saxena in New Delhi

list of newly elected candidates to the Lieutenant Governor. The same was submitted to LG by Ajoy Kumar, Principal Secretary of the ECI and R Alice Vaz, Chief Electoral Officer of Delhi. Also present on the occasion were B C Patra, Secretary, ECI, and Rajesh Kumar, Special Chief Electoral Officer of Delhi. Atishi served as Delhi's Chief Minister for nearly five months. She took oath as chief minister in September last year after AAP convenor and her predecessor Arvind Kejriwal resigned from the post amid corruption allegations against him.

Five women candidates, including outgoing chief minister Atishi won in the Delhi Assembly poll 2025, down from eight in the 2020 elections. Atishi is the only woman candidate of AAP who won this time. The BJP is expected to stake claim to power next week after Prime Minister Narendra Modi returns from a foreign visit, party leaders said.

In a related development, newly-elected MLAs of AAP met party supremo Arvind Kejriwal at his Ferozshah Road residence a day after the party faced drubbing in the Delhi assembly election, winning only 22 out of the total 70 seats it contested.

Dry spell to cast on Shimla apple variety

PTI ■ SHIMLA

A prolonged dry spell has got Shimla farmers worrying about the apple crop, which is now threatened by a hampered production. Desired cooling hours (1,200 to 1,600 below 7 degrees Celsius) for traditional varieties and 600 hours for early varieties have not come by this season. Farmers were also restricted from new plantations due to unfavourable weather conditions. Fruit Vegetable Flower Growers Association President Harish Chauhan told PTI on Sunday. About 90 per cent of apple orchardists in the state are still on traditional varieties, while the remaining have adopted high density plantations. "Snow during winter months also kills insects and diseases but we are

witnessing a one-month shift in weather for the past three years which has affected apple production," Chauhan said.

The state saw a rain deficit of 97 per cent in October last year, 99 per cent in November, and 84 per cent this January, the ninth lowest since 1901, Meteorological expert Sandeep Sharma said.

In all, the rain deficit was 41 per cent in the post-monsoon season (October to December), with December the only exception with 21 per cent of excess rain. Rain deficit from February 1 to 9 was 38 per cent, with the state receiving 16.2 mm of precipitation against a normal of 26.3 mm, the Met said.

Sufficient chilling hours and moisture during winters is essential for a good apple crop, while hailstorms at flowering stage prove harmful.

The temperature has to remain below 7 degrees for appropriate chilling, which varies with latitude as the apple growing area falls mainly in the temperate zone, according to scientists.

An increase in temperature tends to harm the apple production, while early spouting in stone fruit in low hills could affect the yield and the crop, said Sujaat Chauhan, an apple orchardist from Sandhu village.

Farmers had dug pots in several areas for new plantation but a dry spell that led to less moisture in the land halted the process, says Sushil Dhalta, another apple grower.

The cost of plantation is high as one plant costs between Rs 150-200, he said. "We were unable to sow the peas crop due to dry spell and are hoping to see rain and snow in February," another farmer, Rajhuber said.

Climate change affects arrival of winged guests

T K ROY ■ NEW DELHI

Global climate change has impacted the arrival of migratory birds to National Zoological Park (NZP) wetlands here this month besides several such habitats all over the country. However, NZP still managed to welcome few species of migratory water birds including Common Teal, Common Sandpiper and Great Cormorant. Sharing this information, eminent ecologist T K Roy said on Wednesday National Zoological Park (NZP) has cluster of four smaller wetlands which support the habitat for water birds both resident and migratory and especially breeding bird Painted Stork's large breeding colony since past many decades. Asian Waterbird Census (AWC), part of International Waterbird



Census recorded this year partially lesser water bird species diversity, he said. Giving details, Roy said 19 species of total population 609 includes 16 resident species and three migratory species in comparison to AWC 2024 i.e. 17 species of total population 1,249 includes 15 resident species and 02 migratory species. In 2025, among three migratory species includes only one Common Sandpiper, one Great

Cormorant, three Common Teals and among 16 resident species largely 382 Painted Storks, 58 Indian Cormorants, 37 Little Egrets, 41 Great White Pelicans, 19 Indian Spot-billed Ducks and 19 Common Moorhen in comparison to last year (2024) among 15 migratory species largely Painted Storks 985, Indian Cormorants 127, Great White Pelicans 46, Common Moorhen 17, Black-headed Ibis 12, Indian spot-billed Duck 10.

Roy said Wetlands International's annual Asian Waterbird Census (AWC) part of the global International Waterbird Census is carried out in the month of January in 27 countries together in Asia and Australasia including India.

This exercise includes active volunteers under coordination of the AWC State Coordinators as per the confirmed annual dates by National Coordinator. AWC supports the conservation and management of wetland and waterbirds globally.

The AWC here was conducted on January at the smaller wetlands of NZP with active support of NZP Director. Participants included serious birders, professor as volunteer from Amity International University, Ramanujan College, NZP Curator.

Farmers' role crucial in India's development: VP Dhankhar

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ JAIPUR/NEW DELHI

Vice President Jagdeep Dhankhar on Sunday said that no one can undermine the role of farmers in India's journey towards development. Addressing the Akhil Mewar Region Jat Mahasabha in Chittorgarh, the vice-president said the farmers possess political strength and economic capability, adding they should not depend on anyone's help. "When the economic situation of farmers improves, the country's situation improves. After all, farmers are the providers and they should not look to anyone or depend on anyone for help because farmers with their strong hands possess political strength and economic capability," Dhankhar said. "No matter what



happens, no matter how many obstacles arise, no one can undermine the role of farmers in India's journey towards development. Today's governance system bows to the farmers," he added. Remembering the Jat reservation movement that took place 25 years ago, the vice-president urged that never forget the support and efforts of this society gave social justice. Today the results of that effort are visible in the administrative services of the country and the state, he added. Encouraging the farmers to take advantage of Agricultural Science Centers, Dhankhar said, "There are over 730 Agricultural Science Centers to help farmers. Don't leave them alone, go there and ask them. What services will you offer us? Learn about new technologies and government policies. The vice-president empha-

sised the farmers' participation in trade and value addition of agricultural products. "Why isn't the farmer increasing the value of their products? Several businesses are running on the products of farmers, like flour mills, oil mills and many more. We should collaborate and make sure the farmer focuses on livestock. I feel great joy when dairies expand. There should be more growth in this sector," he said. Urging the youth to engage in agricultural business, Dhankhar said, "My appeal is to farmers and to the sons and daughters of farmers agriculture production is the world's largest and most precious trade. Why are farmers not involved in the trade of their products? Why aren't they participating in it? Our youth is talented."

Parliamentary panel calls for security assessment of Indian missions abroad

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

A Parliamentary panel has recommended that the Ministry of External Affairs (MEA) should conduct a "comprehensive security assessment" of all missions and posts of India taking into account the geopolitical situation, potential threats and vulnerabilities in host countries. In its report, the Committee on External Affairs has also noted that India currently lacks resident missions in 42 countries. While acknowledging the challenges involved in establishing new missions, the committee recommended "accelerating efforts to bridge these gaps, particularly in countries where India has significant economic or strategic interests or a large diaspora presence". The fourth report of the committee on external affairs (2024-25) on demands for grants (2024-25) of the Ministry of External Affairs' was presented in

Parliament last week. The panel is headed by Congress MP Shashi Tharoor. The committee further said in its report that it has also "taken note of the criteria" for establishing new missions, focusing on economic partnerships, strategic cooperation, diaspora engagement and multilateral diplomacy. "The committee has also been informed about ongoing efforts to operationalise missions in other strategic locations such as Fukuoka (Japan), Kazan (Russia) and Yekaterinburg (Russia) and future plans for opening five missions in Europe and Latin America and Caribbean regions," it said. The parliamentary panel has made a slew of other recommendations including on the security of Indian missions abroad in view of the geopolitical situation and other factors. "In view of recent developments, the committee feels that the security of Indian missions and posts abroad is paramount for

ensuring the safety of personnel, the protection of sensitive information and the continuity of diplomatic functions," the report said. The MEA has informed the panel that the safety and security of Indian missions and posts is "continuously reviewed". The committee has recommended that "the ministry should conduct a comprehensive security assessment of all missions/posts taking into account the geopolitical situation, potential threats and vulnerabilities in host countries", the report said. Adequate resources should also be allocated for the protection of physical and digital infrastructure of the Indian missions, it added. The recommendations assume salience given the situation in countries like Bangladesh as also in parts of West Asia, and with New Delhi flagging in the last several months the issue of space being provided to anti-India activities in Canada that has affected the bilateral ties.

AIIMS to acquire automated biomedical waste conversion rig

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

The All India Institute of Medical Sciences (AIIMS) is all set to get an automated biomedical waste conversion rig that can disinfect pathogenic biomedical waste such as blood, urine, sputum and laboratory disposables, without the use of costly and energy-intensive incinerators. Science and Technology Minister Jitendra Singh will formally commission the waste conversion rig, 'Srijanam', developed by CSIR-National Institute for Interdisciplinary Science and Technology, Thiruvananthapuram, on Monday. The prototype equipment, with a daily capacity of 400 kg, can handle 10 kg degradable medical waste per day in the initial phase and convert it into soil additives. "With its potential to transform treated waste into value-added soil additives with minimal human intervention, our technology provides a safer solution for healthcare facilities, avoids



the risk of spills and occupational exposure, and assists in preventing uncontrolled spread of infectious microbes," said C Anandharamkrishnan, Director, CSIR (NIIST). The technology, once validated, will be ready for full-scale implementation after securing approval from competent authorities. Through this technology,

CSIR-NIIST aims to provide an innovative and alternative solution for the safe, inexpensive and environment-friendly disposal of pathogenic biomedical waste, Anandharamkrishnan said. The technology has been validated by expert third parties for its antimicrobial action and non-toxic nature of the treated material. Incineration is a costly, ener-

gy-intensive strategy that forces the stakeholders to adopt simpler and cheaper, but sometimes illegal means, to dispose of biomedical waste. The CSIR-NIIST technology can also disinfect laboratory disposables for direct recycling. Soil studies have confirmed that the treated biomedical waste is superior to organic fertilizers like vermicompost. India produces 743 tonnes of biomedical waste daily, which presents a significant challenge for proper management and disposal. Improper segregation, open dumping, open burning and inadequate incineration lead to severe health hazards, such as the release of harmful human carcinogens, particulate matter and ash residues. Increased biomedical waste generation demands more transportation facilities, increasing the risk of accidents and spills. The WHO has also emphasised the importance of innovative and alternative protocols for pathogenic biomedical waste disposal, a statement from CSIR-NIIST said.

President Murmu to take holy dip in Sangam

PNS ■ MAHAKUMBH NAGAR

President Droupadi Murmu, the First Citizen of India, is set to visit the sacred land of Prayagraj and take the holy dip in Sangam on Monday. During her visit, which will last over eight hours, she will experience the Mahakumbh's grandeur and spiritual significance. She will also offer prayers at the revered Akshayvat and Bade Hanuman Temple. Uttar Pradesh Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath will also be present on this occasion. President Murmu will begin her day at the Sangam Nose, where she will take a ceremonial dip at the Triveni Sangam, reinforcing the deep-rooted faith in Sanatan Dharma. Notably, the country's first President, Dr Rajendra Prasad, had also taken a holy dip during the Mahakumbh in the past. President Droupadi Murmu will then visit the sacred Akshayvat tree, which is considered a symbol of immortality in Sanatan culture, and offer her prayers. The site holds great signifi-



cance in Hinduism and is mentioned in ancient scriptures. She will also visit the Bade Hanuman Temple, where she will pray for the well-being and prosperity of the nation. Supporting the initiative of Prime Minister Narendra Modi and Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath to integrate religious events with modern technology, President Murmu will visit the Digital Mahakumbh Experience

Center. This center provides detailed information about the Mahakumbh Mela through advanced digital tools, allowing devotees from India and abroad to experience the grandeur of the event more closely. The President is scheduled to leave Prayagraj for New Delhi in the evening. In light of the President's visit, strict security arrangements have been put in place across the city.

Jail gets fake Presidential order to free murder accused

BISWAJEET BANERJEE ■ LUCKNOW

Saharanpur police have launched an investigation after a forged document, allegedly issued in the name of the President of India, was sent to the district jail in an attempt to secure the release of a murder accused. Jail authorities grew suspicious and flagged the fraudulent order before any action could be taken. According to Senior Jail Superintendent Satyaprakash, the fake release order was for an inmate named Ajay, who is currently facing trial in a murder case. The document was purportedly issued by the "President's Court," a non-existent judicial body. Upon verification, jail officials confirmed that the order was a forgery, prompting immediate action.

VHP calls for uniform law governing religious donations for all faiths

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ PRAYAGRAJ/NEW DELHI

Alok Kumar, the international president of the Vishva Hindu Parishad (VHP), on Sunday urged the Centre to enact a uniform law governing religious donations for all faiths. Speaking after a three-day meeting of the VHP here, Kumar questioned the existence of separate laws for religious donations. "When Muslims donate land to Allah, it becomes Waqf property. But what happens when Hindus donate to temples, Christians to churches, or Sikhs to gurdwaras? Why are there different laws for different religions," he asked. Referring to the Waqf Act of 1954, he claimed two Congress Rajya Sabha members questioned the then-Law Minister about having a separate law for Muslims. "The Minister had said he was considering a common law for all. Now the time has come for the government to implement such a law," Kumar said.



On the issue of "reclaiming" temples in Kashi and Mathura, the VHP functionary said, "We have assured the Hindu community that we will take all constitutional steps to regain these temples." The meeting also discussed the issue of "freeing" Hindu temples from government control. Kumar said temples across various states have been under government control for 208 years, with laws mandating that 12 per

cent of temple revenue be deposited in government coffers as administrative expenses. He cited a gathering at Vijayawada in Andhra Pradesh attended by "2.5 Lakh people" to demand temple freedom, and announced plans for similar large-scale meetings in north and South India in the coming months. "We will meet the Chief Ministers and legislators of different states to submit memorandums on this issue," he said.

Kumar emphasised that temple governance should remain in the hands of devotees, with representation from all sections of society, including Scheduled Castes and women. He also claimed that if temples were freed from government control, they could generate an additional ₹1 Lakh Crore in revenue for welfare initiatives for Hindus, such as healthcare, religious education, and temple maintenance.

On Waqf properties, Kumar expressed satisfaction with the government's recent actions and mentioned the VHP's recommendation to a Joint Parliamentary Committee (JPC) on the Waqf Amendment Bill that Waqf claims should not apply to the scheduled tribal areas. The JPC has considered our suggestion and recommended it," he said. On the demand from certain quarters to declare India a Hindu Rashtra, Kumar said, "There is no need for such a declaration as India is already a Hindu Rashtra. We do not seek a state with an explicitly religious constitution." The meeting was attended by representatives from across India and abroad, including from the UK, the US, Canada, Germany, Hong Kong, Mauritius, South Africa, France, Thailand, Nepal, Bangladesh and Guyana. Senior RSS leaders Dattatreya Hosabale and Bhaiyaji Joshi, along with religious figures like Swami Paramanand and Buddhist scholar Lama Choshpel Zotpa, were also present.

Ex-CM Nishank's daughter accuses film producers of ₹4 Crore fraud

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ DEHRADUN

Former Union minister and ex-Uttarakhand chief minister Ramesh Pokhriyal Nishank's daughter Aarushi Nishank has accused two Mumbai-based film producers of duping her of ₹4 Crore after promising her a role in a movie. However, the two film producers have termed the allegations as "false". On the basis of a complaint filed by Aarushi Nishank, an FIR has been lodged against the two under various sections of the BNS, including extortion, cheating and fraud, forgery, criminal intimidation and criminal conspiracy, investigating officer sub-inspector Manmohan Singh Negi said here. In the complaint, she has alleged that Mansi Varun Bagla and Varun Pramod Kumar Bagla offered her an important role in a Hindi film they were producing



and lured her to invest ₹5 Crore in it after promising big returns in the movie's earnings. Trusting them, she initially transferred ₹2 Crore to the accused through her firm Himshree Films. She also made additional payments to them subsequently bringing the total amount to ₹4 Crore, the complaint alleged. However, the two later informed her that she had been replaced

by another actor in the movie and its shoot in India had been completed, she alleged. Aarushi Nishank asked the two to return her money but they refused to do so and also allegedly threatened her. Aankhon Ki Gustakhiyan - the movie in which Aarushi was offered a role - starred Vikrant Massey and Shanaya Kapoor in lead roles.

IIT Madras to host third edition of IINvenTiv expo



PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

The third edition of IINvenTiv, a national research and development expo, will feature projects not just from IITs but also NITs, IISc Bengaluru and IISERs this time, according to IIT Madras

Director V Kamakoti. The expo scheduled from February 28 to March 1 is being hosted by IIT Madras. It will be inaugurated by Union Education Minister Dharmendra Pradhan, with special emphasis on technologies in mature Technology Readiness Level

(TRL) stages, which are ready for commercialisation and can be transferred to the industry during the event itself. "This time IINvenTiv will feature research and development projects from all the IITs, NITs, IISc and IISERs besides top government and private engineering institutes that rank within the top 50 in NIRE. The primary objective is to increase awareness among industry of these technological breakthroughs and achieve better industry-academia collaboration," Kamakoti said. "Over 300 exhibits from participating institutions will be featured at the with a good representation from startups that have been initiated based on the R&D from these institutions. Special emphasis would be placed on technologies in mature TRL stages which are ready for commercialisation and can be transferred to the industry during the

event itself," he added. IINvenTiv is a flagship event of the Ministry of Education, which was first held in 2022 at IIT Delhi feature exhibits only from Indian Institutes of Technology (IITs). The second edition of the event with participating institutions from top 50 of NIRE, apart from IITs, NITs, IISc and IISERs, was held at IIT Hyderabad last year. The highlights of the third edition include release of a coffee table book on leading technological innovations from Indian higher education institutions and a "chintan shivir". "A Chintan Shivir or brainstorming session will be organised for each thematic area, featuring leading experts from government, industry, academia and start-ups, with each session featuring a lead talk followed by a discussion on what is the current research and development, focus and industry need, a rapporteur from each session will be responsible for drafting an

outcome paper that will be presented at the closing of the event," Kamakoti said. "The focus in these discussions would be on the specific needs of the industry and how academic institutions can gear their research efforts to meet these requirements. The role of government and start-ups will add to the discussion," he said. The thematic areas that would be covered include artificial intelligence and machine learning technologies, aviation, defence and space, marine technology, medical and healthcare engineering, rural technology, smart cities and infrastructure, advanced manufacturing (industry 4. and 5.0) and circularity and sustainability. A coffee table book on leading technological innovations from Indian higher education institutions, which have led to great impacts on the industry, will be released during the event.

Sale, consumption of liquor, non-veg food banned in Katra

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ JAMMU

Authorities have extended two more months of the ban on the sale, possession and consumption of liquor and non-vegetarian food in Katra, the base camp for pilgrims visiting Mata Vaishno Devi shrine in Jammu and Kashmir's Reasi district, officials said on Sunday. The prohibition will be enforced on the 12-km track from Katra to the holy cave on the Trikuta hill and adjoining areas, they said and added that the order would remain in force for two months from the date of its issuance, unless revoked earlier. Katra sub-divisional magistrate Piyush Dhotra has prohibited the sale, possession and consumption of liquor and non-vegetarian food, under Section 163 of the



Bharatiya Nagarik Suraksha Sanhita, the officials said. Besides the track, the prohibition would be applicable in villages within a distance of up to two Km on either sides of the track, including Arli, Hansali and Matyal villages, within 200 metres on either sides of Katra-Tikri road, including villages Chamba, Serli and Bhagta and within 200 metres on either side

of Katra-Jammu road including villages Kundrorian, Kotli Bajalian, Nomain and Maghal, the officials said. The ban also covers 200 metres on both sides of Katra-Reasi road from Katra to Nau Devian and Aghar Jitto and Nau Devian markets, within 200 metres on either side of railway station Katra-Sool Road and within 100 metre on either side of Panthal-Domail road.

BJP's win in UP by-elections boosts CM Yogi's leadership

BISWAJEET BANERJEE ■ LUCKNOW

With the victory in Milkipur, the BJP and Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath have secured their eighth win in Uttar Pradesh by-elections within the last two and a half months. The NDA's success in eight out of 10 seats reinforces its dominance in state politics and signals continued public support for Yogi Adityanath's governance, law-and-order policies, and welfare schemes.

Political analyst Dr Rajeev Pandey sees these results as a decisive endorsement of the BJP's leadership in Uttar Pradesh. "The BJP has not just won these by-elections; it has dismantled the opposition's strongholds," he said. "A victory margin of over 1.44 lakh votes in Kunderki is not just a win-it is a statement. The electorate is clearly standing with Yogi Adityanath."

One of the most significant turn-



BJP workers celebrate party's victory in UP by-polls. PTI

around happened in Katehari, where the BJP had struggled for over three decades. Dharmaraj Nishad's victory over SP's Shobhavati Verma by 34,514 votes marked a historic shift. "Katehari has been a challenge for the BJP for years, but this result shows that Yogi Adityanath's

governance model is breaking barriers," said political commentator Anil Verma. "The party is making inroads even in places where it had little influence before." The Kunderki seat, previously held by the SP, became a battleground after the sitting MLA was elected to Parliament.

Yogi Adityanath personally campaigned to turn the tide, and BJP's Ramveer Singh Thakur delivered a crushing defeat to SP's Mohammad Rizwan by over 1.44 lakh votes. "This was a prestige battle," said senior journalist Pankaj Mishra. "For years, Kunderki was an SP bastion, but

now the BJP has stamped its authority here." In Milkipur, Chandra Bhanu Paswan's win by 61,710 votes further weakened the SP's grip. The constituency, once a swing seat, now appears to be solidly in BJP's camp. "This is the third time the BJP has won Milkipur. It's no longer a coincidence-it's a trend," said Dr Pandey. "The opposition must rethink its strategy if it hopes to challenge the BJP in 2027."

Apart from these key victories, the BJP also secured wins in Ghaziabad, Khair, Phulpur, and Majhawan, while its ally Rashtriya Lok Dal (RLD) won Meerapur. The results, analysts say, set the stage for the 2027 assembly elections. "The message is clear-Uttar Pradesh voters prefer stability, strong leadership, and a party that delivers on its promises," said Verma. "The opposition has a lot of ground to cover before the next big election."

Portion of Kushinagar Mosque demolished after stay order expires

BISWAJEET BANERJEE ■ LUCKNOW



In a major operation in Kushinagar, Uttar Pradesh, officials dismantled a section of the 26-year-old Madani Mosque, citing unauthorised construction on government-owned land. The demolition commenced at 10 AM on February 9, following the expiration of a court-issued stay order a day earlier.

The mosque, built in 1999 within the Hata Municipality area, was originally sanctioned as a two-story structure. However, additional floors and a basement were later constructed without approval. That same year, Hindu leader Ram Bachan Singh raised objections over the unauthorised expansion, but no immediate action was taken. The matter resurfaced on December 18, 2023, prompting authorities to launch an inquiry into the structure's legality.

Following the investigation, municipal officials issued three notices to the mosque's management on December 23, 2023, seeking relevant documentation. The management failed to provide the necessary paper-

work, leading authorities to declare the building unauthorised and order its demolition. The mosque's representatives challenged the decision in the High Court, obtaining a stay order that remained in effect until February 8, 2025. With the legal protection no longer in place, the administration proceeded with the demolition. To maintain security during the operation, six bulldozers were deployed, and extensive law enforcement measures were put in place. Personnel from ten police stations, along with a bat-

talion of the Provincial Armed Constabulary (PAC), were stationed at the site. Authorities also set up barricades and sealed off a 500-meter radius around the mosque to prevent disturbances. Reactions to the demolition have been mixed. Some locals support the move, arguing that it upholds zoning regulations and property laws. Others, however, have expressed concerns over how the situation was handled, emphasising the importance of dialogue and legal procedures in such matters.

Ittija Mufti meets family of youth who died by suicide in Kathua



PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ JAMMU

PDP leader Ittija Mufti on Sunday met the family of a youth who recently committed suicide after alleged torture by police over his suspected links with terrorists in Jammu and Kashmir's Kathua district, party leaders said.

This comes a day after Ittija claimed that she and her mother Mehbooba Mufti had been

placed under house arrest. Makhhan Din (25), a Gujjar youth from Billawar area of Kathua, ended his life by consuming insecticide at his home on Tuesday evening and recorded the act on a video claiming innocence. He denied any connection with terrorists, prompting separate probes by the police and the local administration.

PDP president and former chief minister Mehbooba Mufti wrote on social media, "Finally Ittija

managed to reach Bilawar in Kathua to meet the bereaved family of Makhhan Din, who was driven to suicide by police torture." "It's deeply saddening that she (Ittija) had to endure so many obstacles and travel like a fugitive just to offer comfort to the victim's family. The ruling party has shirked responsibility conveniently attributing all issues to the Lieutenant Governor. However, as a responsible opposition PDP will always strive to reach out to the people to offer solace," she said. On Saturday, Ittija claimed in a social media post that she and her mother were under house arrest in Srinagar.

"I intended to visit Kathua to meet Makhhan Din's family and (I) am not being allowed to even move out. Nothing has changed in Kashmir even after elections. Now even comforting the families of victims is being criminalised," she said on X.

Ham radio users detect suspicious signals along Indo-Bangladesh border

PTI ■ KOLKATA

Amateur ham radio operators have picked up suspicious late-night radio signals in coded Bengali, Urdu and Arabic along the Indo-Bangladesh border in South Bengal over the last two months, raising concerns about possible extremist activities, officials said.

The development comes amidst ongoing unrest in Bangladesh and growing anti-India rhetoric in the neighbouring country. The incident first came to light in December last when Ham radio operators detected unauthorised communications in coded Bengali, Arabic, and Urdu from Basirhat and Bongaon in North 24 Parganas, as well as from the Sunderbans in South 24 Parganas.

Alarmed by these transmissions, the operators informed the Ministry of Communications. The matter was subsequently forwarded to the International Monitoring Station (Radio) in Kolkata for tracking. Ham radio operators have also



been asked to monitor and report if similar signals are detected again. "These suspicious radio signals have been picked up between 1 AM and 3 AM. The transmissions are in coded Bengali (with a Bangladeshi accent), Urdu, and Arabic. Sometimes, there are signals in another language that we couldn't identify. Whenever we asked those communicating to identify themselves, they went silent," Ambarish Nag Biswas, secretary of the West Bengal Radio Club said.

According to Biswas, the first such signal was detected by a Ham radio operator in Sodepur in North 24 Parganas district in mid-December. "Initially, we did not attach much importance to it. But then similar signals were detected from Basirhat, Bongaon, and later from South 24 Parganas district. Even during the Gangesagar Mela in mid-January, several Ham radio users reported hearing these suspicious signals," he said. Asked why these signals seemed suspicious, Biswas

explained that their pattern and language usage were unusual. "The global norm among Ham radio users is that if a third party enters an ongoing communication; they must identify themselves using a radio identification code or radio call sign. But in these cases, whenever we asked for identification, the signals went silent. The pattern remained the same in all instances," he said. Ham or amateur radio operators are licenced under the Union Ministry of Communications and are authorised to communicate using specific radio frequencies.

After Biswas reported the latest findings to his superiors in the Ministry of Communications in January, security agencies visited him to gather more details about the coded signals. "I informed my superiors in New Delhi, who then forwarded the matter to the International Monitoring Station (Radio) Kolkata for investigation. We have also been asked to continue tracking these signals," he said. A senior official from the

Ministry of Communications confirmed that the matter had been forwarded to the International Monitoring Station (Radio) Kolkata for further examination. A senior official from a security agency, who visited Biswas' place for details, declined to comment on the matter. When contacted, a senior BSF official acknowledged the seriousness of the situation, stating that unidentified radio chatter along the border is a matter of concern.

"If we receive details from Ham radio users, we will use our resources to track the source of these transmissions," the BSF official said. He added that it is not uncommon for smugglers and extremist groups to use Ham radio frequencies, as this mode of communication is unconventional and harder to track compared to mobile networks or emails, which are more easily monitored. Biswas recalled previous instances where suspicious and unidentified radio transmissions were detected.

Man hangs from tree in Mathura, family alleges murder



PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ LUCKNOW

A 32-year-old man was found hanging from a tree in Sirrela village, located in the Mant police station area of Mathura, on Sunday morning. The deceased, identified as Vasudev alias Karua, son of Sohanlal, was found near his house, sparking tension in the village.

The victim's family has accused neighbors of murdering him over a dispute involving ₹200. According to them, Vasudev was beaten to death before his body was hung from the tree to make it appear as a suicide.

As soon as the incident was reported, a heavy police force from multiple stations arrived at the scene. However, angry villagers initially refused to let the police take down the body. The police had to use force to gain control of the situation and eventually sent the body for a post-mortem examination.

Pratham Singh, the victim's cousin, alleged that neighbors assaulted Vasudev on Saturday night and later killed him. Mant Police Station in-charge, Rajit Verma, confirmed that the body had been sent for autopsy and that an investigation was underway to determine the cause of death.

Priyanka Gandhi slams Centre for weakening Constitution, democracy

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ WAYANAD

Continuing her criticism of the BJP-led NDA government at the Centre, Congress general secretary Priyanka Gandhi Vadra on Sunday alleged that, for the first time in history, a government is working to weaken both the Constitution and democracy of the country.

Addressing the party's booth-level leaders in Ernad Assembly constituency, the Wayanad MP said, "It's probably for the first time in our country's history, we have a government that is working to weaken the Constitution and the democracy."

"You must understand that today the fight we are fighting is not just a fight for our own politics and ideology



but a fight for protecting the essence of India, everything that makes our nation what it is today," she added. On the second day of her

three-day visit to Wayanad, Priyanka addressed the issue of human-animal conflicts, stating that she would write to both the Centre and state

governments to allocate more funds, as adequate funding is essential for effective protection measures. Later, speaking to reporters after the meeting on the human-animal conflict issue, she said she has already raised it once and will continue to raise it. "It's something we need to look into, it's a complex issue as there is no easy solution. Definitely, I will put as much as pressure and raise as much as I can," she added.

Priyanka stated that there is difficulty in securing funds from both the Centre and state governments. "I will take up this issue and ensure it is resolved," she said, adding that increased funding is crucial for better monitoring, improved safety measures, and enhanced protec-

tion for forest guards, watchers, and others involved. On Monday, she will hold meetings with booth-level leaders at Wandoor and Nilambur assembly constituencies and will also visit families of a few victims of wild animal attacks, Congress sources said. This is her second visit to Wayanad after she won the Lok Sabha bypoll from there.

Priyanka vowed to pressure both the central and state governments to increase funding for mitigating human-animal conflict in this hill constituency while also raising Corporate Social Responsibility funds for the cause. She stated that since January four deaths have occurred in Wayanad due to wild animal attacks.

NTCA warns Morand-Ganjaj irrigation project may impact Tiger movement

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI/BHOPAL

The National Tiger Conservation Authority (NTCA) has warned that the construction of the Morand-Ganjaj Irrigation Project in Madhya Pradesh will submerge forested areas used by tigers to move between reserves, and strongly recommended exploring alternative sites, government records show.

The environment ministry's Forest Advisory Committee (FAC) discussed a proposal to divert 2,250.05 hectares of forest land for the project at a meeting on January 27. The project involves building two dams on the Morand and Ganjal rivers to improve irrigation in Hoshangabad, Betul, Harda, and Khandwa districts of the state.

According to the minutes of the meeting, the NTCA has warned that the project will destroy a crucial tiger corridor between the Satpura and Melghat Tiger Reserves and pose a threat to other wildlife and biodiversity.

The NTCA's analysis, based on the National Tiger Estimation 2022, shows that the project site is part of a critical tiger-occupied habitat. It said the dams would submerge forested areas essential for tiger movement between reserves, affecting "genetic exchange and population stability".

"Any disruption to this ecological connectivity will likely have long-term detrimental impacts on the viability of tiger populations and the broader wildlife community within this landscape," the NTCA said.

The authority also said that both the Satpura and Melghat reserves are in a recovery

phase, with tiger populations increasing after voluntary village relocations. It warned that losing this corridor could reverse those gains.

The NTCA has strongly recommended exploring alternative sites to minimise environmental damage. "Selecting less ecologically sensitive locations for such projects can help strike a balance between developmental needs and the conservation of critical wildlife habitats. Ensuring the long-term preservation of biodiversity and the ecological integrity of this landscape must remain a top priority," it said.

According to the project proposal, the construction of the dams and related infrastructure will displace 644 families, including 604 tribal families, who rely on the forest for their livelihood. Over seven lakh trees will also be affected at full reservoir level, with 5.75 lakh trees marked for felling.

The FAC has also flagged several discrepancies in the Madhya Pradesh government's plan for compensatory afforestation in Agar Malwa, Sagar, Betul, and Jabalpur districts. It said that some proposed afforestation areas are already classified as forest land, while others contain settlements and agricultural land. The state government has not submitted a detailed afforestation plan or revenue records to verify the land status. The FAC has recommended that a sub-committee conduct a site inspection before making a decision. The sub-committee will include representatives from the environment ministry, NTCA, and soil conservation experts.

Defence Minister to participate in 15th Aero India air show

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ BENGALURU/NEW DELHI

Defence Minister Rajnath Singh on Sunday said he will be attending the 15th edition of 'Aero India' in Bengaluru that will showcase cutting-edge defence technologies and global aviation excellence. 'Aero India' is billed as Asia's largest air show, and hosted at Air Force Station, Yelahanka in the southern city.

Air Chief Marshal A P Singh and Chief of the Army Staff General Upendra Dwivedi set the tone for the grand Aero India-2025 by flying in the Light Combat Aircraft (LCA) Tejas here at Yelahanka based Air Force Station.

The performance by the top brasses was the prelude to the biannual event, which commences on Monday and will continue till February 14. All eyes were glued to the sky as the Air Chief Marshal flew the metal bird with the Army Chief.

After the successful sortie, General Dwivedi termed the experience as the best moment in his life. For the Army Chief, the experience was such that he



called the Air Chief Marshal his guru and even regretted why he did not opt for the Indian Air Force.

LCA Tejas is an Indian combat aircraft designed by the Aeronautical Development Agency (ADA) and manufactured by Hindustan Aeronautics Limited (HAL) for the Indian Air Force (IAF) and Indian Navy. "Leaving New Delhi for Bengaluru to attend the 15th edition of Biennial Aero-India. AeroIndia2025 will showcase cutting-edge defence technologies and global aviation excellence. Looking forward to witness

the future of aerospace sector," Singh shared on social media. The Department of Defence Production also shared an update on its X handle about the show that will take place from February 10-14. In a social media post, the department said that the defence minister will inaugurate the 'India Pavilion' at Aero India 2025 on February 10. It is India's premier aerospace and defence exhibition where global aero vendors and the Indian Air Force (IAF) thrill the spectators with back-to-back aerobatic flying displays. A flagship event 'Aero India'

brings together global industry leaders, government officials, technology experts, and defence strategists under one roof, officials said.

"The event not only showcases the nation's technological prowess and innovations but also provides a dynamic platform for international cooperation and strategic dialogue," the defence ministry said ahead of Aero India 2025.

The broad theme of this edition is "The Runway to a Billion Opportunities". "Aero India stands as a testament to India's unwavering commitment to innovation, strategic collaboration, and excellence in aerospace and defence," the ministry said.

As the nation prepares to host Aero India 2025, the event promises to build on the rich legacy of previous editions, most notably, the transformative Aero India 2023, it said. "Through rigorous operational protocols, strategic partnerships, and a forward-thinking agenda, Aero India 2025 is poised to further elevate India's profile on the

global aerospace stage," the ministry said. The United States of America is set to dazzle the audience during the Aero India show with its defence equipment and technology, including F-16, F-35, KC-135 stratotanker, and B-1 bomber, US consular officials said.

As the stage is set for the biannual event here in Bengaluru from February 10 to 14, the US on Sunday said it is proud to take part in it for the fifteenth time. "The United States will showcase a range of advanced aircraft reinforcing the strong and growing defense and aerospace partnership between the United States and India, which share a commitment to promote regional security, stability, economic prosperity through diversified trade, and strategic investment ties," a statement issued by the US Consulate said.

More than two dozen American exhibitors will engage Indian counterparts, explore new business opportunities, and demonstrate innovative solutions in aviation and defence, according to the statement.



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PAPER WITH PASSION

Delhi dislodges AAP

In a landmark political shift, the BJP has stormed to power in the 2025 Delhi Assembly elections, marking its return after 27 years

Aam Aadmi Party (AAP) that ruled for ten years has been ousted by the BJP. It is one of the major setbacks that AAP has suffered since its inception. Despite its misadventures it always remained voters favourite in Delhi. Now with the BJP making a comeback it has suffered not only a big jolt to the party morale but also to the brand Kejriwal. In a historic political shift, the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP), led by Prime Minister Narendra Modi, has secured a decisive victory in the 2025 Delhi Assembly elections, ending the AAP's decade-long governance in the national capital. This marks the BJP's return to power in Delhi after 27 years. The BJP won 48 out of the 70 Assembly seats, surpassing the majority mark of 36 seats. In contrast, AAP managed to secure only 22 seats, a significant decline from its previous tally of 62 seats in the 2020 elections. The Congress party failed to open account, continuing its decline in the region. Notably, AAP's prominent leaders faced unexpected defeats. Aam Aadmi Party chief



Arvind Kejriwal lost the New Delhi seat to BJP's Parvesh Verma by a margin of 4,089 votes. Similarly, former Deputy Chief Minister Manish Sisodia was defeated in the Jangpura constituency. Senior AAP leaders, including Saurabh Bharadwaj in Greater Kailash and Somnath Bharti in Malviya Nagar, also lost their seats. After ten years in power, AAP encountered strong anti-incumbency sentiments, with voters expressing a desire for change.

Legal troubles and corruption allegations against key leaders, including Kejriwal and Sisodia, further diminished public trust in the party. Meanwhile, the BJP successfully leveraged AAP's shortcomings, presenting a development-driven governance model that resonated with the electorate. This electoral outcome serves as a critical juncture for AAP. The party must undertake a comprehensive introspection. Perhaps it is time it realised that it would be a good idea to remain with the INDIA bloc and playing solo is not always a good idea. One of the major reason for its defeat might have been the division of votes. Congress though did not gain but pulled it down. Addressing the corruption allegations transparently and implementing internal reforms will be essential to rebuild credibility. Reassessing policy positions and strengthening grassroots connections can help the party reconnect with its core voter base. In his concession speech, Arvind Kejriwal acknowledged the defeat and extended his congratulations to the BJP, expressing hope that the new government will fulfill its promises to the people of Delhi. The results of the 2025 Delhi Assembly elections send a strong and clear message to all political parties—governance, credibility and adaptability matter more than rhetoric. The political parties cannot rely solely on past achievements; they must continuously evolve and deliver on public expectations. Ultimately, there are no shortcuts to winning voters' trust— even freebies have their limits.

PICTALK



Tourists take a ride on a hot air balloon, in Manali

The new geopolitical communication era

With emerging technologies, evolving geopolitical alliances and the dominance of visual storytelling, the way messages are crafted and delivered is being redefined



CHAITANYA K PRASAD

One of the critical areas where visible changes will be witnessed post-January 2025 is the communication landscape geopolitically. This era is positioned to redefine the very speedways of global communication, with a pivotal question arising: Are we on the verge of a 360-degree transformation in communication delivery, content orientation, outreach mechanisms, and the tools we deploy? Geopolitically, the communication ecosystem will embrace a new language—a language of immediacy, focused messaging, results-driven delivery, and the prioritisation of measurable outcomes to identify realistic patterns and global impacts.

As the world steps into this new chapter of geopolitical shifts, communication strategies are becoming more sophisticated, dynamic and multidimensional. The need of the hour is to analyse the new alliances afoot in the shifting political landscape and the major geopolitical developments. The evolving political climate is challenging traditional paradigms, compelling communication specialists, diplomats, and policymakers to rethink how messages are crafted, delivered, and received on a global stage.

The era demands a communication framework that not only transcends borders but also bridges divides with precision, creativity, and authenticity. In 2025, the phrase "a picture is worth a thousand words" takes on greater resonance. Visual communication has become the most impactful way to deliver messages. A single, well-composed image has the power to convey emotions, ideas, and narratives that words may struggle to encapsulate. Building on this, the explosion of short-form videos, and 30-second reels, for instance, has transformed the landscape further.

Their brevity and emotional depth make them tools of unparalleled influence in shaping public opinion, mobilising support, and even defusing tensions. This evolution places immense responsibility on communicators in the geopolitical arena. Diplomacy, once conducted primarily behind



closed doors, is increasingly playing out in the public domain through curated visuals, symbolic gestures and strategic messaging amplified by digital platforms. For foreign policy, the challenge is to balance transparency and strategy, using these tools to build trust while maintaining sensitivity.

As social media continues its rapid rise, many ask whether traditional media can still hold its ground in the face of this digital juggernaut. Social media has undeniably globalised and democratised communication, giving individuals, governments, and organisations a direct channel to their audiences.

It thrives on immediacy, engagement, and the power to go viral, making it an essential tool in geopolitical communication. However, traditional media is far from obsolete. In an era of information overload, its role as a trusted gatekeeper remains critical. While social media is the messenger of the moment, traditional media provides depth, analysis, and context—elements that are crucial for informed decision-making. For communication to be effective in this new geopolitical era, the two mediums must complement each other, creating a holistic narrative that is both immediate and enduring. The rise of artificial intelligence has added another layer of



SOCIAL MEDIA HAS UNDENIABLY GLOBALISED AND DEMOCRATISED COMMUNICATION, GIVING INDIVIDUALS, GOVERNMENTS AND ORGANISATIONS A DIRECT CHANNEL TO THEIR AUDIENCES

complexity to global communication. AI-driven analytics enable unprecedented insights into audience behaviour, preferences, and sentiments, allowing for hyper-personalised messaging. These tools are invaluable for diplomats and foreign policy experts, who can now craft messages with immense precision and predict their impact with greater accuracy. However, with these advancements come ethical dilemmas. The line between strategic communication and manipulation can easily blur, necessitating robust frameworks to ensure accountability and fairness. As the communication landscape becomes more intricate, the demand for skilled specialists is growing. These professionals are not just channels for information, they are strategists, analysts, and creators who understand the nuances of messaging in a diverse and rapidly changing world. Traditional media must evolve to remain relevant, embracing digital innovations and audience-centric approaches. Meanwhile, social media must grapple with issues of misinformation, polarisation, and echo chambers, striving to become a platform that unites rather than divides. In this era, communication is no longer just about delivering a message; it is about shaping perceptions, building relationships, and driving action. As

the world becomes increasingly interconnected, the ability to communicate effectively will be one of the most powerful tools in navigating the complexities of a neo-geopolitical era. In an era marked by shifting alliances and evolving global priorities, multilateral institutions face both challenges and opportunities. The reworking of commitments by key nations to international frameworks has drawn notice to the fragility of global consensus, raising questions about the role and relevance of these institutions in addressing shared challenges like public health, climate change, and economic inequality. This shifting landscape calls for a more nuanced approach to diplomacy within multilateral spaces, with a renewed focus on collective responsibility. For these institutions to thrive in a complex geopolitical climate, they must leverage communication technologies to foster transparency, engage diverse stakeholders, and amplify their ability to drive action. Whether through the lens of a camera, the reach of a tweet, or the depth of an investigative report, the stories we tell and how we tell them will shape the world in ways we are only beginning to understand.

(The writer is a former civil servant. Views are personal. Inputs by Vaishnavie Srinivasan and Zoya Ahmad)

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

WTO NEEDS REFORM

Madam — It is with reference to the editorial page article "WTO is at a crossroads; Reform or perish" February 8. WTO is the world's largest international economic organisation, established in 1995 with 166 members representing over 98 per cent of the global trade and global GDP. Before the WTO, there was the General Agreement on Trade and Tariffs (GATT), a global trade organisation with 23 countries. Every member country is obligated to follow the laws and policies framed by WTO rules. India is a significant member of the WTO. Trade disputes are addressed by the WTO's dispute settlement process. It is the WTO that makes efforts to promote transparency in decision-making by encouraging participation and, in particular, the use of the consensus rule.

As an international platform, the WTO regulates and negotiates additional trade liberalisation. In recent days, the WTO has been facing many challenges related to changes in the global economy and geopolitical context. Its members have not been able to agree on new rules on agricultural goals, highlighting the conflicting interests between developed and developing countries. Difficult trade relations between the two largest world economies and WTO members—the US and China—also put a strain on the WTO. Unilateral trade measures such as raising tariffs on iron and steel threaten the multilateral trading system. This highlights the WTO might need to be reformed to meet current concerns such as national security, environmental standards, and the impact of technology on trade. If urgent reforms are not undertaken, the global trading system may soon witness the demise of the institution once deemed indispensable.

P Victor Selvaraj | Tirunelveli

ZERO SEATS FOR CONGRESS IN DELHI

Madam — It will be painful for the Congress for the massive loss in the Delhi elections when people voted against them consistently for the last 3 terms 0-0-0. The most pathetic observation is that they

BJP returns to power in Delhi



The BJP's long wait of 26 years to return to power in Delhi has ultimately come to an end after it registered an emphatic victory in Delhi Assembly polls. In fact, Delhi was the only erstwhile BJP-ruled state where victory remained elusive for the BJP even under the strong Modi wave since 2014. Hence, this victory has come as a big relief for the saffron party, which faced unceremo-

couldn't manage even a single seat in the last 3 assembly elections. Capital is Congress's home ground under the leadership of Sonia Gandhi.

The greed for power and dynastic politics made Priyanka Gandhi run all the way from Delhi to Wayanad to come back victorious in the by-election. There's a saying in the villages that 'If one has to assess the quality and power of a person in the village, ask the locals. The same yardstick proved right when there were no takers for Congress locally in Delhi and scoring 0-0-0 in their report card reflects that the quality of the Congress party is under a scanner. For the Congress to survive, the realistic approach must be to keep Rahul and Priyanka from the main limelight and keep them in a low profile so that the party can rebuild the faith for a better future of the party.

A P Thiruvadi | Chennai

RBI CUTS INTEREST RATES

Madam — It is a first-rate cut in nearly five years by RBI and it signifies a shift in monetary strategy. With this cut, RBI has clear-

ly sent a signal that it wants to boost lending, stimulate consumer demand and nurture investment. In the recent months, core inflation has shown easing out, providing much-needed headroom to the RBI to implement this rate cut. And a slowdown in the economic growth forced the RBI to take the plunge now.

By lowering the borrowing cost, RBI wants to encourage businesses to expand, boost consumption, and help economic growth. Now banks will be happy to extend credit more freely, but they need to be wary of what they have witnessed with their microfinance and unsecured loan portfolios in recent months. In the real estate sector, SMEs will take a sigh of relief, and individual borrowers will see a reduction in their EMIs and, in turn, more money in their pockets, coupled with recent income tax cuts, which will create a positive environment for the consumption boom to take place.

Bal Govind | Noida

Send your feedback to: letterstopioneer@gmail.com

Flying faster-than-sound travel closer to reality

Boom Supersonic successfully tested its prototype supersonic aircraft, proving that supersonic commercial travel is not just a dream but an imminent reality

A significant milestone in commercial aviation history has been achieved. Boom Supersonic, a Colorado-based startup, completed a successful test flight of its prototype supersonic aircraft XB-1, demonstrating that commercial air travel at faster-than-sound speeds is not only feasible but may soon be available for frequent flyers, cutting average intercontinental flight times in half.

When we think of supersonic commercial aviation, Concorde often springs to mind. Concorde was an iconic aircraft that flew passengers across the Atlantic in just three hours. It was the first commercial supersonic aircraft, and it flew twice the speed of sound for Air France and British Airways from 1976 to 2003. Concorde was retired in 2003 due to excessive costs, high fares and loud noise. Since then, aerospace giants like Airbus and Boeing have never delivered a commercial-scale replacement.

So, what makes Boom different? Boom's team didn't vent past failures as insurmountable obstacles. Instead, they



saw them as engineering challenges to be overcome with a fresh mindset. Unlike traditional companies that would try to upgrade a subsonic plane to go faster, Boom's team designed every component, from the aerodynamic shape and propulsion system to the fuel system, specifically for supersonic travel. The company exemplifies how ignoring legacy assumptions and knowledge can unlock groundbreaking solutions.

Boom's engineers embraced the concept of "unlearning," jettisoning assumptions that certain design elements were necessary or that certain hurdles were insurmountable. Unlearning allowed Boom to innovate with advanced composite materials, wing design and a new noise-reduction strategy.

They rewrote the rules of the game, overcame longstanding technical barriers and ignited fresh interest in supersonic flight. Established players like Boeing and Airbus often shy away from radical changes for fear of failing or canalising profitable products. Boom took calculated risks, embraced uncertainty, and refined each step through rapid data-driven iteration. Historically, supersonic jets are fuel guzzlers. Boom's approach combines aerodynamic optimisation with advanced high-performance materials and a propulsion system designed ground-up to minimise fuel consumption. The propulsion system (Symphony) will run on zero aromatic 100 per cent sustainable aviation fuel (SAF) for sustainable commercial supersonic flights. As a start-up, Boom operates with lean teams. This contrasts sharply with the massive bureaucratic hierarchy within aerospace giants. Swift prototyping, quick feedback loops, and a willingness to pivot ensure that new technology is tested and integrated faster than what Boeing or Airbus might manage.

The prototype aircraft smoothly transitioned through Mach 1 (the speed of sound) and touched Mach 1.1. This technology demonstration will help refine the design ahead of the company's next goal: launching a full-scale 60 to 75-seater supersonic jet called Overture. The founders' vision is that passengers can fly supersonically at tickets comparable to business class fares. Imagine cutting a 7-hour transatlantic flight to 3.5 hours. Suddenly, a business meeting in Delhi and a dinner date in London are feasible on the same day. Overture is being designed to fly 7800 km. It can fly nonstop on routes like Delhi to Frankfurt or New York to London. Faster travel time can be a game-changer for business travellers and high-priority cargo. While Airbus, Boeing, and other established players have the resources and legacy to make big moves, it often takes a nimble newcomer with a fresh perspective and first-principles thinking to challenge what's possible.

(The writer is an author, innovator and founder of NeuroEquilibrium; views are personal)



RAJNEESH BHANDARI



FIRST COLUMN

LIFE IS A MOUNTAIN: CLIMB YOUR PEAK, YOUR WAY

Just like climbing a mountain, life's true joy comes from the ascent, not just the summit



OP SINGH

I have come to believe life is a lot like climbing a mountain. It's not a race or a competition, and it's not about finding a shortcut. The absolute joy of life isn't standing at the summit—it's in the climb. It's in slipping on loose gravel, feeling the burn in your legs, and wondering halfway through if you should turn around. But when you catch your breath at a ridge or find your footing after a stumble, you realise something powerful: the climb isn't about the mountain—it's about who you become along the way.

Each of us has a mountain to climb. It doesn't need to be Everest or Kilimanjaro. It doesn't have to impress anyone else. What matters is that your mountain challenges you, excites you and pushes you to grow. And yes, the climb will be messy. The trail will disappear just when you think you're getting somewhere. The air will get thin. You might even feel like quitting. But that's the beauty of it—the mountain shapes you with every step. Every great climb starts with a dream—one so audacious it gives you butterflies. Don't let its enormity overwhelm you. Focus on taking the next step, then the one after that. Progress isn't about giant leaps but small, consistent efforts.

Moving forward, even a little each day, builds the path to big dreams. Mountains don't reward the fastest or most competent climber—they reward perseverance. Talent may get you started, but resilience carries you through fatigue, failure, and seemingly impossible moments. You don't need to be perfect; you need to keep climbing. Your journey is unique; not everyone will understand or agree with it. That's okay. When the trail disappears, create your path, even if it's messy.



The best routes are discovered through improvisation and authenticity, not by meeting others' expectations. Slips and falls are inevitable, and they hurt. Yet, each stumble teaches something valuable about the terrain, limits, and strength. Mountains don't demand perfection—they demand persistence. Learn from every fall, and rise stronger. The mountain doesn't care who reaches the summit first. It isn't about trophies or comparisons. The climb is about pushing yourself, growing beyond your comfort zone, and becoming someone who belongs at the summit.

True success is transformation, not competition. The best climbers don't focus solely on themselves. They lend a hand, share tools, and cheer others on. Life's peaks are more meaningful when shared. Those who help will often support you, making the climb richer for everyone. When you reach your summit, pause and reflect. Did your climb inspire others? Did you leave the path better for those who follow? Success isn't standing alone at the top; it's in the legacy you leave—the encouragement, improvements, and hope for others to climb higher. Ultimately, the climb makes life beautiful.

The summit is fleeting, but the slips, breakthroughs, lessons, and growth endure. These moments shape you into someone worthy of the top. If your mountain feels daunting, don't let the height scare you. Start small. Take one step at a time. You don't need to move fast or know the whole path. Just keep climbing. One day, standing at your summit, you'll look back and realise it wasn't about the peak. It was about the person you became along the way. That's the valuable reward of the climb—knowing every inch of it was unapologetically yours.

(The author is DGP & Head of Haryana State Narcotics Control Bureau, with three books to his credit; views are personal)

Trump's vision for Gaza: Paradise or purgatory?



NILANTHA ILANGAMUWA

President Donald Trump's proposal for Gaza is more than just another audacious policy move—it is a collision of commerce, geopolitics and power



Everyone saw it unfold. This is the harsh reality of life in the Devil's paradise, where desires are transformed into laws, ambitions become twisted ethics, and behaviour is coerced into the very fabric of the system. The truth? To survive here, one must bow to the powers that be, no matter the cost. Conscience and integrity are irrelevant—praise those in power or face annihilation. President Donald Trump welcomed Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu—an alleged war criminal wanted by the International Criminal Court—as the first foreign leader in his second term, declaring his grand vision to take control of Gaza, turning it into a "brave new Levantine Riviera" by cleansing over 2 million Palestinians.

Nevertheless, the proposal has sparked strong opposition. Saudi Arabia, a key ally of Trump, swiftly condemned it, insisting that no nation would recognise Israel without the creation of an independent Palestinian state. Jordan and Egypt also rejected the idea of accepting millions of displaced Palestinians. The mere announcement of this plan starkly illustrates the chaotic grandeur of Trump's vision. Yet, his proposal, however audacious, was no accident of rhetoric. It was a calculated, methodical blueprint, crafted long before Trump's second term in office. With Netanyahu—a willing ally in these manoeuvres—Trump painted a picture of Gaza not as a refuge for the Palestinian people, but as a commercialised "paradise" defined not by its displaced residents, but by foreign investments and a transformation into a luxury resort.

Trump's proposition, laden with both visionary ambition and horrific repercussions, challenges the entrenched paradigm. This proposal, as reported, was not born of sudden whim, but the culmination of years of deliberation within Trump's inner circle—an enterprise in which his son-in-law, Jared Kushner, played a pivotal role in positioning the geopolitical and commercial components across Asia.

Kushner's claim, in a recent interview with the Financial Times, that his "ability to see trends before others" uniquely positions him to capitalise on opportunities others find unpalatable, resonates with the underlying logic of Trump's plan. It's a logic that blurs the line between statecraft and property development, where geopolitical ambitions are pursued not merely for strategic suprema-



THE ARAB WORLD, ONCE INTOXICATED BY THE IDEA OF PAN-ARAB UNITY, HAS REPEATEDLY SUCCUMBED TO ITS INTERNAL FISSURES, NEVER ABLE TO OVERCOME THE CORROSIVE FORCES OF REALPOLITIK AND SELF-INTEREST

cy but also as a means to expand a business empire throughout Asia. This fusion of commerce and conquest is as disquieting as it is unprecedented, conjuring images of modern-day feudalism, where land and people are subjugated to serve the profit motives of a privileged few. What is truly striking, however, is that Trump's plan could offer a rare and pivotal opportunity for Arab nations, whose history of disunity has long hindered their collective potential.

Regional players—Saudi Arabia, Egypt, Iran, Qatar, Jordan, and others—have long danced to contradictory rhythms, using Palestine as a symbol to justify their betrayals, while failing to act with sincerity or consequence.

These rivalries, cultivated over decades of political expediency, have reduced Palestinians from champions of an independent cause to mere pawns in a game that has been further complicated by internal rifts within Palestinian movements.

For far too long, the Arab states have abandoned Palestine's plight in favour of personal ambition and strategic alliances, turning the Palestinian cause into a commodity—moulded and shaped according to the whims of foreign powers. This latest manoeuvre must be understood within the context of the convoluted history of Arab disunity—an entangled web of colonial subterfuge, sectarian fragmentation, and a legacy of betrayal that has persistently eroded Palestinian sovereignty and reduced their cause to a tragic geopolitical instrument.

The Arab world, once intoxicated by the idea of pan-Arab unity, has repeatedly succumbed to its internal fissures, never able to overcome the corrosive forces of realpolitik and self-interest. Behind the veneer of solidarity and proclamations of support for Palestinian self-determination, there lies a catalogue of secretive agreements, covert operations, and Machiavellian plots that have long entangled the region.

While the Sykes-Picot Agreement remains the most infamous symbol of colonial partition, it is far from the only clandestine accord that has shaped the fate of Palestine.

Lesser-known pacts, such as the Husayn-McMahon Correspondence, which promised Arab independence in exchange for rebellion against the Ottoman Empire, were later betrayed in favour of European imperial ambitions.

Similarly, the post-World War II period saw Arab states engage in secret dealings with both Western and Soviet powers, each prioritising their strategic interests over Palestinian rights. Agreements such as the Baghdad Pact and the Eisenhower Doctrine—purportedly aimed at regional stability—left the Palestinian cause sidelined in favour of Cold War allegiances, perpetuating cycles of betrayal.

And perhaps most insidious of all were the secret negotiations between Arab leaders and Israel, at times tacit and other times more explicit, often involving quiet exchanges of territory, economic support, or even military cooperation, all under the guise of broader diplomatic manoeuvres. These acts of realpolitik—often driven by the selfish interests of a few at the expense of the many—have left Palestine isolated, its sovereignty forfeited in a game of geopolitical chess. The fractured nature of Arab leadership, perpetuated by sectarianism and divergent national ambitions, only serves to deepen the wound. While leaders such as Egypt's Nasser sought to rally the Arab world under a banner of unity, his efforts were consistently thwarted by rivalries and internal conflicts.

Today, these past betrayals reverberate in the region's collective psyche, leaving Palestinian aspirations still choked by the suffocating embrace of powers both external and internal, with the dream of a unified Arab world and a free Palestine rendered ever more elusive by the cynical. Yet, it is precisely this history that

makes Trump's audacious proposal so paradoxically compelling. Here lies an opportunity for the perennial exiles—the Palestinians—not as pawns in a geopolitical chess game, but as potential agents for the reawakening of Arab unity.

For decades, Palestinian suffering has been wielded as a symbol of resistance, a poignant reminder of an exodus that began with the Nakba in 1948. However, the continued instrumentalisation of Palestinian tragedy by neighbouring Arab regimes—who have long used the plight of these people as a rhetorical tool without offering substantial solutions.

It is within this environment of ambivalence and simmering tension that Trump's proposal must be viewed as a paradigm-shifting moment. The convergence of statecraft and property development, epitomised by Trump and Kushner's ambitions, signals a departure from conventional geopolitical paradigms. We are stepping into an era where the shifting power of oligarchies is increasingly driven by the convergence of economic gain and political opportunism—a transformation with far-reaching consequences for the future of West Asia.

Whether this radical reimagining of Gaza could catalyse Arab unity remains uncertain, inherently tied to the unresolved contradictions within the region's historical legacy. Trump's Riviera dream for Gaza is as much a test of American resolve as it is a crucible for Arab unity—a proposition that, if realised, could compel the Arab states to transcend their long-standing acrimony and mistrust.

However, the likelihood remains that this bold gambit, with all its extravagant rhetoric and ambitious visions, will only serve to deepen existing rifts, leaving Palestinians once again at the mercy of external schemes.

(The writer is a journalist and a policy analyst. Views expressed are personal)

Uttarakhand leads the way: The first state to implement Uniform Civil Code

Uniform laws that empower women will be the common thread binding the nation in oneness and uphold the constitutional spirit

Uttarakhand has led the way in formalising laws for women of different faith as equal, upholding the spirit of the constitution. Babasaheb Ambedkar would have been a contented man knowing that Uttarakhand has become the first state in India to have put an end to the disparity in legal protection provided to women, as till now, they were governed by their respective personal laws based on religion and customary state practices.

By implementing the Uniform Civil Code (UCC) from January 26, 2025, with less than 2 per cent of total land area and less than 1 per cent of total population, Uttarakhand has taken the lead in reinstating the ethos of social equality, part of our syncretic cul-



GEETA BHATT

ture/constitution. The courageous step taken by this young state will pave the way as a paradigm for others to follow similar footsteps. For the first time post-independence, a legislative body has drafted rules for marriage, divorce, inheritance of property, and live-in relationships. UCC has been used as a political tool ever since it was

tabled for discussion in the Constituent Assembly when Babasaheb, as Chairman of Drafting Committee, had expressed need for uniformity in fundamental laws, both civil and criminal. UCC was placed under a sub-committee which proposed to list it as a non-justiciable right hence, making it non-disputable in the courts.

Majority of the members of this sub-committee were in agreement with the proposal except Minoo Masani, Hansa Mehta and Rajkumari Amrit Kaur who wrote to Patel stating, "One of the factors that have kept India back from advancing to nationhood has been the existence of personal laws based on religion". The dissent observed by the women members of the constituent assembly got support from Dr BR Ambedkar, KM Munshi and Alladi K Ayyar. The opposition from the Muslim members ensued the UCC under Directive Principles Article 44, where the Constituent Assembly was not obliged to enforce the provision and at the same time, the provision could be implemented by the legislatures in the future.

A compromise made between those in support and those in disagreement of the UCC. The changing social milieu has seen a trend in rigorous churning to shed away repressive, orthodox practices so as to evolve a social structure which believes in equal rights. This led to the codification of matrimonial, inheritance, succession and adoption laws for the

Hindus from 1955-56. The women's rights under Muslim Personal law were challenged by Shah Bano in 1985 demanding maintenance from her husband. The landmark Supreme Court judgement in favour of Shah Bano was later overturned when the incumbent Rajiv Gandhi-led Congress government, under pressure, enacted the Muslim Women



(Protection of Rights on Divorce) Act, 1986. The lingering wait for gender rights saw a ray of hope after 30 years when on the plea filed by Shayara Bano and others, who were victims of matrimonial dispute, the Supreme Court declared "talaq-e-biddat" or instantaneous triple talaq as unconstitutional in 2017. This time the government of the day stood by the rights of Muslim women and vindicated the crusade undertaken by Shah Bano by legally prohibiting triple talaq and protecting the rights of married Muslim women by bringing The Muslim Women (Protection of Rights on Marriage) Act in 2019. Though the present government has asserted equal rights and status to Muslim women

by bringing this act, there are miles to go as social customs of polygamy and Halala still looms large. The judiciary has reminded the legislators to fulfil their obligation towards the Constitution and promote equal rights for women. A five-member panel constituted in the chairmanship of retired justice Ranjana Prakash Desai diligently worked on the draft for two years besides holding public interactions, taking suggestions from people of the state and internal meetings of the panel to discuss the points to be taken under the draft. The bill in its four parts covers marriage and divorce, succession, live-in relationships. The section 4 of the bill outlines that "neither party has a spouse living at the time of the

marriage" with marriage age of 21 and 18 for man and women respectively, making polygamy and child marriage illegal. The bill also requires compulsory registration of marriages within 60 days where the couple has equal right to dissolve the marriage through a decree of divorce only through court proceedings. The Bill says that marriages can be dissolved only through the provisions of the law "notwithstanding any usage, custom, tradition, [or] personal law of any party to the marriage". This bill provides legal safeguards to protect women who cohabit in a live-in relationship.

(The writer is Director, Non Collegiate Women's Education Board, University of Delhi; views are personal)

Israeli forces begin to withdraw from key Gaza corridor

PTI ■ MUGHRAQA (GAZA STRIP)

Israeli forces began withdrawing from a key Gaza corridor on Sunday, Israeli officials said, part of Israel's commitments under a tenuous ceasefire deal with Hamas that is moving ahead but faces a major test over whether the sides can negotiate its planned extension. Israel agreed as part of the truce to remove its forces from the 6 km Netzarim corridor, a strip of land that bisects northern Gaza from the south that Israel used as a military zone during the war. At the start of the ceasefire last month, Israel began allowing Palestinians to cross Netzarim to head to their homes in the war-battered north, sending hundreds of thousands streaming across Gaza on foot and by car. The withdrawal of forces from the area will fulfill another commitment to the deal, which paused the 15-month war. However, the sides appear to have made little progress on negotiating the deal's second phase, which is meant to extend the truce and lead to the release of more Israeli hostages held by Hamas. Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu was sending a delegation to Qatar, a key mediator in talks between the sides, but the mission included low-level officials,

sparking speculation that it won't lead to a breakthrough in extending the truce. Netanyahu is also expected to convene a meeting of key Cabinet ministers this week on the second phase of the deal. Separately on Sunday, the Palestinian Health Ministry said that a 23-year-old Palestinian woman who was eight months pregnant was fatally shot by Israeli gunfire in the northern occupied West Bank, where Israeli troops have been carrying out a broad operation. **The ceasefire is fragile and its extension is not guaranteed:** Since it began on Jan 19, the ceasefire deal has faced repeated obstacles and disagreements between the sides, underscoring its fragility. But it has held, raising hopes that the devastating war that led to seismic shifts in the Middle East may be headed towards an end. On Sunday, cars heaped with belongings, including water tanks and suitcases, were seen heading north through a road that crosses Netzarim. Under the deal, Israel is supposed to allow the cars to cross through uninspected, and there did not appear to be troops in the vicinity of the road. Hamas spokesperson Abdel Latif Al-Qanoua said the withdrawal showed Hamas had "forced the enemy to submit to



A Thai hostage who was freed from Hamas, Sathian Suwannakham, center, hugs relatives upon arrival at Suvarnabhumi International Airport, in Samut Prakan Province, Thailand, Sunday. PTI

our demands" and that it thwarted "Netanyahu's illusion of achieving total victory". The Israeli officials, who spoke on condition of anonymity because they weren't authorised to discuss troop movement

with the media, did not disclose how many soldiers were withdrawing. Troops currently remain along Gaza's borders with Israel and Egypt and a full withdrawal is expected to be negotiated in a later stage of the

truce. During the first 42-day phase of the ceasefire, Hamas is gradually releasing 33 Israeli hostages captured during its Oct 7, 2023, attack in exchange for a pause in fighting, freedom

for hundreds of Palestinian prisoners and a flood of humanitarian aid to war-battered Gaza. The deal also stipulates that Israeli troops will pull back from populated areas of Gaza as well as the Netzarim corridor. In the second phase, all remaining living hostages would be released in return for a complete Israeli withdrawal from Gaza and a "sustainable calm". But details beyond that are unclear and repeated stumbling blocks throughout the first phase and the deep mistrust between the sides have cast doubt on whether they can nail down the extension. **The truce faces many challenges, including Trump's Gaza proposal:** Israel has said it won't agree to a complete withdrawal from Gaza until Hamas' military and political capabilities are eliminated. Hamas says it won't hand over the last hostages until Israel removes all troops from the territory. Netanyahu meanwhile is under heavy pressure from his far-right political allies to resume the war after the first phase so that Hamas, which carried out the deadliest attack on Israelis in its history, can be defeated. He is also facing pressure from Israelis who are eager to see more hostages return home and want to deal to continue, especially after the gaunt appearances of the

three male captives freed on Saturday stunned the nation. Complicating things further is a proposal by US President Donald Trump to relocate the population of Gaza and take ownership of the Palestinian territory. Israel has expressed openness to the idea while Hamas, the Palestinians and the broader Arab world have rejected it outright. The suggested plan is saddled with moral, legal and practical obstacles. But it may have been proposed as a negotiation tactic by Trump, to try to ratchet up pressure on Hamas or as an opening gambit in a bargaining process aimed at securing a normalisation deal between Israel and Saudi Arabia. That grand deal appeared to be rattled on Sunday as Saudi Arabia condemned remarks by Netanyahu who said Palestinians could create their state in that territory. Saudi Arabia said his remarks "aim to divert attention from the successive crimes committed by the Israeli occupation against our Palestinian brothers in Gaza, including the ethnic cleansing they are being subjected to". In an interview Thursday with Israel's Channel 14, Netanyahu said: "The Saudis can create a Palestinian state in Saudi Arabia; they have a lot of land over there."

Violence surges in the occupied West Bank: The war in Gaza, sparked by Hamas' attack that killed 1,200 people and saw 250 taken hostage, has killed more than 47,000 Palestinians according to local health authorities who do not differentiate between fighters and noncombatants in their count. Vast parts of the territory have been obliterated in the fighting, leaving many Palestinians returning to damaged or destroyed homes. Violence has surged in the West Bank throughout the war and has intensified in recent days with an Israeli military operation in the north of the territory. The shooting of the pregnant woman, Sundus Shalabi, happened in the Nur Shams urban refugee camp, a focal point of Israeli operations against Palestinian militants in the territory. The Palestinian Health Ministry also said that Shalabi's husband was critically wounded by the gunfire. The Israeli military did not immediately respond to a request for comment. Israel's Defence Minister Israel Katz announced on Sunday the expansion of the Israeli military operation, which started in the city of Jenin several weeks ago. He said the operation was meant to prevent Iran from establishing a foothold in the occupied West Bank.

40 held after violence, vandalism at Awami League leader's house

PTI ■ DHAKA

Forty people have been arrested in Bangladesh in an operation launched following a violent attack on a student group's activists during vandalism at an Awami League leader's house on the outskirts of Dhaka that left several people injured, according to a media report. Chief Adviser Professor Muhammad Yunus's government ordered "Operation Devil Hunt" on Saturday after the attack on students and civilians in the Gazipur district on Friday night. Superintendent of Police (SP) of Gazipur Chowdhury Jaber Sadek said that the 40 people were rounded up from parts of the district as part of the operation. United News of Bangladesh reported. On Friday night, at least 14 individuals, all belonging to the mobs out to vandalise and destroy all signs of deposed prime minister Sheikh Hasina's Awami League party, were injured as they came under attack in Gazipur city's Dakshinkhan area. The violence occurred during the attack on the residence of former Liberation War Affairs Minister Mozammel Haque. The injured were immediately taken to Shaheed Tajuddin Ahmad Medical College Hospital for treatment. Later, some of them were referred to Dhaka Medical College and Hospital. In protest, the Anti-Discrimination Student

Movement and the National Citizens Committee held a day-long protest and rally in Gazipur. After the protest, a student was injured in a shooting by miscreants in front of the Deputy Commissioner's office around 6:30 pm. Home Affairs Advisor Md Jahangir Alam Chowdhury has said that Operation Devil Hunt will be targeting those who seek to destabilise the country, stressing that the crackdown would continue until the "devils" are brought to book. The operation is being jointly conducted by the Bangladesh Army, Air Force, and Navy, along with members of the police, Border Guard Bangladesh, Ansar, and Coast Guard. Asked about the goals of the operation, Jahangir said, "What does 'devil' mean? It refers to evil forces. This operation is aimed at those who try to destabilise the country, break the law, engage in criminal activities, and commit acts of terrorism." Jahangir, a former military officer, added that those involved in the recent attacks on students in Gazipur would be brought to justice. "Many of those responsible have already been arrested. Those who haven't will be caught soon and we will ensure they receive the maximum punishment." The Anti-Discrimination Student Movement leaders claim their activists went to the ex-minister's house to prevent looting but were attacked by miscreants. Saturday's incident

was part of the widespread violence that erupted across the country on Wednesday night over a live online address by Hasina. Mobs targeted supporters of the deposed prime minister and vandalised their homes and businesses in Dhaka and other cities. Some media tallied about 70 attacks in at least 35 districts across the country since Wednesday. Protesters also set fire to the historic 32 Dhanmondi residence of Bangladesh's founding leader, Sheikh Mujibur Rahman. It was from this residence that Rahman proclaimed the country's independence from Pakistan in 1971. Hasina, 77, has been living in India since August 5 last year, when she fled Bangladesh following a massive student-led protest that toppled her Awami League's 16-year regime. In a statement on Friday, Yunus called for "complete law and order" and an end to attacks on the properties of the deposed premier's family and leaders of her "fascist" Awami League. Former Prime Minister Khaleda Zia's Bangladesh Nationalist Party (BNP) urged the interim government to curb "mob culture" and restore law and order, warning that failure to do so could lead to the reemergence of "fascist" forces. The party announced a series of rallies across the country starting on Friday 11, demanding effective measures to address the deteriorating law and order situation and push for an electoral roadmap.

Two mass graves with 50 bodies of migrants found in Libya

PTI ■ CAIRO

Libya authorities uncovered nearly 50 bodies this week from two mass graves in the country's southeastern desert, officials said Sunday, in the latest tragedy involving Europe seeking to reach Europe through the chaos-stricken North African country. The first mass grave with 19 bodies was found Friday in a farm in the southeastern city of Kufra, the security directorate said in a statement, adding that authorities took them for autopsy. Authorities posted images on its Facebook page showing police officers and medics digging in the sand and recovering dead bodies that were wrapped in blankets. The al-Abreen charity, which helps migrants in eastern and southern Libya, said that some were apparently shot and killed before being buried in the mass grave. A separate mass grave with at least 30 bodies was also found in Kufra after raiding a human trafficking center, according to Mohamed al-Fadeil, head of the security chamber in Kufra. Survivors said nearly 70 people were buried in the grave, he added. Authorities were still searching the area. Migrants' mass graves are not uncommon in Libya. Last year, authorities unearthed the bodies of at least 65 migrants in the Shuayrif region, 350 km south of the capital, Tripoli.

Libya is the dominant transit point for migrants from Africa and the Middle East trying to make it to Europe. The country plunged into chaos following a NATO-backed uprising that toppled and killed long-time autocrat Moammar Gadhafi in 2011. Oil-rich Libya has been ruled for most of the past decade by rival governments in eastern and western Libya, each backed by an array of militias and foreign governments. Human traffickers have benefited from more than a decade of instability, smuggling migrants across the country's borders with six nations, including Chad, Niger, Sudan, Egypt, Algeria and Tunisia. Once at the coast, traffickers pack desperate migrants seeking a better life in Europe into ill-equipped rubber boats and other vessels for risky voyages on the perilous Central Mediterranean Sea route. Rights groups and UN agencies have for years documented systematic abuse of migrants in Libya including forced labour, beatings, rapes and torture. The abuse often accompanies efforts to extort money from families before migrants are allowed to leave Libya on traffickers' boats. Those who have been intercepted and returned to Libya — including women and children — are held in government-run detention centres where they also suffer from abuse, including torture, rape and extortion, according to rights groups and UN experts.

7.6 magnitude earthquake shakes Caribbean

Mexico City (PTI): A magnitude-7.6 earthquake shook the Caribbean Sea southwest of the Cayman Islands Saturday, according to the US Geological Survey, and some islands and countries urged people near the coastline to move inland in case of a tsunami. The quake struck at 6:23 pm local time in the middle of the sea and had a depth of 10 kilometers, the USGS said. Its epicenter was located 130 miles (209 kilometers) south-southwest of George Town in the Cayman Islands. The US National Tsunami Warning Center said there is no tsunami alert for the U.S. mainland but issued a tsunami advisory for Puerto Rico and the US Virgin Islands, which was later cancelled. The sounding of alarms in Puerto Rico's northwest region caused people to leave coastal areas and caused heavy traffic, according to local media. Hazard Management Cayman Islands urged residents near the coast to move inland and to higher ground. It said wave heights of 0.3 to 1 meter are expected. Puerto Rico Gov Jennifer Gonzalez Colon said in a statement she is in contact with emergency agencies after the tsunami advisory, but did not recommend anyone leave the coast. The Dominican government also issued a tsunami alert and recommended residents on the coast move to high areas "of more than 20 meters of altitude and 2 kilometers inland." But it later canceled the alert.

Trump's actions leave Afghans who aided US airstrikes in limbo

Tirana (PTI): They helped the US military order airstrikes against Taliban and Islamic State fighters and worked as drivers and translators during America's longest war. They were set to start new lives in the United States. Then President Donald Trump issued executive orders that put an end to programmes used to help Afghans get to safety in America. Now those same Afghans, who underwent a years-long background check, find themselves in a state of limbo. "I was shocked. I am still in shock because I have already waited four years for this process, to get out of this hell and to get to a safe place and live in peace and have a new beginning," said Roshangar, one of the Afghans whose life was upended by Trump's action. Roshangar requested that The Associated Press only use his first name because he was afraid of Taliban reprisals. He spoke in an interview from Afghanistan where he, his wife and son live in hiding, fearing punishment or even execution by the Taliban for his more than a decade-long partnership with American forces. Roshangar served as a legal adviser to the Afghan Air Force, helping US officials review and eventually approve airstrike packages that were used against the Taliban and

the Islamic State group from 2007 until the fall of Kabul, the Afghan capital, in 2021. "This was an unexpected move from Mr. Trump and everything went wrong and against us and leave us in severe danger under the Taliban regime," he said. His family's experience is just one aspect of the fallout from Trump's orders, many of which were implemented without broad consultation with experts in the areas affected. "It's an absolute stain on our national honour that we've pulled the rug out from under people who have patiently been awaiting relocation and those here in the US who have recently arrived," said Shawn VanDiver, a Navy veteran and head of #AfghanEvac, a coalition supporting Afghan resettlement efforts. "This is an imminently solvable issue and our national security demands we fix it." During the US evacuation from Kabul in August 2021, American military planes airlifted tens of thousands of Afghans from the main airport. But many more Afghans did not make it onto the planes. Since then, the US has had various ways to help Afghans emigrate to the US depending on what their role was in helping the US-led mission in Afghanistan. Those path have been halted at this point.

Trump's AI ambition, China's DeepSeek overshadow summit

Paris (PTI): The geopolitics of artificial intelligence will be in focus at a major summit in France where world leaders, executives and experts will hammer out pledges on guiding the development of the rapidly advancing technology. It's the latest in a series of global dialogues around AI governance, but one that comes at a fresh inflection point as China's buzzy and budget-friendly DeepSeek chatbot shakes up the industry. US Vice President JD Vance — making his first trip abroad since taking office — will attend the Paris AI Action Summit starting Feb. 10, while China's President Xi Jinping will be sending his special envoy, signalling high stakes for the meeting. Heads of state and top government officials, tech bosses and researchers are gathering in Paris for the two-day summit cohosted by French President Emmanuel Macron and Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi. The event aims to address how to harness artificial intelligence's potential so that it benefits everyone, while containing the technology's myriad risks.

European Commission President Ursula von der Leyen is attending, along with officials and CEOs from 80 countries, including German Chancellor Olaf Scholz, Canadian Prime Minister Justin Trudeau, OpenAI CEO Sam Altman, Microsoft President Brad Smith and Google CEO Sundar Pichai. Tesla CEO Elon Musk, who attended the inaugural 2023 summit at former codebreaking base Bletchley Park in England, and DeepSeek founder Liang Wenfeng have been invited, but it's unclear if either will attend. Panel talks and workshops at the Grand Palais venue on Monday will be followed by a dinner at the Elysee presidential palace for world leaders and CEOs. Leaders and company bosses are expected to give speeches at Tuesday's closing session. More than two years after ChatGPT's debut, generative AI continues to make astounding advances at breakneck speed. The technology that powers all-purpose chatbots is transforming many aspects of life with its ability to spit out high-quality text, images or video, or carry out complex tasks.

Kurds in Syria aim to keep cultural rights gained in war

Qamishli (Syria) (PTI): Kurds in Syria were marginalised during five decades of Assad family rule, with many denied citizenship and wrongly described as Arabs. Now they are seizing the chance during the post-Assad transition to keep the cultural gains they made in the northeast enclave they carved out during the country's civil war. Mothers can now give children Kurdish names. The Kurdish language is taught in schools. The new year, Nowruz, can be celebrated openly. The Kurds, one of the world's largest populations without a state of their own, have been feeling some control over their lives and want to make that permanent with a new government in power. But that depends on Syria's new leaders, and the outcome of an ongoing conflict between the Kurds and Turkish-backed rebels that's been overshadowed by the dramatic shift from Assad rule. Two months of fighting have left scores dead on both sides. "We have made all these gains. There is no way we will abandon them, even over our bodies and the bodies of our children," said Amira Ali, a

Kurdish woman from the northeastern city of Hassakeh whose husband is a member of the local police force known as "Asayish", the Kurdish term for security. Shortly after the uprising against the Assad government began in 2011, the Kurds filled the vacuum created by the withdrawal of government forces from wide areas of Syria's northeast. The main Kurdish-led force now controls about 25% of Syria. An autonomous authority runs day-to-day affairs of the region that many Kurds call "Rojava Kurdistan" or "western Kurdistan". Now Kurdish leaders are negotiating with the new authorities in Damascus on the future of their people, who made up 10% of the country's prewar population. They don't want full autonomy with their own government and parliament; they want decentralisation, room to run their day-to-day affairs. The new authorities, however, are allied with the Turkish-backed armed groups that launched an offensive against the Kurds in December during the chaos around Assad's fall. The fighting between the

Kurds and the coalition known as the Syrian National Army has forced about 100,000 people to flee their homes. The conflict has major implications for Syria's future as its new government, led by the Hayat Tahrir al-Sham former Islamist rebel group, tries to consolidate control and begin rebuilding after nearly 14 years of civil war. Mazloum Abdi, commander of the US-backed Syrian Democratic Forces, the main Kurdish-led force, said the country should be a secular, civil and decentralised state that treats all citizens equally. Western countries have called on Syria's new rulers to respect minorities and women's rights. Abdi recalled the Syrian identity cards that described all its citizens as "Syrian Arab citizens," including non-Arabs like the Kurds. They want it to be changed to "Syrian citizens." "Kurds were persecuted by previous authorities," he said. He wants anti-Kurd laws to be abolished. Abdi and others point out that the Kurds played an important role in defeating the Islamic State group as it rampaged across Syria and neighbouring Iraq for years during Syria's civil war.

Sam Nujoma, Namibia's first president, dies aged 95

Oshakati (Namibia) (PTI): Sam Nujoma, the fiery white-bearded freedom fighter who led Namibia to independence from apartheid South Africa in 1990 and served as its first president for 15 years, and became known as the father of his nation, has died. He was 95. Nujoma's death was announced on Sunday by current Namibian President Nangolo Mbumba, who said Nujoma died on Saturday night after being hospitalised in the capital, Windhoek. "The foundations of the Republic of Namibia have been shaken," Mbumba said in a statement. "Over the past three weeks, the Founding President of the Republic of Namibia and Founding Father of the Namibian Nation was hospitalised for medical treatment and medical observation due to ill health." Unfortunately, this time, the most gallant son of our land could not recover from his illness," Mbumba added. Mbumba said Nujoma "marshalled the Namibian people during the darkest hours of our liberation struggle." Nujoma was revered in his arid, sparsely populated homeland in southwestern Africa as a charismatic father figure who steered it to democracy and stability after long colonial rule by Germany and a bitter war of

independence from South Africa. He spent nearly 30 years in exile as the leader of its independence movement before returning for Parliamentary elections in late 1989, the first democratic vote in the country. He was elected president by lawmakers months later in 1990 as Namibia's independence was confirmed. Nujoma was the last of a generation of African leaders who brought their countries out of colonial or white minority rule that included South Africa's Nelson Mandela, Zimbabwe's Robert Mugabe, Zambia's Kenneth Kaunda, Tanzania's Julius Nyerere and Mozambique's Samora Machel. Many Namibians credited Nujoma's leadership for the process of national healing and reconciliation after the deep divisions caused by the independence war and South Africa's policies of dividing the country into ethnically based regional governments, with separate education and health care for each race. Even his political opponents praised Nujoma — who was branded a Marxist and accused of ruthless suppression of dissent while in exile — for establishing a democratic Constitution and involving white businessmen and politicians in government after independence.

25 killed in Mali gunmen attack

Bamako (Mali) (PTI): Gunmen have attacked a convoy of vehicles escorted by Mali's army, killing 25 civilians mostly gold miners, a military spokesman said Sunday. The attack took place Friday about 30 km from Gao, the largest city in the country's northeast where armed groups hostile to the ruling junta operate. It was the deadliest attack on civilians this year. The assailants targeted a convoy of some 60 vehicles escorted by the army, military spokesman Col Maj Souleymane Dembélé told The Associated Press. He said soldiers assisted the victims and transferred 13 wounded to the Gao hospital. He said four of the attackers were wounded and declined to comment on any army casualties. "My sister survived the attack, but she's in a state of mental shock. She saw a lot of dead and wounded, a whole scene of horror. It was the first time she had seen dead people," said a Gao resident, who spoke on condition of anonymity for his own safety. No armed group has claimed responsibility for the attack.



Must-Do Yogasanas

BY YASH GUPTA

Breathe in! Breathe out! As long as you live there are certain things that you cannot control but there are other things that you can control. Having control over your senses is considered one of the wealth and the path is through yoga. The list of activities is forever going,

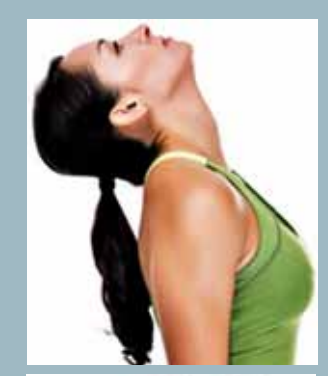
there is no end to what to do for better mental and physical health. Some exercises do not go well with the body because of the body structure, past injuries, or ongoing health issues. But here are 5 yogasanas that are recommended and are equally beneficial for everyone. You can do it during office hours and 2 of them are recommended as for starting your day.



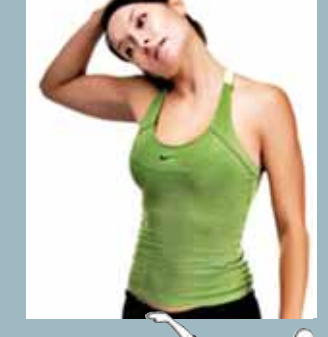
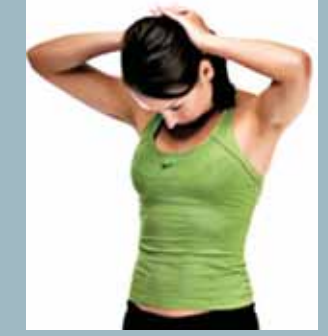
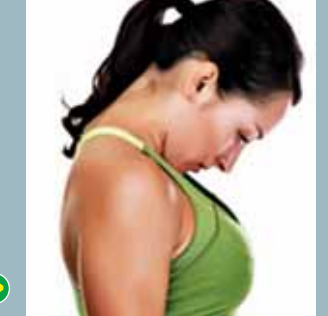
Tadasana: The most common asana for a healthy spine is the tadasana, just be barefoot and balance your body weight on both legs equally, join the feet together and lock your fingers together, and stretch up lengthening your spine, come on your feet, lift your heels and hold the position. Keep breathing and after a while slowly come down, relax your feet and hand by the side. Repeat 2-3 times. *People with shoulder injuries can just lift the shoulder without raising hands and elderly people can also do it while sitting on a chair.*



Malasanas: As soon as you wake up, it is highly advisable to begin the day with lukewarm water and sit in malasana for a while. All you have to do is sip a glass of water like tea sip by sip fold your knees completely and come down in a deep squat position, stay there for a while, and also you can just touch Mother Earth and offer gratitude. Works magic for relief in bowel movements and what could have been a better start than offering your gratitude to Mother Earth. *People having knee issues, can try pulling knees towards the chest while sitting on the cushion surface.*



Neck stretch and movements: It is believed that all of the stress accumulated is usually in the neck and shoulder region. Work on your neck and it will help you release all your stress even in the middle of office hours or any other work. Simply relax your neck and sit in an upright position with a spine, take a deep breath in and out and close your eyes (recommended for better results) stretch your neck to the sides, and try touching your shoulder without lifting them. After a few rounds relax and start rotating your neck clockwise and anti-clockwise and open your eyes slowly. *People suffering from survival do it very gently and not more than two rounds.*



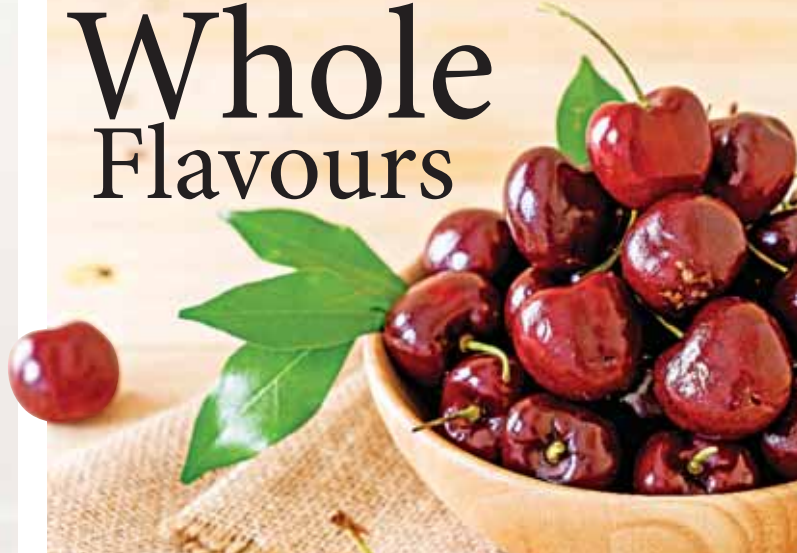
Nadi Shodhan: The King of all the pranayam, the instant stress buster and balancing the entire body. Place your right thumb on your right nostril and inhale from the left press the ring finger close left nostril and release the right exhaling breath, inhale through the right, and exhale through the left.

Yogic breathing: The most effective way to increase prana or vital life force is the pranayamas, simple yet effective and soothing too. It is also known as conscious breathing. Sit in an upright position, relax yourself, and relax your body, place one hand on your chest and the other on your navel. Start breathing in slowly, expanding your chest and stomach slowly, don't rush it and when you reach full capacity, even more slowly release the breath slowly contracting your abdomen and chest. Repeat 3-5 times. *Do not hold your breath and do not rush, the slower the breathing process the better.*



The author is an Art of Living faculty, meditation and mind coach, and professional yoga trainer.

Whole Foods Whole Flavours



TEAM VIVA

Eating well isn't just about counting calories or following strict diet rules; it's about embracing a balanced lifestyle that fuels your body with nutrient-rich, delicious foods. When we choose fresh, wholesome ingredients, we not only boost our health but also enhance the flavours and textures of our meals. Whether you're looking to add more plant-based goodness to your

plate, experiment with creative ingredient combinations, or simply prepare meals that are both nutritious and satisfying. From salads packed with fiber and antioxidants to hearty grains and protein-rich legumes, each dish is crafted to bring out the best in natural ingredients while keeping things easy, flavourful, and fulfilling. These carefully curated recipes prove that healthy food can be just as your favourite comfort meals.

Barley Salad With Chickpeas And Cherries



Ingredients

- Salad:**
- 1 cup hulled barley (uncooked)
 - 14.5 oz can chickpeas, drained & rinsed
 - 1/2 cup diced celery
 - 1/4 cup chopped green onion
 - 1 cup pitted & halved cherries
 - 1/4 cup toasted slivered almonds
 - 2 oz crumbled goat cheese
- Dressing:**
- 2 tbsp fresh lemon juice
 - 1 tbsp white balsamic vinegar
 - 1 tbsp grape seed oil
 - 1/2 tsp Dijon mustard
 - 1 tsp honey
 - 1/2 tsp kosher salt
 - 1/8 tsp black pepper

Directions

- Cook barley in salted boiling water (3 cups) for 45-60 mins until chewy. Drain, rinse, and cool.
- Mix barley with chickpeas, celery, green onion, and almonds.
- Whisk dressing ingredients and toss with the salad.
- Gently fold in cherries and goat cheese.
- Serve immediately or chill for up to 1 hour.

Note: Add cherries and almonds just before serving to maintain texture and prevent discoloration.

Chilean Cherry, Wild Rice, and Quinoa Salad



Ingredients

- 3/4 cup wild rice
 - 1/2 cup quinoa
 - 2 cups fresh Chilean cherries, pitted & halved
 - 2 celery stalks, diced
 - 3/4 cup smoked Gouda cheese, diced
 - 1/2 cup toasted, chopped pecans
- Vinaigrette:**
- 1/4 cup extra virgin olive oil
 - 1/4 cup fruity vinegar (raspberry or strawberry)
 - 1 tsp Dijon mustard
 - 3/4 tsp salt
 - 1/4 tsp freshly ground pepper

Directions

- Cook wild rice in boiling water for 30 mins, add quinoa, and cook 15 mins more. Drain, rinse, and cool.
- Toast pecans in the oven at 350 F for 8 mins or in a skillet until fragrant. Cool and chop.
- Whisk vinaigrette ingredients in a large bowl.
- Toss rice, quinoa, cherries, celery, Gouda, and pecans with the vinaigrette.
- Serve at room temperature or chilled

POWER OF SELF-CARE

Self-care is often neglected yet the most important part that defines your overall health. Authentic self-care fits with your needs, values, and lifestyle. Self-care need not be copied such as using gratitude journaling, bubble baths, etc., rather it should be something that aligns with your body and mind and nourishes your soul.

- **Importance of self-care:** To be honest, as a psychiatrist, I have felt that self-care is a biological necessity as it has a direct relation to improving mental and physical health.
- **Stress reduction:** - When a person stays in persistent stress, the body's cortisol levels rise, leading to poor sleep quality and anxiety too. But to alleviate stress, it's best to practice self-care activities such as deep breathing, mindfulness practices, exercise, etc. These activities are responsible for activating the parasympathetic nervous system.
- **Boosting up emotional health:** The activities that are guided towards self-care are responsible for releasing the 'feel good'

neurotransmitters namely dopamine and serotonin. They, in turn, improve the mood and relieve the symptoms of anxiety and depression. So working on you is an excellent approach to improve the quality of life and gain emotional regulation.

- **Improving physical health:** Self-care activities are inclusive of a good quality night sleep, consuming a well-balanced diet, and engaging in regular physical exercise. They lay the foundation for a healthy mind and body.
- **Better decision making:** When your mental health stays sound, it creates an opportunity to develop a recharged brain that is efficient in problem-solving and is more focused on chores.

Authentic self-care isn't about perfection or following trends, it's about tuning into yourself and making intentional choices that enhance your well-being.



True self-care aligns with your unique needs and lifestyle, fostering balance, resilience, and emotional well-being

CREATING A SELF-CARE ROUTINE

Identification of needs: Think about the self-care activity that you need the most and aligns with your lifestyle, values, and thoughts. You may need it in physical form such as exercise or sleep, emotional form such as therapy or journaling, social form such as connecting with friends, and spiritual form like prayer, nature therapy, etc.

Wise choice - After identification of your

needs, choose activities that are in alignment with your personality. For instance you may prefer solitude or social gatherings as per your nature.

Building a routine: After choosing the activity that you are interested in, plan a simple yet flexible schedule that is easy to follow. Begin by practicing 1-2 habits and try to fix them in your current routine.

Tracking progress: Keep a record of your self-care activities and also reflect on your feelings post accomplishing them.



