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In Bargarh 2 BJP leaders killed as truck rams into car

Injured allege pre-planned attempt to murder

PNS ■ BARGARH

Two BJP leaders were killed in a suspicious road accident near the Kantapali over-bridge in Bargarh district on Saturday night. Questions are being raised about whether the incident was an accident or a deliberate murder.

BJP Goshala Mandal president Debendra Nayak and former Sarpanch Muralidhar Chhuria were killed after their vehicle was hit multiple times by a Hyva. They were travelling back to their village from Bhubaneswar when their car was hit by the Hyva.

Two others in the vehicle



sustained injuries and were admitted to a private hospital in Burla.

A passenger who survived alleged that this was not an accident but a pre-planned attempt to murder. The Burla police have intercepted the vehicle involved and detained

the driver. "I asked the driver to give space to the Hyva after it hit us from rear. However, the Hyva continued to hit our vehicle a couple of times. So, we jumped out of the vehicle to save ourselves. Even after we gave space, the Hyva tried to hit us. I suspect it was pre-

planned to kill us," alleged one of the injured.

Similarly, another injured said, "When the Hyva continuously hit our vehicle, we were sure someone was trying to kill us. Six of us were in the vehicle. I demand thorough police investigation."

Ahead of Pravasi Bharatiya Divas Patha Utsav adds splash of colour to lives in city

PNS ■ BHUBANESWAR

The streets of the state capital Bhubaneswar on Sunday came alive with the return of the vibrant street festival Patha Utsav. The colourful event kicked off on a high note as preparations for the Pravasi Bharatiya Divas in the city gather momentum.

The festivities, which spanned from Master Canteen Square to the Ram Mandir, added a splash of colour to the capital and offered a dazzling array of cultural spectacles. Attendees indulged in a variety of cultural performances that ranged from traditional dance and music to engaging sports activities and artistic displays.

Local artists transformed the pavements with striking paintings and intricate



rangoli designs, providing a visual delight for visitors. Adding to the allure, captivating 3D street art installations captured the imagination of passersby, all meticulously crafted with the theme of Pravasi Bharatiya Divas in mind.

The event sought to create a rich cultural tapestry, reflecting India's diverse heritage while celebrating the Indian diaspora's contributions across the globe. The organisers were enthusiastic

about promoting a sense of community and shared identity among locals and diaspora attendees alike.

"It is a break from our monotonous lives. Every day people have to go to offices, pressured with work. A little dance and music, jogging, painting and other activities on a chilly winter morning will add fun to everyone's life. Body will also be rejuvenated. Our aim is to make Bhubaneswar residents happy fun in their lives," said

city Mayor Sulochana Das.

Minister Prithviraj Harichandan said, "The Patha Utsav has been started to entertain the guests and tourists who will arrive in Bhubaneswar for the Pravasi Bharatiya Divas. But a Sunday should be a day of relaxation and fun for everyone. So, Patha Utsav will make Sunday a fun-filled day with colourful activities. I have requested the department to continue Patha Utsav every Sunday."

Jajpur robbery CM announces Rs 2L aid for kin of deceased

PNS ■ BHUBANESWAR/JAJPUR

Chief Minister Mohan Charan Majhi on Sunday announced a compensation of Rs two lakh each for the families of two men who were shot dead by robbers during a dacoity attempt in Jajpur district.

Majhi expressed deep grief over the incident and also

said that the State Government would cover the medical expenses of those injured.

However, police while investigating into the incident are trying to ascertain if any inter-State gang is involved in the daring robbery in a busy market area in the Panikoli area of Jajpur district.

The two deceased were

identified as Nilamadhab Panda, a local resident, and Sunil Ray, an employee of the jewellery shop.

At least five bike-borne miscreants had barged into the shop and attempted to flee with some jewellery. But the two deceased tried to resist the robbers, following which they were shot multiple times by the miscreants.

BJD decries Centre's move to split Waltair Divn



PNS ■ BHUBANESWAR

The Biju Janata Dal (BJD) has strongly opposed the Central Government's recent decision to split the Waltair Division and remove its revenue-generating part from the East Coast Railway. The BJD has termed it a move aimed solely at appeasing Andhra Pradesh.

While the BJD welcomed the establishment of a new railway division at Rayagada, it raised concerns that the decision to divide the Waltair Division would result in severe economic repercussions for Odisha. The BJD questioned the silence of the State Government on this critical issue.

Addressing the media here on Sunday, BJD leaders, including Brugu Baxipatra, MLA Rupesh Panigrahi and former MP Pradeep Majhi expressed their strong reservations regarding the Central

Government's unilateral move. Baxipatra pointed out that the Waltair Division is one of the largest revenue-generating divisions in the East Coast Railway (ECOR), and the decision to split the division is nothing short of an attempt to please Andhra Pradesh, particularly its political leadership.

The BJD leaders emphasised that ECO, which is a leading contributor to the Indian Railways' financial success, would face a massive decline in revenue after the transfer of the Waltair Division. While the BJD appreciates creation of a new division at Rayagada, it firmly opposes the splitting of the Waltair Division.

The BJD leaders further demanded that Odisha's regions currently under the South Eastern Railway be transferred to the ECO to further

strengthen Odisha's railway infrastructure.

Pradeep Majhi criticised the Central Government's apparent disregard for Odisha's development needs. He pointed out that the State Government, which boasts about the so-called "double-engine development" at the national level, has remained conspicuously silent on key issues that impact Odisha. He referred to the earlier decision to allocate Rs 12,000 crore for the Polavaram project in Andhra Pradesh despite the adverse consequences it could have on Odisha's Malkangiri region. He lamented that Odisha's legitimate concerns continue to be ignored by the Central Government, which seems more focused on appeasing its political allies such as the Telugu Desam Party (TDP) of Andhra Pradesh.

Row over MP's missing name



MLA's name on plaque defaced

PNS ■ BHUBANESWAR

BHUBANESWAR: The inauguration of a new public toilet facility in Bhubaneswar has sparked a dispute among local residents after the name of local Member of Parliament (MP) was found missing on the commemorative plaque.

The facility which was inaugurated near the Kasturba School in Ward 37, was unveiled with only the name of the Member of the Legislative

Assembly (MLA) Ananta Narayan Jena, featuring prominently. However, the name of Bhubaneswar MP Aparajita Sarangi was found missing in the inaugural plaque.

Meanwhile, the exclusion of Bhubaneswar MP's name from the plaque has drawn significant criticism from the community, resulting in protests. Expressing displeasure over the matter, some residents have defaced the MLA's name on the plaque using black paint.

Cold wave in State G Udayagiri coldest at 5 degree

BBSR 14.5 deg, Cuttack 14 deg

PNS ■ BHUBANESWAR

The cold wave intensified further on Saturday night as nine places in the State with minimum temperatures dipped below 10 degrees Celsius.

On the intervening night of Saturday and Sunday, Kandhamal's G. Udayagiri emerged as the coldest place in the State with mercury plummeting down to 5 degrees Celsius while Phulbani

recorded the lowest temperature among all urban areas in the State at 8 degrees.

As per the Regional Office of the India Meteorological Department (IMD), a total of nine places recorded intense chill and temperatures of less than 10 degrees Celsius along with Phulbani and G Udayagiri. Semiliguda shivered at 5.9 degree, Daringbadi 8.5 degree, Koraput 9.4 degree, Rourkela 9.5 degree and Jharsuguda, Bhawanipatna and Nabarangpur at 9.8 degrees each.

Bhubaneswar recorded a

low of 14.5 degrees and Cuttack dipped to 14 degrees.

The IMD also predicted that there would be no respite in sight from the cold wave for at least the next 24 hours. Nail-biting cold along with fog is likely over several parts of the State until Monday owing to cold winds sweeping into the State from the north.

However, after Monday, temperatures may increase slightly by at least 2 to 3 degree owing to a cyclonic circulation over southwest Rajasthan.

CONTEMPORARIES

Promotion to proficiency: Rethinking the No Detention Policy

In the vast labyrinth of India's educational landscape, the No Detention Policy (NDP) emerged as a beacon of hope, a revolutionary attempt to dismantle the tyranny of examinations and eliminate the ignominy of failure. As enshrined within the Right to Education Act, 2009 (RTE Act), this policy sought to create a utopian ideal: a stress-free, inclusive, and joyful learning experience for students up to Class VIII. However, as with many well-intentioned reforms, its lofty aspirations have been tempered by the harsh realities of implementation.

And fifteen years after its inception, the NDP is poised to be relegated to the annals of history. The central government's decision to annul this policy, leaving states the discretion to reintroduce detention, signals a paradigm shift in India's educational ethos. While critics may decry this move as regressive, a closer examination reveals it to be a necessary recalibration—one that prioritises the quality of learning over the illusion of progress.

A noble vision undermined by reality

The NDP was born from a pro-



S JYOTIRANJANA

found recognition of systemic inequities in India's education system. In 2009, the dropout rate for Classes I to VIII stood at an alarming 42.5%, disproportionately affecting marginalized communities. For Scheduled Castes (SCs) and Scheduled Tribes (STs), the rates were even more harrowing, 51.2% and 56.8%, respectively. By guaranteeing automatic promotion, the policy aimed to prevent the stigma of failure from pushing vulnerable children out of the system. In this respect, it achieved remarkable success, with dropout rates plummeting to 12.6% in 2024.

However, these statistics, while heartening, conceal a more troubling narrative. The Annual Status of Education Report (ASER) 2023

exposes the stark inadequacies of the NDP: only one in four students aged 14 to 18 can fluently read a Class II-level text. This alarming disconnect between enrolment and learning outcomes underscores a critical flaw in the policy. It prioritised quantity over quality, mistaking promotion for progress and attendance for achievement.

The fallacy of automatic promotion
In its zeal to democratize education, the NDP inadvertently eroded accountability. The automatic promotion, unmoored from academic performance, fostered a culture of complacency. Teachers, overburdened and under-resourced, lacked the incentive, and often the capacity, to ensure that students met grade-level competencies. Meanwhile, students, unencumbered by the prospect of failure, often failed to develop the discipline and resilience that examinations instil.

This culture of mediocrity is antithetical to India's aspirations as a global knowledge economy. Education, at its core, must empower individuals with the skills, knowledge, and critical thinking required to navigate an increasingly complex world. The NDP, while noble in in-

tent, fell short of this mandate by treating education as a conveyor belt rather than a transformative process.

Rethinking detention: What is the correct approach?

The decision to reintroduce detention, while controversial, is neither punitive nor regressive, instead, it represents an opportunity to recalibrate the balance between inclusion and accountability. Detention, if implemented judiciously, can serve as a constructive mechanism for identifying and addressing learning gaps. It is not an end in itself but a means to ensure that every child achieves foundational proficiency before advancing to more complex academic challenges.

However, for detention to fulfil this role, it must be accompanied by robust support systems. The RTE envisioned a framework where students at risk of detention would receive special care and remedial education. Unfortunately, this vision has been undermined by systemic deficiencies, as India faces a shortage of 8.4 lakh teachers, leaving existing educators overburdened and ill-equipped to provide individualised attention. Therefore, without addressing these structural

issues, detention risks are becoming a blunt instrument rather than a tool for empowerment.

Learning from global models

India's educational conundrum is not unique; countries like Finland and Japan often celebrated for their exemplary education systems, eschew high-stakes examinations in favour of continuous assessment and personalised learning. These nations demonstrate that it is possible to combine inclusivity with rigor, provided the system is underpinned by well-trained teachers, robust infrastructure and community engagement.

And for India, the lesson is clear: detention must be the exception, not the norm. So, by investing in teacher training, leveraging technology for personalised learning and fostering a culture of parental involvement, India can create an education system that leaves no child behind, not by advancing them unprepared but by equipping them with the skills they need to succeed.

Education as a transformative force

The National Education Policy (NEP) 2020 rightly envisions education as a transformative force, a means to unlock the latent poten-

tial of every individual. It emphasises foundational literacy and numeracy, recognising these skills as non-negotiable prerequisites for higher learning. The NDP, while well-intentioned, has proven inadequate in fulfilling this mandate. Its annulment, therefore, is not a rejection of its principles but an evolution of its practice.

Detention, re-imagined as part of a holistic education strategy, can align with the NEP's vision. It must be grounded in empathy and equity, ensuring that no child is punished for systemic failures. Instead, it should serve as a catalyst for targeted interventions—extra classes, mentorship, and counselling that address the root causes of underperformance.

Need for a balanced approach

As India transitions away from the No Detention Policy, it must guard against swinging to the opposite extreme. The challenge is to strike a delicate balance between compassion and accountability, between inclusion and rigour. This requires not only policy reforms but also a cultural shift, a recognition that education is not merely a tool for social mobility but a cornerstone of national development.

The path forward demands courage and clarity of purpose. It requires investments in teachers, infrastructure, and technology, as well as a commitment to continuous improvement. Most importantly, it requires a renewed focus on the child, not as a statistic or a recipient of rote learning, but as a future citizen capable of contributing to a dynamic and competitive world.

The decision to scrap the NDP is not a retreat into regressive policies but a step toward recalibrating India's educational ambitions. Therefore, by placing learning outcomes at the heart of its strategy, India can transform its schools from mere custodial institutions into centres of excellence. The stakes are high, but so too are the rewards, for in the classroom lies the foundation of the nation's destiny.

(The writer is an advocate, Orissa High Court, Addl. Central Government Standing Counsel, CAT, Cuttack Bench, Consulting Editor-Legal Affairs and Public Policy, The Pioneer and a Distinguished Adjunct Professor of Law and Media Studies, School of Mass Communication, KIIT University. Views are personal)

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INSIDE

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RRTS brings Meerut closer to Delhi



Prime Minister Narendra Modi takes a ride on a Namo Bharat train during the inauguration of the 13 km stretch of the Delhi-Meerut Regional Rapid Transit System (RRTS) corridor between Sahibabad and New Ashok Nagar

RAJESH KUMAR ■ NEW DELHI

The BJP AAP rivalries came to fore as the Prime Minister Narendra Modi inaugurated a 13-km section of the Delhi-Meerut Regional Rapid Transit System (RRTS) corridor from Sahibabad in Uttar Pradesh to New Ashok Nagar and the Janakpuri West-Krishna Park Extension stretch, the first section of the Delhi Metro Rail Corporation's Phase-IV network to open for public. Even before the Rapid Rail Transport System could open for public, the race to grab credit started full steam. Prime Minister Modi and

former chief minister of Delhi Arvind Kejriwal took cudgels at each other to win the brownie points. In a blistering attack on the Aam Aadmi Party (AAP) government again during a massive rally in Rohini, PM Modi made a strong appeal to people to bring the BJP to power in Delhi, as he attacked the Arvind Kejriwal-led party with "AAP-da" and "Sheesh Mahal" jibes and assured Delhiites that no welfare scheme would be discontinued if the saffron party forms the government. AAP retorted saying that AAP believed in the service of Delhi and that it had the 'aashriwad' of Delhiites.

Addressing a rally, the prime minister called AAP's Delhi government as "AAP-da government" (disaster government) that has stalled Delhi's progress. PM Modi said the AAP-da government does not have the vision to develop the national capital and the responsibility given to AAP-da means punishment for the people of Delhi. The prime minister appealed to voters to end the AAP's misrule and give the BJP a chance to lead Delhi towards a brighter future. Modi said every season in the city has turned into a period of "emergency," with drinking water shortages in the summer, water logging

during the monsoon and pollution during the winter. Highlighting the achievements of the BJP-led central government over the past decade, PM Modi pointed to landmark initiatives that have transformed India's infrastructure, connectivity, and global standing. He cited projects like the expansion of the Delhi Metro, the Namo Bharat Train, Bharat Mandapam, Yashobhooni, and the National War Memorial as examples of BJP's commitment to development. "In the last 10 years, the BJP government at the Centre has doubled Delhi's metro network, built world-class infrastructure, and prioritized public welfare. These are the actions of a government focused on progress, not excuses," PM Modi said. The prime minister accused Delhi's AAP government of wasting a decade fighting with the Centre and urged its people to give the BJP an opportunity to turn the national capital into a city of the future.

PM Modi also accused the AAP government of spreading fear that a BJP government in Delhi would discontinue several welfare schemes launched by the AAP. Hours after Modi's accusation, AAP chief Arvind Kejriwal held a press conference and said the BJP is seeking votes by abusing him. Reacting to PM Modi's attack, Kejriwal said that these projects wouldn't have been inaugurated had his party not cooperated with the Centre over alleged "atrocities" against the party's leaders.

Bidhuri shoots from the hip; Cong fumes, BJP distances

SAUMYA SHUKLA ■ NEW DELHI

Not new to stirring a political uproar for his remarks, senior BJP leader and party's candidate from Kalkaji Ramesh Bidhuri has yet again created controversy by stating that he will develop smooth roads of his constituency if he wins like Congress Lok Sabha MP Priyanka Gandhi's 'cheeks'. "I assure you that just as we made the roads in Okhla and Sangam Vihar, we will make all the roads in Kalkaji like Priyanka Gandhi's cheeks," Bidhuri is heard saying in the purported video, which went viral on social media. This comes at a time when the Delhi assembly elections are just a few weeks away with the AAP and Congress calling the statement 'anti-women' and cornering the BJP over the issue.



Speaking to The Pioneer, Bidhuri claimed that he made the statement with no intentions to hurt anyone's sentiment and both AAP and Congress should reflect on their own behaviour towards women before pointing fingers at anyone. "When it comes to Congress, they forgot what statement



former Bihar Chief Minister Lalu Yadav made on BJP MP Hema Malini. Is she not a woman? He was in their cabinet. Did they ask him to apologise? Moreover, did AAP chief Arvind Kejriwal not insult women by calling Atishi a 'temporary' Chief Minister? Does he not trust that a woman can win the

elections on her name? Their MLA Naresh Baliyan has also made similar statements but they did not have any problem with it," he remarked. Reacting to the AAP and Congress making this a poll issue, he said that their situation is best explained through a phrase 'khisyanii billii khambaa noch' (an embarrassed or ashamed person tends to vent his/her feeling by quarrelling). "They have nothing else to do so they are making this an issue. Congress is engulfed in corruption while AAP has no vision for Delhi. What will Atishi say to the public that we will improve the dilapidated state of roads in Kalkaji and Govindpuri in the next five years when they have already ruled for a decade?" he questioned.

Delhi LG relaxes job norms for 1984 riot survivors

STAFF REPORTER ■ NEW DELHI

Lieutenant Governor Vinai Kumar Saxena has approved full relaxation in required educational qualification and age relaxation up to 55 years for 88 applications for employment from victims of 1984 anti-Sikh riots. This relaxation has been approved for their appointment in Government Service to the post of Multi-Tasking Staff (MTS), a statement said. "Repeated representations had been made by the Delhi Sikh Gurdwara Management Committee, public representatives and groups of victims, who had met LG recently, in this regard," the communique added. A Rehabilitation Package, including provision of jobs, was sanctioned by the Ministry of Home Affairs (MHA), Government of India (GoI) on January 16, 2006, for victims of 1984 anti-Sikh



Delhi Lt. Governor Vinai Kumar Saxena, inaugurates 'Yamuna Vatika', in New Delhi

riots. "The Revenue Department in a subsequent special drive got 72 applications out of which appointment was given to 22 applicants by obtaining age relaxation from then LG," it said. In Oct 2024, LG granted full relaxation in required educational qualification to the post of MTS for leaving out 50 applicants out of the total 72 received

during the special drive. "Revenue Department was also directed to process the cases for granting employment to one of the children of the applicants wherein applicants have surpassed the age of employment," an official from Raj Niwas stated. He added that after directions, the Revenue Department organised special camps during November 28 to 30 last year and issued notices in leading newspapers, inviting applications for employment to family members of 1984 anti-Sikh riots victims. "Subsequently, a total of 199 applications, were received, of which 89 candidates were found eligible, but all these were above the age limit and a few also missed out on the required educational qualification," it said, adding that LG's approval for relaxation will clear obstacles of 88 applicants for their appointment as MTS in Government Service.

Pravasi Bharatiya Divas 40 including 12 CAPF platoons to ensure security



Chief Secretary, DGP review preparedness

PNS ■ BHUBANESWAR

In a bid to ensure foolproof security for the three-day Pravasi Bharatiya Divas celebrations in Bhubaneswar, scheduled from January 8, as many as 40 platoons of police force would be deployed in the city, said Twin City Police Commissioner S Devadatta Singh on Sunday. He said 12 companies of Central Armed Police Forces (CAPF) would also be deployed to ensure safety and security during the event which is being held in Odisha for the first time. The city would be under the surveillance of Central intelli-

gence agencies, and an Anti-Terror Squad would also be part of the security measures, he informed. "Traffic management and guest security will be given top priority. Specific agencies have been entrusted with the responsibility of ensuring the safety of visiting dignitaries. Security arrangements will also be in place during their visits to tourist destinations," Singh said. Earlier on Sunday, the Special Protection Group (SPG) and the Special Operations Group (SOG) of Odisha police conducted mock drills to counter any potential threats. Chief Secretary Manoj Ahuja and DGP YB Khurania reviewed the arrangements at the Janata Maidan. The State Government has

also launched a central command control centre to coordinate with the guests during the event. This centre would provide information and assistance to around 7,000 non-resident Indians (NRIs) and Persons of Indian Origin (PIOs) who are to attend the event, a statement from the Chief Minister's Office (CMO) said. The centre can be reached by dialling 1929 for support with an Interactive Voice Response system in place for event-specific inquiries. Personnel from various departments will be deployed to assist the attendees. Prime Minister Narendra Modi is scheduled to inaugurate the event on January 9 while President Droupadi Murmu would address the gathering on January 10.

Breach in security Unidentified drone falls near CM in Jharsuguda

Illegal drone flies over Jagannath Temple

PNS ■ JHARSUGUDA/PURI

In a major security breach, a drone fell significantly close to Odisha Chief Minister Mohan Charan Majhi during his visit to Jharsuguda district on Thursday. The incident came to light after the visuals surfaced on social media on Sunday. The incident had occurred as the Chief Minister was heading towards the Jhadaeshwar Temple in the Purnabasti area of Jharsuguda town when the unidentified drone suddenly fell near him, leaving him startled and those accompanying him, including Revenue Minister Suresh Pujari. The Chief Minister's PSOs and local police kicked the drone away. Reports suggest that the drone was used for photography, but how it managed to breach security protocols and fell so close to the Chief Minister remains uncertain. An investigation is underway

to determine the cause and accountability behind the incident. Serious questions are being raised about how such a security lapse occurred and who permitted the drone to fly over the Chief Minister's head. In another such incident, an unauthorised drone was sighted flying over the Jagannath Temple in Puri early on Sunday morning. At about 4:10 am, the drone was spotted in the restricted airspace around the Srimandir, circling the temple and moving along the Meghanada Pacheri. It subsequently hovered over the Dadhinauti and Neelachakra, later passing over the northern gate and ascending from the Bada Danda before retreating into the distance. Similar to the security breach involving CM Majhi, authorities have not yet identified the operator or how the drone entered the airspace. In the Jagannath Temple incident, the Puri SP has assured swift identification and legal action against the drone operator.

In State Rs 291 cr for farmers hit by untimely rains

Assistance announced by CM Majhi

PNS ■ BHUBANESWAR

Chief Minister Mohan Charan Majhi on Sunday announced a financial assistance package of around Rs 291 crore to support the farmers in the State affected by the recent unseasonal rains. The adverse weather impacted over 6,66,000 farmers, the CM said. For the first time in Odisha, the government has classified unseasonal rain as a 'natural calamity'. This declaration is intended to expedite aid to those in the agricultural sector struggling with adverse conditions. The CM also emphasised his government's commitment to improving irrigation facilities. This improvement forms part of a broader strategy to mitigate the challenges faced by farmers due to inadequate water supply, he said. Majhi criticised the previous government for failing to achieve the expected advancements in agriculture over the past 24 years. As both Chief Minister and Water Resource Minister, he highlighted col-



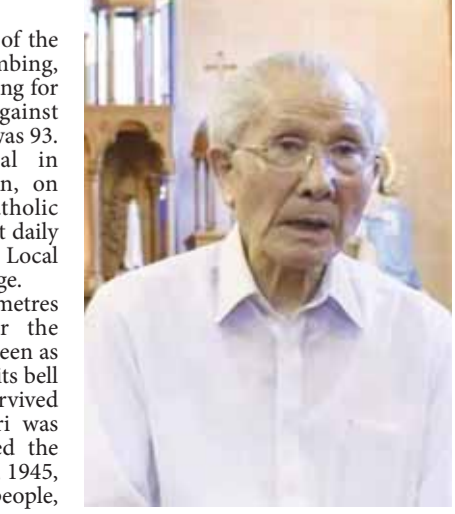
laborative efforts among the government departments to develop optimal farming practices aligning with adverse climatic conditions. Speaking to mediapersons, the CM said, "Excessive damages due to recent unseasonal rains were caused in at least 16 districts, including the coastal ones. Cabinet Ministers had visited several districts and I had also visited three districts and reviewed the crop losses." "We have received the damage assessment reports from

all affected districts. More than 6,66,000 farmers have been affected and a total of around Rs 291 crore will be disbursed to them towards compensation," he said. "The process has already begun and compensation money will be disbursed through the district Collectors. Every affected farmer will get compensation," he said. Notably, the CM said this while addressing a huge gathering at an event organised on the occasion of Pani Panchayat Fortnight 2025.

Fukahori, the Nagasaki atomic bomb survivor dies at 93

PTI ■ TOKYO

Shigemi Fukahori, a survivor of the 1945 Nagasaki atomic bombing, who devoted his life to advocating for peace and campaigning against nuclear weapons, has died. He was 93. Fukahori died at a hospital in Nagasaki, south-western Japan, on January 3, the Urakami Catholic Church, where he prayed almost daily until last year, said on Sunday. Local media reported he died of old age. The church, located about 500 metres from ground zero and near the Nagasaki Peace Park, is widely seen as a symbol of hope and peace, as its bell tower and some statues and survived the nuclear bombing. Fukahori was only 14 when the US dropped the bomb on Nagasaki on August 9, 1945, killing tens of thousands of people,



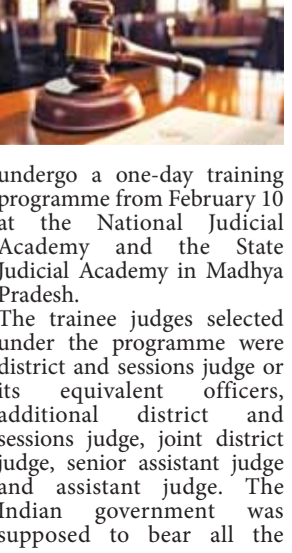
including his family. That came three days after the nuclear attack on Hiroshima, which killed 140,000 people. Japan surrendered days later, ending World War II and the country's nearly half-century of aggression across Asia. Fukahori, who worked at a shipyard about 3 kilometres from where the bomb dropped, couldn't talk about what happened for years, not only because of the painful memories but also how powerless he felt then. About 15 years ago, he became more outspoken after encountering, during a visit to Spain, a man who experienced the bombing of Guernica in 1937 during the Spanish Civil War when he was also 14 years old. The shared experience helped Fukahori open up. "On the day the bomb dropped, I

heard a voice asking for help. When I walked over and held out my hand, the person's skin melted. I still remember how that felt," Fukahori told Japan's national broadcaster NHK in 2019. He often addressed students, hoping they take on what he called "the baton of peace," in reference to his advocacy. When Pope Francis visited Nagasaki in 2019, Fukahori was the one who handed him a wreath of white flowers. The following year, Fukahori represented the bomb victims at a ceremony, making his "pledge for peace," saying: "I am determined to send our message to make Nagasaki the final place where an atomic bomb is ever dropped." A wake is scheduled for Sunday, and funeral services on Monday at Urakami Church, where his daughter will represent the family.

Bangladesh cancels training of judges in India

PTI ■ DHAKA

Bangladesh's interim government on Sunday cancelled a planned training programme for 50 judges and judicial officers in India, scrapping a previous notification. "The notification has been cancelled," a law ministry spokesman said without elaborating. The Daily Star newspaper, however, reported the cancellation came in compliance with a directive from Bangladesh's Supreme Court. The cancellation order came a day after the state-run Bangladesh Sangbad Sangstha reported that 50 lower judiciary judges would



expenses for the training programmes. India and Bangladesh have witnessed strained ties since the deposed Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina fled to New Delhi on August 5 last year following a massive student-led protest that toppled her Awami League's 16-year regime. There have been a series of attacks on Hindu community members and their places of worship after the interim government headed by Muhammad Yunus came to power on August 8. New Delhi has already raised concern with Dhaka, especially after a Hindu monk was arrested in a sedition case and put in jail after he was denied bail last month.

In State Double-decker buses roll out for trial run

Equipped with state-of-the-art amenities
PNS ■ BHUBANESWAR

A trial run of double-decker buses in Odisha is currently underway in the State capital and adjoining areas ahead of the Pravasi Bharatiya Divas scheduled to take place in Bhubaneswar from January 8 to 10.

On Friday afternoon, two of the total five double-decker buses arrived at the Gadakana depot in Bhubaneswar from Mumbai. Equipped with state-of-the-art amenities, these fully air-conditioned ochre-coloured vehicles have the capacity to seat a total of 66 passengers at any given time.

Moreover, they are also adorned with designs and artworks highlighting the vibrant cultural landscape heritage of Odisha. From promi-



nent landmarks such as the Konark Sun Temple and Wheel, Puri Jagannath Temple and Dhuli Stupa, the buses also feature Odishi dance forms and Odia motifs.

Following their arrival in Bhubaneswar, they set off to ply on various stretches of the city along with Khordha and Jatni to ascertain their working conditions.

Urban Development Minister Krushna Chandra Mohapatra said the buses would operate under the Mo Bus initiative and would be managed by the Capital Region Urban Transport (CRUT).

He also laid out plans for the buses to operate as regular Mo Buses in different cities of the State after conclu-

sion of the Pravasi Bharatiya Divas. "A total of five double-decker buses were set off for Odisha out of which two have already arrived and begun trial runs. The government will check the feasibility of routes on which these buses will be the most suitable to run in tourist sites in cities like Bhubaneswar, Cuttack and Puri," the minister added.

Koraput-BBSR train via Angul demanded temporarily introduced during Covid pandemic

PNS ■ KORAPUT

Demand for train service from the tribal-dominated district of Koraput to Bhubaneswar via Sambalpur and Angul is growing louder.

Activists and local residents urged the Indian Railways to introduce a train that would go a long way in benefiting the region and address the long-standing issues of overcrowding and limited connectivity.

At present, only one train serving is the Hirakhand Express which operates between Jagdalpur (Chhatisgarh) and Bhubaneswar via Rayagada and Vizianagaram (Andhra Pradesh). With just one train, it is mostly overcrowded with passengers travelling in risky manners.

Submitting a memorandum, Koraput Citizen Committee, Bhabani Mishra said hundreds of people from

the Koraput region travel to the State capital daily for various purposes, and the existing Hirakhand Express is insufficient to meet their demands. Hence, introducing a new train via Sambalpur and Angul would not only reduce dependency on Hirakhand Express but also improve connectivity between western Odisha and Koraput district. He also pointed out that the locals here have to mostly depend on buses due to lack of proper rail connectivity.

A train service was introduced on the route via Angul during Covid-19 times, only to be discontinued afterwards.

"During Covid-19, the Railways had introduced a train connecting Koraput to Bhubaneswar via Angul, which proved extremely beneficial. However, the service was discontinued after the pandemic. The Railways should re-consider introducing a new train from Koraput to Bhubaneswar via Sambalpur and Angul," demanded former president of Koraput Bar Association Ajit Patra.

IN BRIEF

Sandeep elected organising secy of lawyers' assn

Keonjhar: Sandeep Kumar Patnaik, a member of the Keonjhar District Bar Association, has been elected an organising secretary of the All Odisha Lawyers' Association at its recent conference held at Bhanjanagar, Ganjam. Sisir Kumar Padhy and Prasanna Nanda were elected as president and secretary, respectively. About 2,500 advocates from different parts of Odisha had joined the conference.



IFFCO manager gets Honorary Doctorate

Paradip: The American Merit Council has given Honorary Doctorate Award to Dr RN Roy for his work in social services.



The event was organised by World Charitable Foundation on December 31 at Puri. Roy is the son of Sudhanshu Sekhar Roy of Kendu Shai village under Rajkanika block of Kendrapada district. Now Roy is serving as Assistant Manager, Department of Technical service in IFFCO at Paradip.

Ace anchor couple of Brahmapur feted

Brahmapur: Ace anchor couple of India Hrusikesh Panigrahi and Sudipta Panigrahi was felicitated on behalf of Utkal Association of Madras and Sri Jagannath Mandir, Chennai. The renowned anchor couple got enormous popularity in stage anchoring of cultural festivals. They were felicitated at the Jagannath temple here with bouquets and Uttariyas. The Panigrahi couple got their achievements recorded in the INDIA Book Records recently.



Friendly cricket match at DAV CSpur

Bhubaneswar: Like previous years, a friendly 20-20 cricket match was organised at the DAV Public School, Chandrasekharpur, Bhubaneswar between the Chairman XI



and Principal XI comprising players from both parents and staffs on Saturday in which the Principal XI won by 7 wickets. Principal of the school Dr Sujata Sahu flanked by dignitaries inaugurated the match and appreciated the support of the parents in every aspect and mad an appeal to glorify the institute further.

CM lauds triumph over political 'Ravanas' in Jajpur



PNS ■ JAJPUR

Chief Minister Mohan Charan Majhi has declared a significant political victory over his adversaries, whom he called 'Ravanas', in Jajpur district. Addressing attendees at the Dharmasala Mahotsav on Friday, he credited the local populace for overturning the established political 'Ravanas' and making Jajpur free from misrule.

Although he did not name anyone, it was evident that he was hinting at the BJD and its previous government. He said certain politicians had considered themselves unbeatable in the region. However, people proved their hubris unfounded by voting them out.

"I want to thank all of you for shattering their arrogance

and pride. Some of them thought that they were invincible and could never be defeated in this district because they won by 80-90,000 votes. But it is rightly said pride goes for a fall," the CM said.

He likened these political figures to 'political Ravanas', referring to the mythological character from Hindu epics who embody arrogance and tyranny.

"For this landmark achievement, all of you deserve gratitude," Majhi said while expressing gratitude to the Jajpur residents for their role in this political shift. Majhi also emphasised the importance of continued vigilance and engagement, urging the citizens of Jajpur to remain proactive in safeguarding their newly-established political landscape.

J'suguda to be major industrial, commercial hub'

CM Majhi unveils Zilla Lok Mahotsav 'Dulduli'

RAJKUMAR SHARMA ■ JHARSUGUDA

Chief Minister Mohan Charan Majhi inaugurated the Jharsuguda Zilla Lok Mahotsav 'Dulduli' at BTM Chowk on Thursday, emphasizing the district's potential to become a major industrial and commercial hub.

He lauded the region's rich legacy of freedom fighters and its vital role in Odisha's economic development due to its mineral wealth and industrial prowess.

Highlighting the ongoing progress, Majhi announced that flights from Jharsuguda to Hyderabad have commenced, with services to Raipur, Lucknow, and



Mumbai to follow soon. He also revealed plans to establish an industrial park in the district, boosting local economic opportunities. Additionally, the Chief Minister assured that the long-closed Mangal Bazar Old Hospital, shut since 2018 after the District Headquarters Hospital's relocation to Malimunda, would soon be reopened.

dancer Sujata Mohapatra, the daughter-in-law of the legendary Kelucharan Mohapatra, adding cultural prestige to the celebration. A souvenir commemorating Jharsuguda's District Foundation Day was also released.

The festival witnessed the presence of several dignitaries, including Revenue Minister Suresh Pujari, Bargarh MP Pradeep Purohit, Jharsuguda MLA Tankadhar Tripathy, Revenue Divisional Commissioner (Northern Division) Sachin Ramachandra Jadhav, IGP (Northern Range) Himanshu Kumar Lal, district Collector Aboli Sunil Naravane, and SP Smit P Parmar, among others.

Majhi called for collective efforts to position Jharsuguda as Odisha's leading industrial district, underscoring its strategic importance in the State's growth narrative.

Bird & crocodile census

Satkosia sanctuary shut for tourists for Jan 6-8 & 17-18

PNS ■ ANGUL

The Satkosia Tiger Reserve and its different sections would remain closed for tourists from January 6 to 8 and again on 17 and 18 owing to the scheduled bird and crocodile census. Satkosia Wildlife Division Forest Officer (DFO) Saroj Panda informed on Saturday that the crocodile census would commence from the evening hours of January 5 and continue until 8.

Besides, Satkosia will again reopen on January 9 before remaining out of bounds for tourists on 17 and 18 for the bird census. All tourism-related activi-



ties, including boating in the Mahanadi river, will also be suspended along with a prohibition on local fishermen from entering the gorge during this period.

rangements, including the use of country boats, have been made for the census activities.

Incidentally, last year's census in Satkosia was held around roughly the same time when the crocodile population had surged with the number of mugger crocodiles rising to 97 and the population of gharials increasing to 14.

However, the DFO had also mentioned a decline in the number of birds visiting the sanctuary last year with approximately 3,330 birds flocking to the gorge against 3,800 birds of 81 species in 2023.

Native of Kendrapada

US-settled NRI Prof helps students for higher studies

Felicitates persons at his trust's annual fest

RAJESH BEHERA ■ KENDRAPADA

Septuagenarian NRI Professor Debendra Das, a native of Badahat of Kendrapada district and presently settled in the USA, is on a mission to encourage the meritorious students of his native district by giving them scholarships to go for higher studies.

He, on Saturday, provided scholarships to nearly 500 students under Shree Banchhanidhi Das and Srimati Devi Charitable Trust, established by him in the name of his late parents in a func-



tion at Kendrapada. Former PCC president Niranjan Pattanaik was the chief guest on the occasion. Former Health Director of SCB Medical College and Hospital Dr Nayan Kishore Mohanty, NRI educationist Dr Biswaprakash Kanungo, Prabasi Odia social activist Dr Rita Mohanty and Runu Mohanty were the guests in the function.

Former PCC president Pattanaik also received Tulashi Ratna Samman from the Trust, whereas social activist Gayatri Mohanty, Dr

Rita Mohanty, Dr Nalini Pattanaik, Dr Pratap Das, Dr Birendra Kumar Pattanaik, and former Head of Times of India, Kolkata, late Kamalakat Mohanty received Katherine Das Seva Samman on the occasion.

The Trust provided a sum of Rs 1 lakh to Jagatsinghpur-based "Amari Biswas" NGO managed by Dr Runu Mohanty for the social empowerment of poverty stricken women.

Prof Debendra Das, working as Emeritus Professor at the University of Alaska, be-

longs to a lower middle class family. But most of his family members were well educated and established themselves in their own fields which inspired him to do well in his studies. He graduated in the Mechanical Engineering from Regional Engineering College, Rourkela in 1972 with a gold medal which paved the road to the US for his higher studies. Brown university gave him cent percent scholarship to pursue master's degree and later he obtained Doctorate. He settled in USA and married Katherine Cross (Das). "I know there are several meritorious poverty stricken students who fail to go for higher studies due to lack of encouragement and financial constraints. So I decided to help the meritorious and poor students," stated Prof Das.

Many Ganjam mega drinking water projects in limbo

Locals demand probe as to why projects worth crores defunct

KRUSHNA CHANDRA PANDA ■ BRAHMAPUR

The much-hyped multipurpose inter district mega drinking water supply project to meet the need of 55 villages under Ganjam Block and 42 villages of Krushna Prasad Block in Puri is in doldrums due to poor supervision. The project was started in 2018 with a target to complete it in 2022.

The RWSS Division has utterly failed to supervise the execution. The project was aimed to provide piped water at the doorsteps of people in the two adjoining districts at an approximate cost of Rs 150 crore since the ground water

in several areas of Ganjam district and Krushna Prasad Block is saline and contaminated and unfit for consumption. There is a growing demand by the villagers for fixing accountability on the contractors, concerned engineers and the erring officials responsible for the delay of the project execution.

The false claim of the BJD government of having provided piped drinking water in Ganjam was exposed after the villagers of Mayurpada, Gokharakuda, New Podampetta and old Pedampetta under Ganjam Block narrated their difficulties.

The villagers led by KM Reddy of Mayurpada village said that the villages located near sea-shore are deprived of getting piped drinking water

due to discontinuation of water supply from the earlier project i.e. Lakshmi Overhead Tank and the mega drinking water project. Hence, drinking water supply has been very irregular and erratic.

Further, the Ganjam-Humma drinking water line constructed at a cost of Rs 10 crore too has gone futile. The overhead tank as well as Ganjam-Humma pipe line were meant to provide drinking water to the nearby villages. However, the inter district drinking water project is confined to pen and paper only and intended to befool the public, as water supply to these villagers has been frequently discontinued and interrupted. The villagers have now demanded for a thorough inquiry into the matter.

Similarly, another glaring example of non-functioning of drinking water project is in Karapada GP. For last 3 years, the water supply has been either erratic or stopped to which the officials reportedly have expressed their ignorance. During the earlier government, the officials laid pipes spending huge money from the government exchequer ignoring effective and hassle free performance of the project. There is a public perception that, the CM should order an impartial probe in to the matter and fix accountability on those responsible and restore water supply in public interest.

Meanwhile, the MLA of Chhatrapur has also written a letter to the Chief Minister requesting to order for a high level inquiry.

Stay vigilant against anti-national forces: VP Dhankhar to youth

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■
NEW DELHI

Vice President Jagdeep Dhankhar on Sunday urged the country's youth to "stay vigilant" against "anti-national forces", saying it alone will secure India's democratic values.

In his address at a ceremony at the Delhi Cantonment here to mark the formal inauguration of the NCC Republic Day Camp, he also said "nationalism has to override all other interests, personal or organisational".

The vice president said the foundation of "our national transformation" rests on five basic pillars and these include social harmony, environmental protection and adherence to civic duties.

"Our Constitution gives us fundamental rights and we are conscious of those fundamental rights but there are fundamental duties also. Nations blossom, nationalism is nurtured, growth is secured, harmony is stabilised when every

citizen of the country believes and subscribes to fundamental duties. For civic duties, you as a disciplined members of the force can really be torch-bearers," he added.

A total of 2,361 NCC cadets from around the country are taking part in the month-long Republic Day camp, which began on December 30, and will culminate with the PM's rally on January 27.

The annual event is also witnessing the participation of 917 girl cadets, the largest contingent so far.

"The organisation instils nationalism and nation-first approach. No nation in the world can grow unless its citizens are deeply committed to nationalism," Dhankhar told the gathering.

"Nationalism has to override all other interests, personal or organisational. Nation first approach has to be our only approach, maintain these qualities as a tribute to our motherland," he said.

In his address, the vice president also emphasised that



India's vision of becoming a developed nation by 2047 is no longer a dream but a "certain destination".

He praised the National Cadet Corps (NCC) cadets for being a section of the country's youth known for fostering unity and discipline with a sense of service to the nation.

"My dear cadets, stay vigilant against anti-national forces because that alone will secure our democratic values. Our dedication to motherland has to be the foremost. It has to be steadfast, it has to be unflinching, it has to be unshakable because it is bedrock and foundation of our existence," Dhankhar said.

The vice president further said the "challenges are emanating" because the nation is witnessing a rise which is "globally acclaimed".

"A rise that is incremental for last decade or so, a rise that is envy of the world, a rise that is positively impacting every person in this country," he said. Dhankhar said the month-long camp, with convergence of

over 2,000 cadets, is bound to be "remarkably rewarding".

Of the 2,361 cadets at the camp, 114 are from Jammu and Kashmir and Ladakh and 178 from the northeast region.

"Boys and girls, you represent our youth demographic dividend. This is envy of the world, our developed nation vision at 2047 is no longer a dream. It is our certain destination," the vice president said.

"You all are crucial to Bharat's development at 2047," he stressed.

Prime Minister Narendra Modi-led government has envisioned becoming 'Viksit Bharat' by 2047 when the nation completes 100 years of independence from colonial rule.

"Boys and girls, you are fortunate to be living at a time when India is no longer a nation with a potential. It is a nation rising with unmatched infrastructure growth," Dhankhar said.

He cited various infrastructure projects, including new airports and metros, to emphasise his point.

"To reflect on our digital pen-

etration, technological advancement that has been acceded by the world, we have 6.5 billion monthly digital transactions. Boys and girls, we are living at a time when national optimism prevails as we approach to becoming the world's third largest global economy," he said.

The vice president underlined that youth opportunities expand as "global institutions hail Bharat as favourite prime investment destination".

The government has taken much-needed initiatives and policy decisions. Now there is transformation from discriminatory to merit-based mechanisms all over," he said.

Emphasising the five-point mantra, Dhankhar said, "I urge all citizens and particularly the youth and more particularly the NCC cadets to practise these in all earnestness, in letter and spirit because subscribing to these, adherence to these, will be game changer and game changer for the better for Bharat, that is home to one-sixth of humanity."

VHP says acquittal of Nanded blast accused 'tight slap' on Congress

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■
NEW DELHI

The VHP on Sunday termed the acquittal of the 2006 Nanded blast accused a "tight slap" on the Congress' face and asked the party's top leadership to apologise to Hindu society. The reaction came after a sessions court in Maharashtra's Nanded acquitted on Saturday all nine surviving accused in the 2006 blast case.

"The Congress' dream of proving Hindus to be terrorists in the 2006 Nanded blast case stands exposed, with the court acquitting all the persons made accused in the case during Congress rule," Vishva Hindu Parishad (VHP) national spokesperson Vinod Bansal said. He claimed the Congress and the Maharashtra Anti-Terrorism Squad (ATS) had already been "exposed" in the Malegaon blast case.

"After 19 years, the Nanded court acquitted all the accused and slapped the Congress hard on its face for its anti-Hindu misdeeds," Bansal said. "At



least now, the top leadership of the Congress should apologise to Hindu society," he added. The case pertains to an explosion at the home of Laxman Rajkondwar -- allegedly a Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS) worker in Nanded city -- on the intervening night of April 4 and 5, 2006. His son Naresh Rajkondwar and VHP activist Himanshu Panse were killed in the blast, allegedly while assembling an explosive device, the investigators had claimed.

The case was initially investi-

gated by the Maharashtra ATS before being transferred to the Central Bureau of Investigation (CBI). According to defence lawyer Nitin Ruwal, 49 prosecution witnesses were examined during the trial. However, the prosecution could not prove that the incident was a "bomb blast" and not the explosion of a gas cylinder or some other inflammable object, he told PTI on Saturday. The Congress was in power at the Centre and in Maharashtra at the time of the incident.

Three-day Pravasi Bharatiya Divas convention to be held in Bhubaneswar from January 8

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■
NEW DELHI

The Indian diaspora's achievements and contributions across the world and ways to further deepen their engagement with India are set to be the key focus at the three-day Pravasi Bharatiya Divas convention to be held in Bhubaneswar from January 8. India's economic growth, policy reforms and developmental trajectory in several key sectors are also likely to be showcased to woo overseas Indian investors at the convention. A large number of overseas Indians, including top businessmen, entrepreneurs and economists, from over 50 countries are expected to participate in the 18th Pravasi Bharatiya Divas (PBD) convention. The PBD is celebrated on January 9 to mark Mahatma Gandhi's return to India on that day in 1915.

Prime Minister Narendra Modi will formally inaugurate the high-profile event on January 9. It will feature a virtual address by chief guest Christine Carla Kangaloo, President of Trinidad and Tobago, according to the Ministry of External Affairs.



The theme of the convention is 'Diaspora's Contribution to a Viksit Bharat'. President Droupadi Murmu will deliver the valedictory address on January 10. She will confer the Pravasi Bharatiya Samman Awards 2025 on select members of the Indian diaspora to recognise their achievements.

India's economic growth, policy reforms and the country's developmental trajectory in several key sectors will be showcased at the convention with an aim to strengthen the country's connect with its diaspora, people familiar with the preparation for the event said. The country will also be showcased as an attractive investment destination, they said.

This year, the Pravasi Bharatiya Divas convention is being organised by the Ministry of External Affairs (MEA) in partnership with the Odisha government. Prime Minister Modi will also inaugurate four exhibitions at the PBD convention, including one titled 'Vishwaroop Ram - The Universal Legacy of Ramayana'.

This exhibition would present the timeless epic of Ramayana through a curated juxtaposition of traditional and contemporary art forms, the MEA said on Sunday.

The second exhibition will be on the diaspora's contribution to technology and Viksit Bharat. It will acknowledge the contributions of the Indian diaspora to the development of technology in the world.

Another exhibition would be on the spread and evolution of the Indian diaspora in the world. It will showcase rare documents of people who migrated from Mandvi in Gujarat to Muscat in Oman. The PBD convention will have five thematic plenary sessions including one on 'Building Bridges, Breaking Barriers: Stories of Migrant Skills' and another titled 'Beyond Borders: Diaspora Youth Leadership in a Globalised World'.

The third plenary will be 'Green Connections: Diaspora's Contributions to Sustainable Development'.

Another will be 'Diaspora Divas: Celebrating Women's Leadership and Influence -- Nari Shakti'. The MEA said the Youth Pravasi Bharatiya Divas will also be held on January 8.

Former CRPF DG Prakash Mishra pens 'humorous' memoir

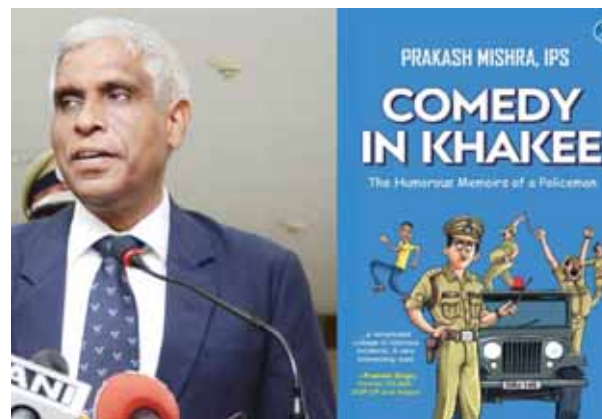
PTI ■ NEW DELHI

Former IPS officer Prakash Mishra spent his career dealing with dangerous situations such as protests and violence. Now, nine years after he retired, he is ready to offer a glimpse into the lighter side of the life in uniform in his soon-to-be released memoir.

"Comedy in Khakee: The Humorous Memoirs of a Policeman" has anecdotes of an "uncanny boss" frowning at pink napkins in a meeting and how a young Mishra played pranks on friends and teachers during school and training.

The book, of course, does not name anyone. The memoir recounts how the son of a district magistrate in Odisha "loved to laugh, even at silly things, much to the annoyance of others".

Mishra, a 1977-batch Indian Police Service (IPS) officer, retired in 2016 from the post of director general (DG) of



the Central Reserve Police Force (CRPF), the world's largest paramilitary force with over three lakh personnel. He also served as director general of police (DGP) in Odisha, apart from heading the National Disaster Response Force (NDRF) and having stints at the National Investigation Agency (NIA) and the Union home ministry while on central deputation. "In an environment of policing, where seriousness often

overshadows the joys of life, 'Comedy in Khakee' seeks to remind us the power of humour and the importance of laughter," Mishra writes in his book, which is set to release on January 11 in Delhi. The book, much on the lines of the "humour in uniform" columns that appear in various publications globally, contains anecdotes, musings and observations about a variety of human beings and cir-

cumstances the former top cop observed while being in school, during his training at the National Police Academy and various stints with the Odisha Police.

He admits to playing pranks, sometimes bordering on the dangerous, along with his twin brother during his early days and later with his "partners-in-crime" friends and batchmates.

The book describes an incident of a commode at the residence of his senior -- a deputy inspector general -- collapsing while the officer was sitting on it and tales of "sumptuous" feasts being organised by police personnel for their seniors during routine police station inspections.

"There was a particular officer of the rank of commissioner, who used to love this kind of arrangement. I had heard that once, during an inspection of the office of the subdivisional officer, he was given such a sumptuous

lunch. Having eaten his full, he retired for an afternoon siesta," Mishra writes in the book.

The characters, including an "uncanny boss" who ended an important meeting as he had got offended with the "pink napkins" served with potato chips, remain unnamed.

The 198-page book is peppered with anecdotes and repartee that went around in the police establishment during Mishra's tenure while dealing with a multitude of circumstances -- protests, riot-like situations or during routine practice at the firing range for cops.

The book is "for the jesters among us who remind us not to take ourselves too seriously and bring light into our lives with their wit and charm," according to Mishra.

The retired IPS officer confesses in the book that it was in his school that he learnt "rascals can be of different types."

NIA arrests PFI member for funding plot

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■
NEW DELHI

The NIA has arrested a cadre of the Popular Front of India (PFI) for channelising funds from Dubai for the banned outfit to further its unlawful activities in India, an official statement issued on Sunday said. A team of the National Investigation Agency (NIA) arrested Mohammad Sajjad Alam of East Champaran district, Bihar, on Saturday as soon as he landed at the Indira Gandhi International (IGI) Airport here from Dubai, UAE, it said. An arrest warrant had been issued against Alam, a trained cadre of the PFI, by a special NIA court. A lookout circular (LOC) had also been issued against him, the statement said. According to the NIA, the accused was involved in channelising illegal funds from Dubai to PFI cadres in Bihar through a UAE, Karnataka and Kerala-based syndicate. The funds were used for pro-



moting the banned outfit's criminal and unlawful activities, the NIA said. The case, which was initially registered by Phulwari Sharif police in Bihar in July 2022, relates to PFI cadres' involvement in unlawful and anti-national activities.

The cadres conspired to create an atmosphere of terror and spread religious enmity between members of different religions and groups through activities prejudicial to the maintenance of peace and harmony in the country, the statement said. Aimed at disrupting

public tranquillity and causing disaffection against India, their activities involved the use of criminal force to advance the PFI ideology of establishing Islamic rule in India as envisaged in the organisation's vision document, "India 2047: Towards Rule of Islam in India, Internal Document: Not for circulation", the probe agency said.

The NIA, which took over the case days after it was registered by police, has charge-sheeted 17 accused in the case. Alam is the 18th accused to be arrested in the case.

Yogi to perform Ram Lalla's abhishek during Pratishtha Dwadashi fest on January 11

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■
AYODHYA

Ayodhya will host the Pratishtha Dwadashi festival from January 11 to 13, celebrating the first anniversary of Ram Lalla's installation in the grand temple. On the opening day, January 11, Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath will perform the sacred Abhishek of Shri Ram Lalla in the sanctum sanctorum at 11 AM.

Following this, he will inaugurate a cultural program at Angad Tila and address devotees. Devotional songs by renowned artistes such as Sonu Nigam, Shankar Mahadevan, and Malini Awasthi will also be released on the occasion.

Champat Rai, General Secretary of the Shri Ram Janmabhoomi Teerth Kshetra Trust said, "On January 11, corresponding to Paush Shukla Paksha, Dwadashi, Vikram Samvat 2001, we mark one year since the establishment of the newly built temple at Ayodhya Dham, the sacred birthplace of Maryada Purushottam Lord Shri Ram, the patron of Indian culture and Sanatan Dharma."

He added, "Events will include vibrant kirtans at key locations across Ayodhya, such as Lata Chowk, Janmabhoomi Path, Shringar Haat, Ram Ki Paidi, Sugriva Fort, and Chhoti Devkali. Young artistes will enchant audiences with musical performances throughout



the city."

As part of the festivities, he said, "A three-day Shri Ram Raag-Seva program will take place in a pavilion near the temple's sanctum sanctorum. This initiative, led by Ayodhya artist Yatindra Mishra with support from the Sangeet Natak Academy, will present devotional offerings to Lord Shri Ram through music, dance, and instrumental performances."

The Trust has extended invitations to saints and devotees from across the country. Champat Rai urged residents and pilgrims to participate in the celebrations, making at least a one-day visit during the three-day festival to honor the occasion and experience

the spiritual atmosphere of Ayodhya.

Three days of the program Day 1 (January 11): The festival will open with Raga Seva, performed by renowned singer Usha Mangeshkar, sister of the legendary Lata Mangeshkar, and accompanied by Mayuresh Pai, who will present devotional bhajans. This will be followed by a soulful duet (jugalbandi) of the sitar by Sahitya Nahar and the violin by Santosh Nahar. The day will conclude with a captivating Bharatnatyam dance performance by Dr. Ananda Shankar Jayant.

Day 2 (January 12): The second day will begin with Raga Seva by celebrated folk singer

Shailesh Srivastava, featuring traditional Badhava and Sohar melodies. Following this, classical vocalist Kalapini Komkali will perform Shri Ram bhajans and Nirgun Gayan. The day's program will end with a mesmerizing flute recital by the internationally acclaimed maestro, Rakesh Chaurasia.

Day 3 (January 13): The festival's final day will start with a classical vocal performance by the acclaimed Aarti Ankalikar, followed by an elegant Kathak performance by renowned dancer Shobhana Narayan. The grand finale will feature classical singing and Shri Ram bhajans by the celebrated South Indian duo, Shri Krishna Mohan and Shri Ram Mohan Thrissur Brothers.



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PAPER WITH PASSION

Vision for rural India

PM Modi hails rural resilience at Grameen Bharat Mahotsav; says rural prosperity is essential for national growth

Prime Minister Narendra Modi delivered an inspiring address at the Grameen Bharat Mahotsav 2025, held in New Delhi, highlighting the transformative strides made in rural development. The event celebrated the resilience and progress of rural India under the theme "Building a Resilient Rural India for Viksit Bharat 2047"—a vision to make India a developed nation by its centenary year of independence. PM Modi emphasised that the government's intentions, policies and decisions are invigorating rural India with newfound energy. He highlighted significant achievements in healthcare, agriculture and basic infrastructure that have elevated the quality of life in villages and driven economic growth. Reflecting on India's response to the COVID-19 pandemic, he proudly noted how Indian villages defied global doubts by ensuring vaccine access to the last mile. He attributed this success to inclusive economic policies that cater to every section of society. Prime Minister Narendra Modi's address at the Grameen Bharat Mahotsav



2025 highlighted significant achievements in rural development, painting an optimistic picture of progress. While these strides are commendable, a closer examination reveals underlying challenges that must be addressed to ensure holistic and sustainable rural transformation. PM Modi emphasised healthcare advancements, noting the establishment of over 1.5 lakh Ayushman Arogya Mandirs and the growing reach of telemedicine in rural areas. These initiatives reflect substantial progress; however, challenges such as a shortage of trained healthcare professionals, limited infrastructure, and inconsistent internet access in remote villages continue to hinder equitable healthcare delivery.

Agriculture has been a central focus of rural development efforts, with financial assistance under PM-KISAN and a significant increase in agricultural loans helping farmers enhance productivity. Yet, structural problems persist in the agrarian sector, including reliance on unpredictable monsoon, insufficient crop diversification and market volatility. The protests against contentious agricultural reforms also highlight the need for more inclusive policy-making and effective stakeholder engagement. The Prime Minister highlighted the sharp reduction in rural poverty, which has reportedly fallen below 5 per cent from 26 per cent in 2012. While this represents significant progress, the persistence of rural inequality and exclusion of marginalised communities from development initiatives cannot be ignored. Poverty metrics alone do not capture the broader challenges of deprivation, including limited access to quality education, healthcare and social mobility. Infrastructure gaps, such as unreliable road connectivity, inadequate digital networks, and inconsistent electricity supply, limit the potential of rural economies. Furthermore, rural India's heavy dependence on agriculture underscores the urgent need for economic diversification and the creation of jobs in manufacturing and services. Prime Minister's vision is indeed laudable but a lot needs to be done for upliftment of rural masses.

PICTALK



'Sadhus' of 'Shri Niranjani Akhara' take part in a procession towards Sangam, in Prayagraj

Harmony: A prerequisite for national unity



ATUL SEHGAL

The resurgence of communal discord calls for urgent reflection and action. It is time to expose the forces that exploit differences for personal gain

The global communal ecosystem is showing change for the worse. The word communal here connotes and covers ethnic, racial, religious and sectarian communities. The last seven decades since 1950 have not seen very many episodes of communal conflict or conflagration in the global society. After the terrible death and destruction wrought by the Second World War (1939-1945) and the horrible communal riots following the partition of India into two independent states, episodes of communal violence have been relatively less compared to that in earlier periods of world history. Of late, the world is riven by acrimony and wars at multiple locations and communally divisive sentiments across global societies appear to be rising again. It seems that during the above period, the sentiments of mutual hatred and antipathy among certain global communities remained suppressed, only to resurface now.

It is time to review and relook at the elements that go into building and strengthening communal harmony. With the world in the terrible throes of wars at several locations, it is perhaps time to strengthen communal harmony and amity globally, particularly in our society and not to allow it to be undermined. History has been written largely by the conquerors of countries and the governing elite. We often do not have true accounts of history do not read true history or otherwise are inclined to interpret facts wrongly, driven by our deep-seated prejudices. If we look closely at the picture and analyse it dispassionately, we shall find that it is generally the politicians and rulers who incited communal violence for their own selfish needs or vile vested interests. Often, these acts of incitement are obscured through disinformation campaigns. There are cultural and ideological differences between communities. What to talk of mainstream religions like Hinduism, Islam, Christianity or Buddhism, there are major and minor variants of these religions and sub-ideological sects whose number touch-



es almost three thousand. They all have major or minor ideological differences. Notwithstanding the many differing and dissonant injunctions of their scriptural texts, peace and harmony are basic to the progress and prosperity of citizens in every country, and every society and they are dear to all human individuals. That is why there are constitutions, laws and regulations in every country for proper governance that incorporates the functional upholding of universal peace promoting human values of justice and equality. Hence, we need to expose the machinations of the political elite to strengthen communal harmony in today's world. In the context of the current global scenario, the incidence of violence against Hindus in Pakistan or Bangladesh is more because of mischief and misdeeds of the ruling elite. During the colonial period in India, communal riots were frequently triggered by politicians or the governing elite. In our country with population of 145 crore, nearly 21 crore are Muslims. They have been a part and parcel of our society for ages. We need to better integrate them, not appease them for petty political gains. The need of the hour is ideological realignment. And we should quickly brace ourselves for it. Let us not allow the demolition or destruction



DURING THE COLONIAL PERIOD IN INDIA, COMMUNAL RIOTS WERE FREQUENTLY TRIGGERED BY POLITICIANS OR THE GOVERNING ELITE. THIS HAPPENS WHEN RELIGION AS A PRACTICE OF FAITH IS GIVEN A POLITICAL COLOURING

of religious buildings anywhere, but build monuments of universal, secular and humanistic culture to promote communal harmony. Let us build buildings and institutions that bind humans, not separate them. Let us educate global humans on the eternal metaphysical truths that apply to all, everywhere. Let us awaken humanity to the threads of universal knowledge about the Creator, creation and their relationship. Bharat has been the cradle of human civilisation because the divine knowledge emanating from the one Creator was revealed in this land to sages at the dawn of civilization. That core knowledge enshrined in the divine scriptures Vedas and ideology based on that needs resurrection today. Humans can live sensibly and peacefully for ages if they wish to. Only they need to be aligned with universal Dharma. Man-made sects separate; universal Dharma (righteousness) unites—because the latter comes from the omniscient Creator of all humans. When we talk of Sanatan as the religion of the inhabitants of Bharat, we refer to the above said broad-based, universal and eternal religion of humanity that transcends caste, creed, ethnicity and sect. Sanatan Dharma is the prescribed code of living handed down to the

earliest humans by the Creator. Let us strengthen adherence to that eternal code of living expected from humans by the one master of the Universe whose subjects we all are. Let us focus on the common, positive strands of ideology that exist in various mainstream religions and let us deliberate on the ideological strands that are dissonant with the universal Sanatan Dharma. Let us not mix religion with politics; rather let us give politics a more humanistic complexion. That is what is required today. We Indians are in the process of nation rebuilding after centuries of lying low due to depredation by foreign invaders. Now is the time for fast-track progress and we must beware of nefarious designs of foreign powers to create impediments to our progress. We should try to reform our political and legal institutions to make them truly secular and democratic. Let us make our national fabric strong, placing it above caste, creed, faith or religion. At the same time, we should strive to dissolve our ideological differences in the bright shining light of Sanatan Vedic Dharma which has been the beacon of guiding light of all humanity for eons since the dawn of civilisation. (The author is a management consultant based in New Delhi; views are personal)

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

ISRO EMBARKS DOCKING MISSION

Madam — On December 30, ISRO has embarked on another mission that has vast application in future exploratory missions. In fact, the space docking experiments or SpaDex mission are linked to the plan for setting up India's own space station named the Bharatiya Antariksh Station by 2035 to carry out spacewalks and research in microgravity conditions. This mission also carries the PS4 orbital experiment module 4 or POEM 4, using the spent fourth stage of PSLV C 60 which otherwise would have ended as space debris carrying 24 payloads. Autonomous orbited docking is a sophisticated manoeuvre mastered by a few elite nations like the USA, China and Russia and India too is set to join this group. Docking is indispensable for missions that require heavy spacecraft and equipment that cannot be launched in one go, viz the International Space Station for instance.

A manned foray to the moon and the operation of the country's first space station is not possible without it. It could also open up opportunities for India's space research agency to collaborate with global missions that require docking facilities. The success of missions like Chandrayaan 3 and Aditya 1 in 2023 followed by the setting up of the first space observatory to study the polarisation of cosmic X-rays in 2024, to the recent Cabinet approval in Sept 2024 of Venus Orbital Mission to study the different aspects of Venus, clearly showcases that it has enough expertise to contribute to the divergent facets of planetary research. This mission is the handiwork of collaboration between public and private enterprises and underscores not just its technical prowess but also lays a solid foundation for future endeavours that will shape the global space landscape. **Vijay Singh Adhikari | Nainital**

RELIEF FOR BHOPAL RESIDENTS

Madam—It is really sad that it took four decades to remove the toxic waste from

HMPV virus outbreaks spark panic



In China, the spread of viruses causing respiratory illnesses like Influenza A, HMPV, Mycoplasma Pneumonia, and COVID-19 has increased. This spread is affecting children's health significantly, leading to a rise in hospital admissions. These viruses exhibit symptoms similar to other respiratory infections, such as devastation caused by COVID-19, trusting the "Chinese Dragon" seems difficult. Five years ago, Wuhan's coronavirus outbreak wreaked

havoc worldwide, and now, the HMPV virus appears to have originated from the same location. Is this merely a coincidence, or is Wuhan a hub for developing biological colds and fevers in children. Now, the Human Metapneumovirus (HMPV) is spreading in China, sparking fears that a similar outbreak could occur again. Wuhan, the epicentre of the initial coronavirus outbreak, is reportedly the origin of this new virus as well. China has stated that the situation is under control, and no travel restrictions have been imposed internationally. The Chinese Dragon seems to be spewing various deadly viruses. It is essential for the World Health Organization to take timely notice of these recurring dangerous viruses emerging from China. **Dattaprasad Shirodkar | Mumbai**

MELANISTIC LEOPARD SPOTTED AGAIN

Madam — After a "melanistic leopard" was spotted in the forests near Odisha's Nayagarh, wildlife lovers are understandably euphoric. Over the last five years, various forests of the country have reported the sighting of "melanistic leopards." Black feline of the big cat family, with small head, a robust jaw and strong hind legs—that's the compact description of "panther" or "melanistic leopard." In India, dense forests of the southern part harbour the black beauty. The black cats love to live in dense evergreen forests so that they can, as far as possible, avoid light. A genetic mutation, dominant or recessive, causes an overexpression of melanin pigments resulting in the so-called 'melanistic leopard.' However, the joy of sighting the big cat should be tempered with sobriety. Some 15 variants of the black cats are endangered. **Ganapathi Bhat | Akola**

Send your feedback to: letterstopioneer@gmail.com

Embracing your unique journey to success

This year, let's shift our focus inward, honour our unique paths and recognise the triumphs that shape who we are

How often have you beaten yourself up saying you don't measure up to others in terms of skills and success? How often have you undervalued your accomplishments with a desultory wave of hand accompanied by a "Oh, this is something everyone does" or "I haven't done anything great"? Chances are that we have done it a greater number of times than what is good for our self-esteem and confidence.



others and trying to be one up over the rest.

As long as we keep looking at others, we shall never be able to make the cut, which is completing a task to the best of our abilities, putting forth the best of our ideas as they emerge in our intellect and assessing their value not in terms of where you stand or what your ranking is in comparison, but giving ourselves due credit for the distance we have come given our specific challenges in life. No victory is small. To the little boy participating in a sack race at school, winning it or making it to the other end without stumbling should be an accomplishment. To a student who successfully makes a presentation in class, the comfort that she feels standing in front of a class and speaking about what she believes in is a success. To

our character and our path forward. The mistake we often make is believing that success has a standard template. It doesn't. As we step into a new year, let us make a conscious choice—to shift the gaze inward, to honour our unique journeys, and to celebrate the progress we've made, however small it may appear. Let us define success not by comparisons but by the courage to keep going, the strength to rise after a fall, and the grace to applaud ourselves for showing up. You are enough. Your story matters. And your victories, no matter how quiet, deserve recognition. Here's to a year where we measure success by our growth, not by how we compare to others. Let those who conquer mountains do so with pride and let those who climb smaller hills find joy in reaching their summits. And for those who can climb neither—whether by circumstance or choice—let their strength shine in being the cheerleaders who uplift others on their journeys. (The author is a Dubai-based columnist, and writing coach and has published six books. Views are personal)

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ASHA IYER KUMAR



FIRST COLUMN

GOD IS THE SOLE CONTROLLER

Logic, practicality and experience point to the necessity of a singular, omnipotent force governing all



AJIT KUMAR BISHNOI

Imagine there being more than one controller of the Creation. They disagree on some matters and are not able to resolve them. What kind of chaos will result? Therefore, there being more than one controller is illogical, impractical and unimaginable. And this reality rules out all small controllers, as we imagine ourselves to be. Don't we all feel that we control something or another? Do we? These examples should provide the answer. There is a huge corporation, which employs thousands of people worldwide. Its owner has a say over who is used and at what level.

This is fine till something like a COVID-19 pandemic hits. There are lockdowns, quarantines and other social restrictions. This affects the working of the corporation. What about the so-called controller? He is under quarantine. Another example is of a president of a big country. He is puffed up by the power he enjoys. Unfortunately, he is assassinated. The assassin had control over his life, and this assassin was hanged. Who controlled what?

Let me take a common household. The man of the house making most decisions about the household may feel that he is a controller. What happens when the lady of the house opposes him on some issue? Where did the control go? We must understand that making decisions is not controlling anything because that would require controlling results. A team leader can make decisions on behalf of his team but he, himself, is controlled by circumstances. The only entity, who can ensure some result every time is God only, and no one else, now or ever. Having understood that God is the whole and sole controller, let us



understand how He manages it. The control is exercised through the 'Karmaphala Principle', which is just and according to the highest religious principles ('with - the Bhagavad Geeta 18.78), which is 'dharma'. Briefly, it is 'what you sow is what you reap.' Isn't that fair? No one can complain, and no one escapes punishment either, death notwithstanding.

Many engage in wrongful acts hoping to get away from punishment from man-made laws, but in God's control, no one does. Similarly, rewards are forever coming, as decided by the Divine Authority, which works under the superintendence of God. Similarly, God has empowered the material nature to give birth to the world along with moving and stationary objects. And on account of this, the world goes on. (The Bhagavad-Geeta 9.10) Questions are raised about God's fairness and the System set by Him not being just. It is not true, which will be clear from the following examples. How was Hiroshima wiped out? Why were so many women and children killed or maimed? Surely, many must have been innocent.

The answer is very simple. All those born there were destined to be hurt in that fashion. Only those, who had bad karmaphalas coming to fruition were born there. Doesn't the divine authority have control over who would be born where? They have complete control and they also know the future.

Accordingly, they manage the Creation. Another instance could be of an infant dying soon after birth. Could we know that this soul had punishment coming for the heinous crime he had committed in his previous life; he had forced his wife to abort because the child was a girl? I am speculating, but that could be a reason. All souls are relocated after death. Where they will go will depend on many factors. Only God knows!

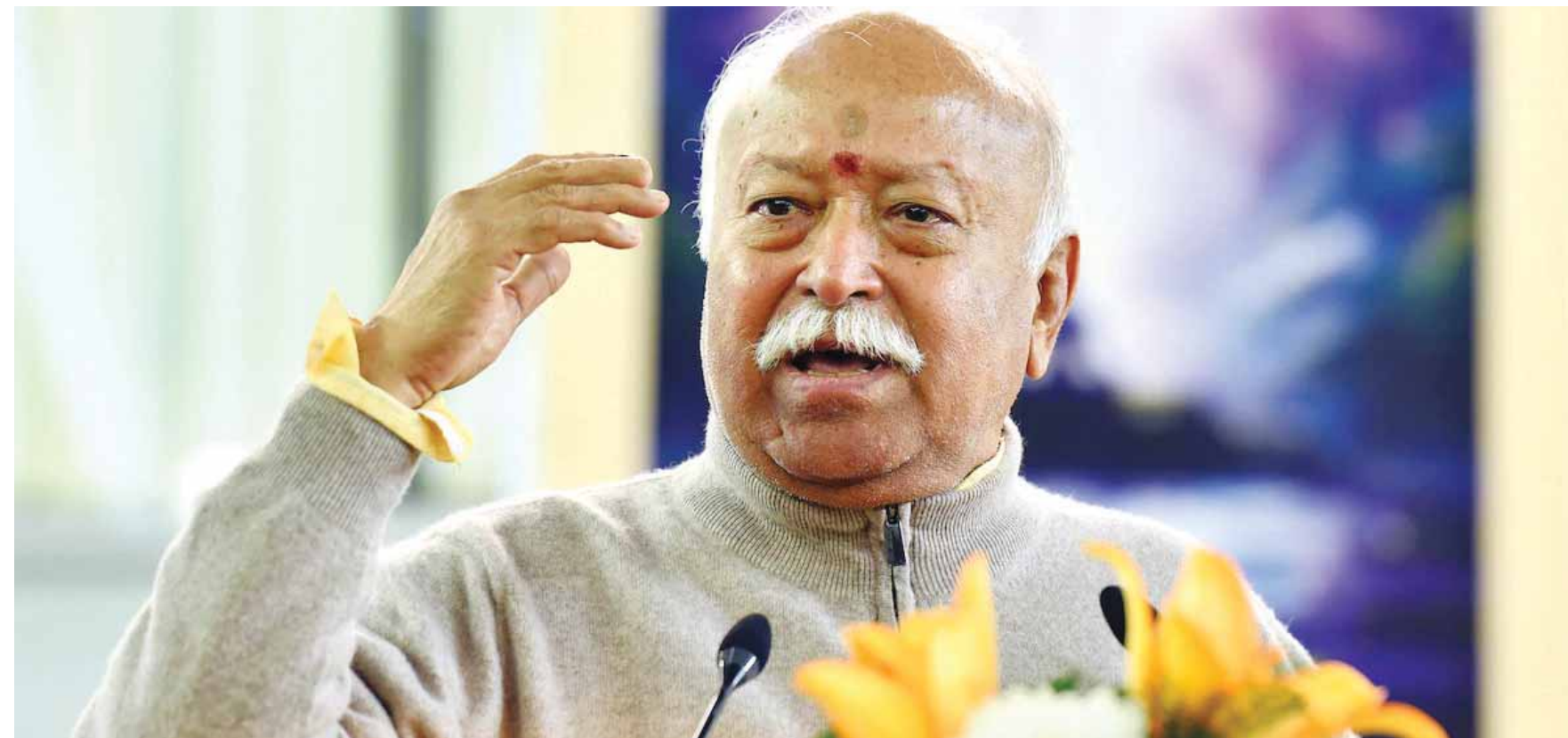
(The writer is a spiritual guide and teacher; views are personal)

Bhagwat champions unity as the path to India's Vishavguru vision



SUKHDEV SINGH

Highlighting the risks posed by divisive narratives such as 'Mandir-Masjid' disputes, Mohan Bhagwat stresses the importance of embracing India's pluralistic identity



Delivering a Sahjeevan Vyakhyanmala series lecture on the topic, India—the Vishavguru, the RSS chief Mohan Bhagwat expressed his concern over the recent upsurge of 'Mandir-Masjid' disputes and pointed out: "After Ram Mandir, some think they can become leaders of Hindus by raking up similar issues in new places". Rejecting the practice, he said, "This is not acceptable." Echoing his comment on Gyanvapi Masjid that "We look for a Shivling beneath every mosque," implying that we should not, he cautioned: "The days of hegemony are gone," and that now "People choose their representatives, who run the government." Questioning the "language of dominance," he acknowledged the pluralistic nature of Indian society, where "tradition" allows people to live in harmony while following their respective faiths. Drawing a comparison of India with the world, where similarity is the principle of unity, for India, he said, "Diversity is an ornament of unity, and we should respect and accept it."

Rejecting hatred, malice, enmity, and suspicion daily under the burden of the past, he ruled out the 'majority-minority' binary and emphasised, "Everyone is equal here." To be a Vishavguru, India should be a nation of people who can rise above caste and religious differences. By what he has said, Bhagwat has targeted more than one point while acknowledging the reality of about 200 million Muslims besides the Christians, Sikhs, and others in India, on the one hand, and the geopolitical realities, on the other. If that is so, then the word 'Hindu' needs to be accepted as an Arabic-Persian cognate of the Sanskrit 'Sindu' and 'Hindustan' as a reference to the land of Hindus, i.e., the people living beyond the river Sindu, but not a place of and for the people of a specific religion. The historical chronicles state that the river 'Sindu' was pronounced as 'Indus' by the Greeks



THE INDIAN NATIONAL IDENTITY WAS CODIFIED BY A SECTION OF PEOPLE AS A HINDU NATIONAL RELIGIOUS IDENTITY AND AN ISLAMIC NATIONAL IDENTITY, DIVIDING THE PEOPLE ON RELIGIOUS LINES

and 'Al-Hind,' which later became 'Hinds' or 'Hindus' by the Arabic Iranians.

The Greeks called 'the land of Indus' India, while the Arabic-speaking people called the region 'Hindustan.' It was a reference to the geographical region of old Punjab. The land of Hindus i.e. the people of river Sindu, called Hindustan or India in the above sense, is a land of several religious faiths, such as Shaivism, Buddhism, Jainism, and Sikhism, besides the principles of ancient Vedas and Puranas, and the word 'Hindu' has been a geographic and a cultural identifier to distinguish between the indigenous people and others who came as traders or invaders, like Muslims, Christians, and Jews, etc., at the initial stages of their entry into the region; the distinction, however, did not mean religious opposition.

It only acted as an identifying communicative 'sign': for communication is organised on two axes: the axis of similarities and the axis of differences. The people from the 'other' lands gradually became the people of the land called Hindustan, or India, settling permanently and adding to the diversities on the land of the river Sindhu.

Since there is no definite founder and no single holy text to establish a religion called 'Hinduism,' it remains only a set of socio-cultural practices while the people practice a variety of their respective religious worship.

The words 'Hindu' and 'Hindustan' have remained signifiers for the geographic-cultural practices until projected as a religious and national identifier in

the early twentieth century in opposition to the colonial rule and in reaction to the Khilafat Movement by the Muslims in support of the Turkish Ottoman Sultan during the freedom movement of India.

The Indian national identity was codified by a section of people as a Hindu national religious identity and an Islamic national identity, dividing the people on religious lines. The division was perpetrated by the colonial British in more than one way, leading to the partition of India. Since 1947, free India has been a sovereign state nation, though it should have been a state of cultural nations politically united as a federal political state, settling the issue of religious nations forever. Yet India has stood the test of its unity in diversity with some collisions on the sidelines.

The internal dynamism of society and state is its continued collision and cohesion in their weaving: the more complex a society or a state is, the higher its level of collision-cohesion dynamics. For the well-being of the land and its population, the political drivers must turn the power to strengthen 'diversity' against the 'forced homogeneity' as a principle of organisation. But with the rising assertion of Hindu religious identity and a Hindu nation-state over Hindu geographic-cultural identity juxtaposing with the recent upsurge in 'Mandir-Masjid' controversies, rightly perceived by Mohan Bhagwat, the danger to the unity and cohesion is more imminent than not.

The sooner the ideologues of identities understand it, the better it is for the people living

together for centuries. Mohan Bhagwat seems to have realized it, and rightly so, he has underplayed the slogan—one nation, one people—stating, "Without Muslims, Hindutava is incomplete": Hindus and Muslims are different but complementary. Hindustan, or India, or Bharat, is a land of diversities, and only by choice of the ideology and practice of inclusion, it can become Vishavguru. To be the Vishavguru is to experience and accommodate more diversity. The Vishav, i.e., the universe, is organized into networks of similarities and differences, yet the precursor of life on earth is the 'difference' that engenders diversity.

Mohan Bhagwat's nuanced remarks underscore the importance of unity amidst diversity in India's journey toward becoming a Vishavguru. Acknowledging India's pluralistic fabric, he emphasised harmony over divisive narratives like 'Mandir-Masjid' disputes and rejected notions of religious hegemony. Bhagwat traced the historical and cultural origins of terms like 'Hindu' and 'Hindustan,' advocating for their geographic and cultural significance rather than a singular religious identity. He urged political and social leaders to strengthen diversity as a foundation for national cohesion. By embracing inclusion and mutual respect, India can truly embody the universal ideals required to be a global guide and leader.

(The writer is Professor (Retd), Guru Nanak Dev University, Amritsar, Vice-Chairman, Indian National Trust for Art & Cultural Heritage, New Delhi; views are personal)

The Bhagavad Gita: A blueprint for resilience, holistic health and leadership

From inspiring modern management practices to enriching prenatal care, the Gita's teachings resonate deeply in today's fast-paced world

The Bhagavad Gita is revered as a profound source of resilience, wisdom, and ethical guidance, often referred to as the essence of the Upanishads. Known as Brahmavidya or "Superior Knowledge," it offers timeless insights into life, existence, and cosmic truths. Despite being composed millennia ago, the Gita remains relevant today, providing practical teachings for navigating the complexities of modern life.

Its wisdom extends across diverse fields such as management, leadership, psychology, and medicine. For example, many prestigious

The Relevance of Beeja Sanskara and Garbha Sanskara
A lesser-known yet signifi



KASHINATH SAMAGANDI

cant aspect of the Gita is its emphasis on Beeja Sanskara (pre-conception practices) and Garbha Sanskara (post-conception practices). Through the concept of Atmaja Bhava, it highlights the importance of establishing a deep connection with the unborn child. These practices, rooted in Ayurveda and

Yoga, nurture wisdom, emotional stability, and virtuous qualities in the foetus, fostering holistic development. The scripture also underscores the importance of Satvika Ahara—a pure, balanced diet. During pregnancy, this diet not only supports the physical health of the mother and foetus but also nurtures emotional and spiritual harmony, laying the foundation for a well-rounded individual.

Resilience, Energy and Cosmic Balance

Rather than considering the Gita as the book of any person, caste, creed, country or religion, it is a guide to one's own personal, mental, social, and spiritual resilience and adaptability. Its teachings on perseverance, balance, and inner

strength resonate deeply with those facing modern challenges. The Gita's perspective on energy and cosmic balance aligns with contemporary scientific principles.

Ayurvedic Insights on Foetal Development

The Gita's teachings influence Ayurvedic principles, particularly in prenatal care. It identifies six essential Bhavas contributing to foetal development: Matruja Bhava (mother's qualities) Pitruja Bhava (father's qualities) Atmaja Bhava (soul connection) Satmyaja Bhava (compatibility) Rasaja Bhava (nutrition) Satvaja Bhava (mental stability)

These emphasise the importance of parental health, nutrition, emotional well-being, and spiritual align-



ment in shaping the child's future. Such principles form the core of Garbha Sanskara practices, increasingly recognised in modern prenatal care for their holistic approach.

The Balanced Mind: Sthitaprajna

One of the Gita's most profound teachings is the concept of Sthitaprajna. This idea of remaining unaffected

by success or failure, challenges or triumphs, is particularly relevant in today's fast-paced world. Cultivating such equanimity fosters mental resilience and emotional stability, enabling individuals to navigate life's ups and downs with composure.

Holistic Health Through Integration

The Gita advocates an integrated approach to Ahar (diet), Vihar (lifestyle), Nidra (sleep), Achar (conduct), and Vichar (thoughts).

These elements must work cohesively to promote comprehensive health and wellness. This holistic philosophy supports inter-science and intra-science integration in medicine. Intra-science integration ensures that all aspects of a medical system

work together to manage chronic conditions effectively, while inter-science integration leverages the strengths of multiple systems for optimal care. This collaborative approach is essential for addressing both acute and chronic conditions.

Holistic Development and Liberation:

The Gita offers a roadmap for holistic self-development, encompassing physical, mental, and spiritual growth.

Its teachings on Dharma (duty), Karma (action), and Bhakti (devotion) provide practical guidance for leading a purposeful and ethical life. Moreover, the Gita provides insights into personal development, emotional mastery, and the attainment of Moksha (liberation).

Its universal principles resonate across disciplines such as psychology, philosophy, and leadership, offering a framework for self-realisation and collective well-being. In conclusion, the enduring relevance of the Bhagavad Gita lies in its universal message of harmony, balance, and self-awareness. It inspires individuals and societies towards holistic growth and ethical living.

Whether guiding inner conflicts or addressing societal complexities, the Gita remains an effective tool for achieving balance, resilience, and self-mastery in an ever-changing world.

(The author is Director of the Morarji Desai National Institute of Yoga; views are personal)

South Korean protesters brave cold to demand Yoon's ouster as detention deadline looms

AP ■ SEOUL

Hundreds of South Koreans, bundled up against freezing temperatures and snow, rallied overnight into Sunday near the residence of impeached President Yoon Suk Yeol, calling for his ouster and arrest, as authorities prepared to renew their efforts to detain him over his short-lived martial law decree.

Dozens of anti-corruption agency investigators and police attempted to execute a detention warrant against Yoon on Friday but retreated from his residence in Seoul after a tense standoff with the presidential security service that lasted more than five hours.

The one-week warrant for his detention is valid through Monday. There were no immediate indications that anti-corruption authorities were ready to send investigators back to the residence as of Sunday afternoon. Staff from the presidential security service were seen installing barbed wire near the gate and along the hills leading up to Yoon's residence over the weekend, possibly in preparation for another detention attempt.

A Seoul court last Tuesday issued a warrant to detain Yoon and a separate warrant to search his residence after the

embattled president repeatedly defied authorities by refusing to appear for questioning and obstructing searches of his office. But enforcing them is complicated as long as Yoon remains in his official residence.

Investigators from the country's anti-corruption agency are weighing charges of rebellion after the conservative president, apparently frustrated that his policies were blocked by a legislature dominated by the liberal opposition, declared martial law on Dec. 3 and dispatched troops to surround the National Assembly.

The Assembly overturned the declaration within hours in a unanimous vote and impeached Yoon on Dec. 14, accusing him of rebellion, while South Korean anti-corruption authorities and public prosecutors opened separate investigations into the events.

If the anti-corruption agency manages to detain Yoon, it will likely ask a court for permission to make a formal arrest. Otherwise, Yoon will be released after 48 hours.

The Corruption Investigation Office for High-Ranking Officials, which is leading a joint investigation with police and military investigators, says detaining Yoon would be "virtually impossible" as long as he is protected by the presidential

security service. The agency has urged the country's acting leader, Deputy Prime Minister Choi Sang-mok, to instruct the service to comply with their execution of the detention warrant, but Choi has yet to publicly comment on the issue.

The chiefs and deputy chiefs of the presidential security service defied summonses on Saturday from police, who planned to question them over the suspected obstruction of official duty following Friday's events. Yoon's legal team said it will file complaints against the anti-corruption agency's chief prosecutor, Oh Dong-woon, and approximately 150 investigators and police officers involved in Friday's detention attempt, which they claim was unlawful. The team said it will also file complaints with public prosecutors against the country's acting defense minister and police chief for ignoring the presidential security service's request to provide additional forces to block the detention attempt.

Yoon's lawyers had submitted an objection to the warrants against the president on Thursday, but the Seoul Western District Court dismissed the challenge on Sunday.

Park Chan-dae, floor leader of the main opposition



Protesters stage a rally demanding the arrest of impeached South Korean President Yoon Suk Yeol near the presidential residence in Seoul, South Korea on Sunday. The letters read 'Arrest Yoon Suk Yeol'.

Democratic Party, called for the anti-corruption agency to move quickly to detain Yoon, saying it was deeply disappointing to see the agency "hesitating and letting time slip away."

Hundreds of anti-Yoon protesters rallied for hours near the gates of the presidential residence from Saturday evening to Sunday, voicing frustration over the failed detention attempt and demanding

stronger efforts to bring Yoon into custody. Separated by police barricades and buses, pro-Yoon protesters were gathering in nearby streets, denouncing his impeachment and vowing to block any efforts to detain him.

"With barely a day left before the execution deadline for Yoon Seok Yeol's detention warrant, the presidential security service continues to hide a

criminal and the Corruption Investigation Office for High-Ranking Officials cannot be more relaxed," Kim Eun-jeong, an activist, said on a stage during the anti-Yoon rally.

"Angry citizens have already spent two freezing nights demanding his immediate detention. Are their voices not being heard?"

Yoon's lawyers have challenged the detention and search war-

rants against the president, saying they cannot be enforced at his residence due to a law that protects locations potentially linked to military secrets from search without the consent of the person in charge - which would be Yoon. They also argue the anti-corruption office lacks the legal authority to investigate rebellion charges and that police officers don't have the legal authority to assist in detaining Yoon.

While the presidential security act mandates protection for Yoon, it does not authorize the presidential security service to block court-ordered detentions. The service's attempts to block the execution of the warrant may amount to an obstruction of official duty, according to Park Sung-bae, an attorney specializing in criminal law. While the president mostly has immunity from prosecution while in office, the protection does not extend to allegations of rebellion or treason. The agency said its outnumbered investigators had several scuffles with presidential security forces that threatened their safety and expressed "serious regret" that Yoon was not complying with the legal process.

After getting around a military unit guarding the residence's grounds, the agency's investigators and police were able to

approach within 200 meters (yards) of Yoon's residential building but were stopped by a barricade comprising around 10 vehicles and approximately 200 members of the presidential security forces and troops. The agency said it wasn't able to visually confirm whether Yoon was inside the residence. The Defense Ministry says the troops at Yoon's official residence are under the control of the presidential security service. Kim Seon-ho, the acting defense minister, conveyed his concern to the presidential security service, saying that deploying military personnel to block the execution of the detention warrant would be "inappropriate" and requesting that the troops aren't placed in a position where they might confront police, according to the ministry.

Yoon's defense minister, police chief and several top military commanders have already been arrested over their roles in the period of martial law. Yoon's presidential powers have been suspended since the National Assembly voted to impeach him on Dec. 14. Yoon's fate now lies with the Constitutional Court, which has begun deliberations on whether to uphold the impeachment and formally remove Yoon from office or reinstate him.

Ukraine will ask allies to boost its air defences: Zelenskyy

AP ■ KYIV

Ukraine's President Volodymyr Zelenskyy said he will again call on allies to boost its air defences at this week's meeting in Germany, as US President-elect Donald Trump takes over later this month with a vow to end the almost three-year war quickly.

Zelenskyy said that dozens of partner countries will participate in the meeting of the Ramstein group at Ramstein Air Base in Germany on Thursday, "including those who can help boost our capabilities not only to defend against missiles but also against guided bombs and Russian aviation."

"We will discuss this with them and continue to persuade them," Zelenskyy said in his nightly address on Saturday. "The task remains unchanged: strengthening our air defence."

US Defence Secretary Lloyd J. Austin will attend the meeting.

Biden was originally scheduled to attend the October summit in Ramstein but it was postponed because of response to Hurricane Milton that battered the US.

In its last few weeks in office, the Biden administration was pressing to send as much military aid as possible to Ukraine before Trump is sworn in January 20.

Trump claimed during his election campaign that he could end the war in one day and his comments have put a question mark over whether the United States will continue to be Ukraine's biggest — and most important — military backer.

Zelenskyy said last week that Trump is "strong and unpredictable," and those qualities can be a decisive factor in his policy approach to Russia's invasion of Ukraine.

Russia controls about one-fifth of Ukraine, and capitalised last year on weaknesses in Ukraine's defences to slowly advance in

eastern areas despite heavy losses of troops and equipment. The war's trajectory isn't in Ukraine's favour. The country is shorthanded on the front line and needs continued support from its Western partners.

Zelenskyy said Saturday that Russian and North Korean troops had suffered heavy losses in the fighting in Russia's Kursk region. "In battles yesterday and today near just one village, Makhnovka, in the Kursk region, the Russian army lost up to a battalion of North Korean infantry soldiers and Russian paratroopers," Zelenskyy said. "This is significant."

Zelenskyy said last month that 3,000 North Korean troops had been killed and wounded in Kursk, where Ukrainian forces launched an incursion in August, dealing a blow to Russia's prestige and forcing it to deploy some of its troops from a slow-moving offensive in eastern Ukraine.

The incursion didn't significantly change the dynamic of the war, and military analysts say Ukraine has lost around 40 per cent of the land it initially captured. In other developments, nine people were wounded in a Russian guided bomb attack on the border town of Semenivka in Ukraine's northern Chernihiv region on Saturday evening, local officials said.

Moscow sent 103 drones into Ukraine overnight on Sunday, Ukrainian officials said. According to Ukraine's air force, 61 drones were destroyed and 42 were lost likely due to electronic jamming.

Russia's Defence Ministry said that 61 Ukrainian drones were shot down overnight into Sunday in five regions of western Russia. No casualties were reported but Rostov regional Gov. Yuri Slyusar said residential buildings and cars had been damaged by falling drone debris.

World Bank to approve USD 20 bn lending package for Pak: Report

PTI ■ ISLAMABAD

The World Bank is set to approve a USD 20 billion indicative lending package for Pakistan — a pioneering 10-year initiative to protect its funded projects from political transitions and focus on six targeted areas, according to a media report.

The programme, titled "Pakistan Country Partnership Framework 2025-35", aims to improve social indicators in the most neglected but important areas. The Express Tribune newspaper reported, citing official documents.

It will focus on reducing child stunting, combating learning poverty, enhancing climate resilience, decarbonising the environment, expanding fiscal space, and boosting private investment to improve productivity.

These areas have broad support across the political spectrum and are expected to remain unaffected by government changes during the 2025-2035 period, which is anticipated to include at

least three general elections.

This 'Country Partnership Framework' is scheduled to be approved by the World Bank board on January 14, following which the global lender's Vice President for South Asia Martin Raiser is also expected to visit Islamabad.

According to the World Bank's assessment, the planning framework "will help shield the programme from the country's volatile polity and frequent swings in priorities and requests that follow government changes."

The requests arising from government changes have caused "fragmentation of the World Bank portfolio and diluted impacts," it said.

A key Pakistani official, who was part of the framework development, said that the World Bank picked Pakistan as the first country where it would introduce the 10-year partnership strategy.

"The World Bank's total indicative lending envelope for fiscal year 2025 to 2035 will total around USD 20 billion," reads a

draft of the framework.

Out of the USD 20 billion, the World Bank's concessional arm, the International Development Association (IDA), will lend USD 14 billion and the remaining USD 6 billion is projected to be provided through the relatively expensive window — the International Bank for Reconstruction and Development (IBRD).

"However, these indicative loans will depend upon the evolution of the IDA funding over the years, Pakistan's standing and performance, including with respect to the Sustainable Development Finance Policy and its debt vulnerability indicators," reads the document.

In addition to the USD 20 billion loans to the government of Pakistan, the new framework also aims to support another USD 20 billion private lending by the World Bank's two other arms — the International Finance Corporation (IFC) and the Multilateral Investment Guarantee Agency (MIGA). This

brings the total package to USD 40 billion but the official loans will be equal to USD 20 billion, according to the newspaper.

The new lending will focus on six areas that "currently enjoy strong support across the Pakistani political spectrum," according to the documents. However, it will phase out lending from 10 less-impactful sectors, such as transport, power transmission, telecoms, tertiary healthcare and higher education.

The World Bank's concessional and expensive lending will be meant for "larger projects on average, more frequent scale-ups and expansions, and less pilots and one-off operations," according to the planning document.

The Washington-based Bank's new strategy marks a shift from "short-term macro-fiscal adjustment programmes and often small investments scattered in a wide array of sectors, to more selective, stable and larger investments in areas that are critical for sustained development and growth."

Israel kills member of Palestinian security forces who it says was militant

AP ■ JERUSALEM

Israeli forces killed a member of the Palestinian security services in the occupied West Bank whom they accused of being a militant. Tearful Palestinians on Sunday meanwhile laid to rest six people killed in Israeli strikes in the Gaza Strip the day before, including a teenager.

In a separate development, Israel warned that a ceasefire in Lebanon could break down if Hezbollah militants do not withdraw from the border and Lebanese troops fail to police the buffer zone.

Israel's paramilitary Border Police said they carried out an operation in the West Bank village of Meithaloun to arrest Hassan Rabaiya, describing him as a wanted militant. They

said he was killed in a shootout while trying to escape, and that the troops found a shotgun, weapons parts and around USD 26,000 in cash inside his home.

Meithaloun is near the northern West Bank city of Jenin, an epicentre of Israeli-Palestinian violence in recent years.

The Palestinian security services identified Rabaiya as a first lieutenant in its Preventive Security force, saying he was killed while "performing his national duty".

The Palestinian Authority has been waging a rare crackdown on militants in Jenin in recent weeks, angering many Palestinians.

Last week, the Palestinian Authority ordered the Al Jazeera news network to suspend its operations in the

West Bank. Israel has also banned the Qatar-based broadcaster, accusing it of being a mouthpiece for Hamas militants.

Al Jazeera denies the allegations and accuses both Israel and the Palestinian Authority of trying to silence critical coverage.

The internationally recognised Palestinian Authority exercises limited autonomy in parts of the Israeli-occupied West Bank and cooperates with Israel on security matters. But Israel has long accused it of inciting violence and turning a blind eye to militants, while Palestinian critics view it as a corrupt and ineffective body that aids the occupation.

The West Bank has seen a surge of violence since Hamas' October 7, 2023, attack out of Gaza ignited the war there.

Costas Simitis dies at 88

AP ■ ATHENS

Costas Simitis, former prime minister of Greece and the architect of the country's joining the common European currency, the euro, has died at age 88, state TV ERT reported.

Simitis was taken to a hospital in the city of Corinth early Sunday morning from his holiday home west of Athens, unconscious and without a pulse, the hospital's director was quoted as saying by Greek media. An autopsy will be performed to determine the cause of death. The government decreed a four-day period of official mourning. Simitis will receive a state funeral. Warm tributes appeared, and not just from political allies. "I bid farewell to Costas Simitis with sadness and respect. A worthy and noble political opponent," Prime Minister Kyriakos Mitsotakis said in a Facebook post.

180m people have been denied voting rights, says Bangladesh CEC

PTI ■ DHAKA

Bangladesh's Chief Election Commissioner (CEC) AMM Nasir Uddin on Sunday said that almost 180 million people have been denied their voting rights and the Election Commission wants to end their deprivation.

The Dhaka Tribune newspaper reported.

The CEC, while addressing the inaugural ceremony of a training programme for election officers ahead of a voter list updating exercise, said the Election Commission (EC) wants to remove the fact that the people have been deprived of the voting right for so long.

"We want to remove the pain of their deprivation. We are steadfast in our commitment," he said.



The countrywide door-to-door data collection for updating the list of possible voters will start on January 20.

The CEC said they are here to hear the 180 million people who have been suffering from the deprivation of voting rights.

"We've taken the responsibility so that we can remove their deprivation," he said. He said the commission's main goal is to arrange

a fair and credible election.

"It's a marathon race beginning from today up to the delivery of the result," he said.

"Our goal, commitment and promises to the nation is to present a free, fair and credible election as the nation has been deprived of it for so long," the CEC said.

Meanwhile, the EC has decided to investigate irregularities and shortcomings in all previous elections, including the three preceding elections that have been controversial during the Awami League-rule in 2014, 2018 and 2024.

The 2014, 2018 and 2024 national elections are widely regarded as some of the most controversial in the country's history.

The newly formed EC, which assumed office on November 21,

has already initiated several reform measures while preparing for the 13th National Election. A few days ago, CEC Nasir Uddin said that ousted prime minister Sheikh Hasina's Awami League may participate in elections unless the government or the judiciary issues a ban against the party.

Chief Adviser Muhammad Yunus, 84, who was sworn-in to lead the interim government after the ouster of Hasina in August, during his Victory Day speech on December 16 indicated that elections might be held by early 2026.

"Broadly speaking, the election can be scheduled between the end of 2025 and the first half of 2026," he said. Yunus said that the elections would be held after updating the voters' list.

Snow brings widespread disruption across UK, Germany

AP ■ LONDON

Heavy snow and freezing rain brought widespread disruption across Europe on Sunday, particularly in the UK and Germany, with several major airports forced to suspend flights.

With the weather set to stay inclement on Sunday in the UK, there are concerns that many rural communities, particularly in the north of England, could be cut off, with up to 40 centimetres (15 inches) of snow on ground above 300 metres (985 feet).

The National Grid, which oversees the country's electricity network, said it had been working to restore power after outages across the country. The company's live map shows

power cuts in Birmingham in central England, Bristol in the west and Cardiff in Wales.

Many sporting events have already been postponed, though the heavyweight Premier League fixture between rivals Liverpool and Manchester United is on, following an inspection at Liverpool's home ground of Anfield and of local conditions.

Liverpool's John Lennon Airport and Manchester Airport had to close runways, but both appeared poised to reopen them by late Sunday morning. Leeds Bradford Airport, however, said it had closed its runway on Sunday morning.

The road network was heavily impacted too, on what would have been a very busy day with

many families returning home from the Christmas and New Year break and students heading back to universities.

Many roads had been preemptively closed by local authorities but stranded vehicles and collisions have caused disruption elsewhere.

On the railways, many services were cancelled, with National Rail warning of disruption continuing into the working week.

Britain's main weather forecaster, the Met Office, says sleet and snow will continue to push north on Sunday and will be heaviest in northern England and into southern Scotland.

After experiencing freezing rain, which occurs when super-cold rain freezes on impact, the south will turn milder.

The Environment Agency has also issued eight flood warnings across southern England on the River Taw and River Avon.

Snow and ice were also causing havoc in Germany, where a bout of winter weather is spreading from the southwest. Authorities have issued black ice warnings for drivers and pedestrians, advising people to stay home where possible.

Frankfurt airport cancelled 120 of its 1,090 planned takeoffs and landings on Sunday, according to the Fraport press office. At Munich airport, only one runway was open while the other one was being cleared.

In Baden-Wuerttemberg eight people were injured when a bus skidded off the road near the town of Hemmingen.

Winter storm threatens central US with snow, blizzards

AP ■ WASHINGTON

A major, disruptive winter storm was sweeping across the central US on Sunday, forecasters said, bringing with it a dreaded combination of snow, ice and plunging temperatures.

The National Weather Service issued winter storm warnings from Kansas and Missouri — where blizzard conditions are expected — to New Jersey.

In the two states where blizzard warnings were in effect, travel "could be very difficult to impossible," with snow whipped around by high winds reducing visibility, the NWS said. Gusty winds could bring down tree branches.

"Do not travel unless necessary!" the NWS said. The polar vortex of ultra-cold air usually stays penned up

around the North Pole, spinning like a top. But sometimes it escapes or stretches down to the US, Europe or Asia — and that's when large numbers of people experience intense doses of cold.

Studies show a fast-warming Arctic gets some of the blame for the increase in polar vortex stretching or wandering.

Snow and ice in the forecast: By Saturday evening, widespread heavy snow was likely between central Kansas and Indiana, especially along and north of Interstate 70. Part of the interstate was closed in central Kansas by the afternoon.

Total snow and sleet accumulations for parts of Kansas and northern Missouri were predicted to be as high as 14 inches (35.6 centimeters).

The storm was forecast to

move then into the Ohio Valley, with severe travel disruptions expected. It will reach the Mid-Atlantic states on Sunday into Monday, with a hard freeze even expected as far south as Florida. Severe thunderstorms, with the possibility of tornadoes and hail, were also possible ahead of the storm system's cold front as it crosses the Lower Mississippi Valley, the National Weather Service warned.

Parts of upstate New York saw 3 feet (0.9 meters) or more of snow from a lake effect event expected to last until late Sunday afternoon.

Car wrecks start as storm hits: A fire truck, several tractor-trailers and passenger vehicles overturned west of Salina, Kansas. Rigs also jackknifed and went into ditches, state

Highway Patrol Trooper Ben Gardner said.

He posted a video showing his boots sliding across the highway blacktop like an ice-skating rink. "We are in it now," Gardner said as he drove to the scene of an accident. Online, he begged for prayers and warned that some roadways were nearly impassable.

Freezing rain in Wichita, Kansas, sent authorities to multiple crashes in the morning, and police urged drivers to stay home if possible and watch out for emergency vehicles.

Governors in neighboring Missouri and nearby Arkansas declared states of emergency. Whiteout conditions threatened to make driving dangerous to impossible, forecasters warned, and heighten the risk of becoming stranded.

Singapore concerned over increasing 'sham marriages' with foreign women

PTI ■ SINGAPORE

Singapore authorities are concerned over the increase in "sham marriages or marriages of convenience" between Singaporean men and foreign women, which most of the time involves a syndicate and could lead to social problems. The Immigration and Checkpoints Authority (ICA) has highlighted the concern and reported that "sham marriages" have increased to 32 cases between January and September last year compared to just four cases during the same period in 2023. A media report cited ICA as saying that arrests of people involved in "sham marriages" followed vigorous investigations into a suspected syndicate arranging such arrangements between Singaporean men getting paid for marrying foreign women. "Sham marriages" in Singapore often involve a foreign woman paying a Singaporean man money for a union to be arranged, so she can get a permit to stay or work here, reported The Straits Times on Sunday.

A marriage of convenience is when two people tie the knot for the sole intention of acquiring an immigration advantage. Inspector Mark Chai, deputy officer-in-charge of ICA's intelligence division, said the increase in such cases was concerning as it could lead to a social problem in multi-ethnic Singapore, where these foreigners could get involved in illicit activities. He attributed the increase to more foreigners wanting to extend their visit passes to continue staying and working here. "The idea of such marriages is often spread through word of mouth. And to some Singaporean men, it can be seen as easy money," the broadsheet had Insp Chai saying. "But it is illegal, and the ICA is stepping up enforcement efforts to bust such arrangements," he warned. Those convicted for their involvement in a marriage of convenience can be jailed for up to 10 years, fined up to SGD10,000, or both. Superintendent Goh Wee Kiat, a senior assistant direc-

tor at ICA's intelligence division, added that most marriage of convenience cases were flagged to the ICA by tip-offs from the public. He said, "The couple can try to hide the fact that their union is a marriage of convenience, but there are telltale signs that our officers are able to spot." He cited one case of a Singaporean mother not being aware of her son's marriage, which is usually not the case for such a milestone event in someone's life. A case was also cited of sham marriage where the "wife" lived away from the house of her "husband". He was arrested for making a false declaration, saying his "wife" lived with him but her clothes were elsewhere. Goh encouraged the public to report any suspected cases of marriage of convenience here, noting that all information provided will be treated with the strictest confidence. In June 2024, 13 people - six Vietnamese women and seven Singaporean men - were charged over their alleged links to marriages of convenience.

UK Opp wants Starmer to scrap plans for Islamophobia definition

PTI ■ LONDON

Britain's Opposition Conservative Party is leading calls for Prime Minister Keir Starmer to scrap government plans for an official definition of Islamophobia over fears it would restrict free speech and action against wrongdoing. Shadow justice secretary Robert Jenrick said this weekend that a "false label" of Islamophobia had hampered investigations into the child abuse grooming gang scandal involving men of Pakistani heritage. It comes as The Daily Telegraph newspaper claims that the Labour Party government is considering a formal definition of anti-Muslim discrimination. "The government should drop its plans for such a deeply flawed definition of Islamophobia," Jenrick told the newspaper. "Throughout the grooming gang scandal the false label of Islamophobia was used to silence people. It appears that the government has learnt nothing and is determined to press ahead with a definition that will have a chilling effect on freedom of speech," he said. In a social media post, the Tory MP elaborated that "for

decades the most appalling crimes from predominantly British-Pakistani men were legalised and actively covered up to prevent disorder". "The rule of law was abandoned to sustain the myth that diversity is our strength, destroying the lives of thousands of vulnerable white working class girls in the process," he noted. The shadow minister blamed the "onset of mass migration" for the scandal, brought back into focus by Tesla chief Elon Musk posting severely critical remarks on his X platform over the British government's handling of young girls' sexual exploitation across a number of towns and cities in England more than a decade ago.

"The foreign nationals responsible must be deported - no ifs, no buts. And the officials that covered up must be sent to jail for their appalling cowardice. Even that won't be enough for the victims," added Jenrick.

His intervention comes as sources in the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government (MHCLG), led by Deputy Prime Minister Angela Rayner, were referenced by The Daily Telegraph

to claim that officials were considering whether to introduce a formal definition of Islamophobia. Such a definition, though not legally binding, would require organisations to adopt it.

Office of the Superintending Engineer
3rd Circle, Public Works Department, Pithoragarh
 Email : sepwdpth@rediffmail.com

Letter No. : 83/13 PIU-03/2024 Dated : 04/01/2025

National Competitive E-Tender Notice

The Superintending Engineer 3rd Circle, Public Works Department Pithoragarh on behalf of "Hon'ble Governor of Uttarakhand" invites tender for Consultancy Services for the following works. The RFP/TOR document will be available from date 09-01-2025 at 5.00 PM onward on website <http://www.uktenders.gov.in>

Sl. No.	Name of Work	Earnest Money (in Lac)	Cost of Tender (₹)	Validity of Tender (day)	Period of Completion (months)	Contractor's Category of Registration
1	Consultancy Services for Preparing of D.P.R. for Construction of Two lane motor road including Two lane Bridges from Rupalgarh Km 55 to Pancheshwar Km 90 in Uttarakhand State (App. Length 35.00 Kms)	3.50	5000.00 +18% G.S.T.	120	08	Experience of Two Lane Motor Road & Bridges with consultancy work in NH/NHA/PSU and any department of State Govt.
2	Consultancy for Services for Preparing of D.P.R. for Construction of Single lane motor road including 1.5 lane Bridges from Pancheshwar Km 90 to Baltari Km 120, in Uttarakhand State (App. Length 30.00 Kms)	2.08	5000.00 +18% G.S.T.	120	08	Experience of Two Lane Motor Road & Bridges with consultancy work in NH/NHA/PSU and any department of State Govt.

PUBLIC NOTICE

Castro S/o Mr. Ditto Rajkumar D (Age 33 Yrs) R/o 11 Middle Street, Udangudi, Thoothukudi, Tamil Nadu 628203 and Saloni Adarsh, D/o Jagdish Chandra Adarsh (Age 41 Yrs) R/o A-24, A-Block, 1st Cross Street, LG Chowk, Gamma-1 Greater Noida Gautam Buddha Nagar UP-201310 Under Special Marriage Act, 1954 an application has been submitted regarding marriage. If you have any objection regarding the above, you can submit your written objection within 15 days in the office of the undersigned (Room No. 119) on any working day.

Deputy District Officer Sadar
 Special marriage officer
 Gautam Buddha Nagar
 Deputy District Officer

Austrian People's Party nominates Christian Stocker as interim leader

AP ■ VIENNA

Austrian People's Party on Sunday nominated its General Secretary Christian Stocker as interim leader after the expected resignation of Chancellor Karl Nehammer, Austrian news agency APA reported. Nehammer announced Saturday he would resign in the next few days after coalition talks with the Social Democrats collapsed. Stocker, a lawyer and member of the Austrian Parliament, has served as general secretary of the People's Party since 2022. He is seen as an experienced and calm crisis communicator who has frequently appeared in Austrian media to defend controversial decisions. Protected by special police forces, Nehammer walked across the square from the Chancellery toward the presi-


dent's office in Vienna. "What is important for me is that the way of stability and the centre can be continued," he said. The 52-year-old Nehammer became chancellor and conservative party leader in 2021, after his predecessor Sebastian Kurz was forced to stand down following allegations of corruption. In April 2022, Nehammer became the first European leader to visit Moscow and meet with Russian President Vladimir Putin since the invasion of Ukraine in February that year. Before going to Moscow, he also met Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy in Kyiv. Austria's President Alexander Van der Bellen will make a public statement to announce the next steps once the meeting with Nehammer is over.

New Orleans mourns victims of truck attack

AP ■ NEW ORLEANS

New Orleans mourned, wept and danced at a vigil Saturday evening along the famous thoroughfare where a man rammed a pickup truck into a crowd, killing and injuring revellers who were there to celebrate the new year. A makeshift memorial of crosses and pictures of the 14 deceased victims amassed with candles, flowers and teddy bears. Victims' relatives held each other, some crying. But as a brass band began playing, the sorrow transformed into a celebration of life as the crowd snapped fingers, swayed and followed the music down Bourbon Street. The coroner's office listed the cause of death for all 14 victims as "blunt force injuries." Beyond the deaths, authorities say about 30 other people suffered injuries in the attack early Wednesday by Shamsud-Din Jabbar, a former US Army soldier who proclaimed his support for the Islamic State militant group in online videos posted hours before he struck. Police fatally shot Jabbar, 42, during a firefight at the scene of the deadly crash on Bourbon Street, famous worldwide for its festive vibes in New Orleans' historic French Quarter. University Medical Center New Orleans spokesperson Carolina Giepert said 13 people remained hospitalised, with eight people in intensive care. Cathy Tenedorio, who lost her 25-year-old son Matthew, said she was moved by the flood of condolences and kindness at Saturday's vigil. "This is the most overwhelming response of love, an out-


pouring of love. I'm floating through it all," she said. New Orleans native Autrelle Felix, 28, left a handwritten card beside a memorial for his friend Nicole Perez, a single mother who was killed. "It means a lot, to see that our city comes together when there's a real tragedy," Felix said. "We all become one." Others who crowded around the brass band said the best way to honour the victims was with a party. "Because that's what they were down here to do, they were having a good time," life-long New Orleans resident Kari Mitten said. President Joe Biden planned to travel to New Orleans with first lady Jill Biden on Monday to "grieve with the families and community members impacted by the tragic attack." Federal authorities searching Jabbar's Houston home found a workbench in the garage and hazardous materials believed to have been used to make explosive devices, according to law enforcement officials familiar with the search. Jabbar had suspected bomb-making materials at his home and reserved the vehicle used in the attack more than six weeks earlier, law enforcement officials told The Associated Press. The officials spoke on the condition of anonymity as they were not authorised to speak publicly about the inquiry. Jabbar purchased a cooler in Vidor, Texas, hours before the attack and gun oil from a store in Sulphur, Louisiana. He also booked his truck rental on November 14, suggesting he may have been plotting the attack for more than six weeks, authorities said.



Indian Railways Fostering New Regional Growth Hubs

for

Viksit Bharat



Inauguration of

New Jammu Railway Division of Northern Railway

&

Charlapalli New Terminal Station in the twin cities of Secunderabad and Hyderabad

and

Foundation stone laying for

Rayagada Rail Division Building in Odisha

By

Narendra Modi

Prime Minister

(Through Video Conferencing)

On January 6, 2025 | Time 11:00 AM

HIGHLIGHTS

Jammu Railway Division

- Links major cities and towns across India to the Jammu & Kashmir region, fulfilling the long-pending demand of its people.
- Acts as a game-changer by promoting trade, tourism and economic opportunities in the region.
- Seamlessly connects regions of Jammu & Kashmir viz. Udhampur-Srinagar-Baramulla and Leh & Ladakh to major destinations across India strengthening unity and development.

Rayagada Divisional Office Building


- Features a Divisional Control Office, eco-friendly staff residences and modern amenities, enhancing railway operations in Koraput, Rayagada and Kalahandi.
- Streamlines railway management and boosts operational efficiency across Odisha.
- Strengthens connectivity, accelerates development and fosters economic progress in tribal belt of South Odisha for Viksit Bharat.

Charlapalli New Railway Terminal in Telangana

- A world-class, eco-friendly terminal that offers top-tier facilities at Charlapalli in the Twin Cities.
- Relieves pressure on existing terminals in Secunderabad, Hyderabad and Kacheguda.
- Facilitates the operation of new trains and enhances connectivity for the people of Telangana and nearby regions.

In the august presence of

Dr Hari Babu Kambhampati Governor, Odisha	Mohan Charan Majhi Chief Minister, Odisha	Jishnu Dev Varma Governor, Telangana	A. Revanth Reddy Chief Minister, Telangana
Ashwini Vaishnaw Union Minister of Railways, Information & Broadcasting and Electronics & Information Technology	G. Kishan Reddy Union Minister of Coal and Mines	Manoj Sinha Lieutenant Governor, Jammu & Kashmir	Omar Abdullah Chief Minister, Jammu & Kashmir
Dr. Jitendra Singh Union Minister of State for Science & Technology (I/C), Earth Sciences (I/C), PMO, Personnel, Public Grievances and Pensions, Atomic Energy & Department of Space	V. Somanna Union Minister of State for Railways and Jal Shakti	Bandi Sanjay Kumar Union Minister of State for Home Affairs	Ravneet Singh Union Minister of State for Railways and Food Processing Industries

Watch the live programme on 

FDI in India growing rapidly: Goyal

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

FDI inflows into the country are surging, with investors from the Middle East, Japan, European Union, and the US recognising India's status as a top investment destination, driving rapid economic growth and generating millions of new jobs, Commerce and Industry Minister Piyush Goyal said. He said that global investors are showing keen interest in India as the country offers several advantages such as strong domestic market, skilled and talented workforce and rule of law. "I can clearly see FDI (foreign direct investment) in India once again growing rapidly and creating millions of jobs. Countries in the Middle East, EFTA region, Japan, and investors from the EU and the US are all realising that India continues to be the most preferred destination for FDI," Goyal told PTI. He added that India's stable and predictable regulatory framework, coupled with a favourable business environment and progressive policies aimed at enhancing ease of doing business, is attracting an increasing number of investors from around the world. "Last month I met a CEO of one of



the largest funds in the US, who is also the largest investor in India, and he shared with me that his investments in India over the last 10 years have been some of the best investments his funds have ever done," he noted. The US fund, Goyal said, informed him that they are investors in India for the last 20 years, but more than 80 per cent of their investments happened in the last few years.

"The CEO told me that he will be coming to India to celebrate 20 years of investing in India by announcing a further tranche of investments in India," he said. The healthy performance of the Indian stock market will also attract more and more FIIs (foreign institutional investors), the minister said. India is averaging over USD 4.5 billion in monthly foreign direct

investment (FDI) inflows since January this year despite global uncertainties and challenges. In the January-September period this year, FDI into the country rose by about 42 per cent to USD 42.13 billion. The inflow was at USD 29.73 billion in the year-ago period. The inflows during April-Sept 2024-25 grew by 45 per cent to USD 29.79 billion against USD 20.48 billion in the same period previous fiscal. Total FDI in 2023-24 was a healthy USD 71.28 billion. The key sectors attracting the maximum of these inflows include the services segment, computer software and hardware, telecommunications, trading, construction development, automobile, chemicals, and pharmaceuticals. FDI is allowed through the automatic route in most of the sectors while in areas such as telecom, media, pharmaceuticals and insurance, government approval is required for foreign investors. These inflows are important as India would require huge investments in the coming years for its infrastructure sector to boost growth. Healthy foreign inflows also help in maintaining the balance of payments and the value of the rupee.

Govt to launch another round of PLI scheme for steel sector

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

The government will launch another round of production-linked incentive scheme for the steel sector on Monday. The 'PLI scheme 1.1' will be launched by the steel minister H D Kumaraswamy. "Union Minister of Steel and Heavy Industries... Will launch 'PLI scheme 1.1' for the steel industry and call for applications... On January 6," the steel ministry said in a statement. To encourage domestic production of specialty steel and lower imports by drawing in capital investments, the government had earlier introduced the PLI scheme for specialty steel. The scheme has attracted investments worth Rs 27,106 crore, envisaging creation of 14,760 direct employment opportunities with an estimated production of 7.90 million tonnes of specialty steel. As of November 2024, companies have already



invested Rs 18,300 crore and generated over 8,660 in employment. The government has been interacting regularly with the participating companies and based on feedback, it was felt that there was a scope to notify the scheme again to attract more participation, the statement said. The concept of Production-Linked Incentives (PLI) was conceived during the Covid-induced global lockdowns of 2020, emphasising the need to boost domestic manufacturing. Initially launched for three sectors, the PLI scheme was later extended to include steel in November 2020. The government had earlier said that it is working on another round of the PLI scheme for specialty steel as the response for the first round of the initiative did not meet expectations. Specialty steel is still one area where more is needed to be done. The government brought a PLI to incentivise the manufacturing of specialty steel but the offtake of the sops was not as expected, the government had earlier said. Specialty steel is a high-grade product used in sectors like defence, automobile, and electrical, among others.

Budget: CII suggests seven-point agenda for employment generation

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

The upcoming annual budget for FY26 could announce further measures to boost employment generation, CII said on Sunday, emphasising that job creation at a mass scale is important to engage the young population productively, and drive inclusive growth in the world's most populous nation. The industry body has suggested a seven-point agenda to harness India's demographic dividend, including an integrated national employment policy, support to labour-intensive sectors, and setting up an international mobility authority, among other targeted measures. With a median age of just 29 years, India is a young country, and is set to add 133 million people to its working-age population by 2050. The government could consider launching an internship programme in government offices in rural areas for the college-educated youth, CII said. It argued that this initiative would create short-term



employment opportunities in government offices while bridging the gap between education and professional skills. The programme would also help augment the available manpower resources for the effective implementation of various rural programmes and government initiatives. CII has also proposed introducing a new provision under income tax rule in lieu of Section 80JAA to encourage new employment. The new provision should continue as Chapter VIA deduction from gross total income, which is available even if a taxpayer opts for concessional tax regime. It has proposed an integrated national employment policy which could subsume under its ambit the slew of employment generating schemes currently in works by various ministries/states. In addition, the unified policy could also build on the single integrated employment portal -- National Career Service (NCS) -- wherein all the data can flow into this from various ministries and state portals. Highlighting that increasing women's participation in the workforce, which currently is low, can further boost the Indian economy, CII said, new initiatives including the construction of dormitories

using CSR funds, the formalisation of sectors like care economy, and establishing government-supported creches in industrial clusters could be taken to increase female labour force participation. Moreover, rolling out labour codes while ensuring social security coverage to the gig and platform workers would further strengthen the employment landscape. Many parts of the world are facing workforce shortages due to ageing populations, and India should leverage this opportunity. The government could consider setting up an international mobility authority under the Ministry of External Affairs. This authority could facilitate G2G collaborations for helping Indian youth tap the overseas employment opportunities. The authority could also work with the Ministry of Skill Development and Entrepreneurship to help develop skill development programmes aligned with global opportunities. In addition to technical skills, the programmes should also include cultural training, and foreign language skills.

Global trends, earnings, FII trading activity major drivers for markets this week: Analysts

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

Equity markets this week will take cues from global trends, trading activity of foreign investors and quarterly earnings, with TCS kick-starting the results calendar on Thursday, analysts said. Macroeconomic data announcements and the rupee-dollar trend would also dictate market trends, experts noted. "The Q3 FY25 earnings season will begin this week, with IT giants and leading financial institutions set to announce their results. TCS and Tata Elxsi will declare results on Thursday, January 9, 2025. Investors will closely monitor individual stock performances. "Following the earnings season, markets' focus is expected to shift towards the upcoming Union Budget and the policy decisions of the Trump 2.0 administration," Praveesh Gour, Senior Technical Analyst, Swastika Investmart Ltd, said. Foreign institutional investors (FIIs) have been net sellers, while domestic institutional investors (DIIs) have been actively buying. This ongoing tug-of-war between FIIs and DIIs is likely to play a crucial role in determining the



direction of the market this week, he added. "Looking ahead to the second week of the year, several key events are likely to influence market sentiment. The earnings season begins with IT major TCS, a key trigger as any signs of improvement in Q3 numbers could reverse the ongoing trend of FII outflows. Additionally, a host of economic data, including HSBC services PMI, and IIP, will be closely monitored for further cues," Ajit Mishra, SVP, Research, Religare Broking Ltd, said. The rupee depreciated 4 paise to close at a record low of 85.79 against the US dollar on Friday. Vinod Nair, Head of Research, Geojit Financial Services, said, "Looking ahead, the market is likely to focus on Q3 earnings, with expectations of improvement in earnings on a QoQ basis." On the global front, FOMC (Federal Open Market Committee) minutes will be announced during the week. Last week, the BSE benchmark jumped 524.04 points, or 0.66 per cent, and the Nifty climbed 191.35 points, or 0.80 per cent. On Friday, the 30-share BSE Sensex tumbled 720.60 points, or 0.90 per cent, to close at 79,223.11. The Nifty tanked 183.90 points, or 0.76 per cent, to 24,004.75. "Despite the short recovery in the past two sessions, markets lost the momentum as there is still a lot of pessimism due to slowing growth, higher domestic valuations, foreign fund outflows and uncertainty over US trade policies post Trump's resumption as the country's president.

Karur Vysya Bank adds two more branches in Tamil Nadu

PTI ■ CHENNAI

Private sector Karur Vysya Bank has inaugurated two more branches, taking the overall branch network to 475 in Tamil Nadu, the bank said on Sunday. The Tamil Nadu-based bank inaugurated two branches, one each in Chennai and the other at Tiruchirappalli. According to a press release, during the current financial year, the company has added 28 new branches, taking the overall presence of the banking network to 866 across the country. The new branches would provide basic banking transactions and would also address the specific needs of customers. It would also provide banking and financial services covering retail, institutional and consumer lending. As on September 30, 2024, the bank's total business stood at Rs 1,76,138 crore with a deposit base of Rs 95,839 crore and advances at Rs 80,299 crore. In the last financial year, the bank recorded its highest net profit of Rs 1,605 crore, the release added.

FMCG makers expect inflation to hit volume growth, operating profit in Q3



PTI ■ NEW DELHI

Hit by inflation, higher input costs and pricing measures, fast-moving consumer goods companies are expected to see a contraction in their gross margin and a modest-to-flat operating profit in the October-December quarter. Several FMCG makers are likely to log a low single-digit rise in their revenue, returning to the cycle of value-driven growth. One of the reasons could be that a number of companies have opted for a price hike in the December quarter due to rising costs of input items such as copra, vegetable oil, and palm oil. The price hikes came at a time when the urban market was dragged down by lowered consumption due to high food inflation. However, the rural market, which is slightly above one-third of the total FMCG market, stayed ahead of it. Some of the listed FMCG companies, such as Dabur and Marico, shared their updates for the third quarter

of FY25, and analysts expect either flat or low single-digit volume growth. Home-grown firm Dabur expects a "low single-digit growth" in the December quarter along with a "flattish operating profit" as it faced inflationary headwinds in some of the segments. "In Q3, inflationary pressures were witnessed in some segments which were partially mitigated through tactical price increases and cost-efficiency initiatives. We anticipate flattish operating profit growth in Q3," said Dabur in an update for Q3/FY25. Besides, in the December quarter, rural consumption for FMCG was resilient and continued to grow faster than urban, said the company which owns brands such as Dabur Chyawanprash, Dabur Honey, Dabur PudinaHara, Dabur Lal Tail, Dabur Amla, Dabur Red Paste, Real and Vatika. It further said that alternative channels like modern trade, e-commerce, and quick commerce continued to post strong growth, while general

trade, which mainly consists of neighbourhood kirana stores, was under pressure in the October-December period. Marico expressed similar views, saying, "During the quarter, the sector witnessed steady demand trends on the back of improving rural consumption and stable sentiment in urban vis-à-vis the preceding quarter." Over domestic volume growth, Marico said it expects an 'uptick' in the December quarter but on a sequential basis and said its operating profit growth will be modest due to higher input costs. It expects a "higher-than-anticipated gross margin contraction" as key inputs faced 'higher-than-expected' inflation, said a quarterly update by Marico, which owns brands such as Saffola, Parachute, Hair & Care, Nihar and Livon, among others. "Among key inputs, copra prices remained firm at higher-than-expected levels and vegetable oil prices moved up during the quarter, while crude oil derivatives remained range-bound. The rising trend in input costs is expected to result in a higher-than-anticipated gross margin contraction on a year-on-year basis, as the company continues to favour consumer franchise expansion in the current environment," said Marico. According to Nuvama, the urban demand scenario is challenging due to inflationary pressures, low wage growth and higher housing rental costs.



CCI will focus on leveraging tech for fair competition: Chairperson Kaur

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

CCI will focus on strengthening enforcement, enhancing collaborations and leveraging technology to ensure fair competition in the country, its chief Ravneet Kaur has said. Competition Commission of India (CCI), which has the mandate to foster fair competition as well as curb anti-competitive practices, has been working on understanding the dynamic interplay between traditional market practices and the rapidly evolving digital economy. "There is an imperative need for a nimble, proactive regulatory approach that adapts to emerging market challenges, particularly in sectors driven by technology and innovation," Kaur told PTI in a recent interview. Various amendments to the Competition Act were made in 2023 leading to introduction of new mechanisms, including settlement, commitment and deal value thresholds. The CCI Chairperson

emphasised that the endeavour is to strike a balance between effective oversight and a simplified, market-friendly regulatory regime. "Going forward, our focus will be on strengthening enforcement, enhancing collaborations and leveraging technology to uphold fair competition in India," she said. Among other efforts to boost its capabilities, the watchdog plans to hire more domain experts to help assess competition amid rapid changes in the technology landscape. "Recruitment of domain experts in areas like AI, data analytics and digital markets is a priority. This will ensure that CCI remains future ready and well equipped to address challenges posed by rapidly evolving technologies," Kaur said. Currently, the regulator is conducting two market studies on competition issues in relation to artificial intelligence and to renewable energy space across BRICS nations.

Govt should lower GST on cement at 18 per cent, frame policy to boost demand: JK Lakshmi

PTI ■ PATNA

The government should reduce GST on cement to 18 per cent from 28 per cent and take some policy measures in the upcoming Budget to boost consumption of this key building material, a senior official of JK Lakshmi Cement said. In an interview with PTI, Arun Shukla, President and Director of JK Lakshmi Cement, said there is a case to increase cement manufacturing capacity in India to meet the rising demand, which is expected to grow at an average annual rate of 7-8 per cent. "One of the long-cherished dream, or the wish for us, has been reducing GST on cement," Shukla told PTI on the sidelines of 'Bihar Business Connect 2024' meet held here recently. In India, cement is taxed at the highest rate of 28 per cent and this needs to be reduced to 18 per cent, he said while replying to a query on the Budget wishlist from the industry. "Cement is, I would say, one of the major component of driving growth in the economy," Shukla said, adding that cement is required to build world-class infrastructure that can support the growth of the Indian economy. He also emphasised on the need to enhance the consumption of cement in India. "Cement is one of the major drivers of growth, so how we can really increase



consumption of cement?" he said. Shukla said the cement concrete roads have more longevity and in the long run and it is more cost-effective than bitumen roads. "So my wish would be to really kind of drive this (cement consumption), through maybe some of the policies and specifications..." he said. JK Lakshmi Cement, part of the JK Organisation, is investing Rs 500 crore in Bihar to set up a manufacturing plant in Madhubani district. The Bharat Hari Singhania family-promoted JK Lakshmi Cement had signed a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) with the state government in 2023 investors' meet itself for its proposed manufacturing unit. The company has already acquired land and is in the process of obtaining other approvals to set up the plant. "We want to cater to local demand from this plant at Madhubani in Bihar," he said, adding that the plant is expected to be operational within a year. Shukla complimented the Bihar government for fulfilling its promises, including fiscal incentives, saying "they are really walking the talk". About the company's experience in Bihar so far, Shukla said, "I think the experience has been encouraging, and the very reason I am here for the second time to attend this meeting was to express my gratitude, but to also encourage my other colleagues to set up..." "The kind of support we have got from all corners, all departments and the bureaucracy in Bihar was amazing. And this is one of perhaps the best experience which we had in setting up a new plant at new location," he said. JK Lakshmi Cement has 18 million tonnes of annual capacity. "We have set a target to reach 30 million tonnes by 2030," he said. The 12 million additional capacity expansions across various geographies are on track, Shukla said.



DSPL-298



Shri Narendra Modi
Prime Minister



Shri Mohan Charan Majhi
Chief Minister, Odisha

5TH NATIONAL CHILIKA BIRD FESTIVAL
6 - 12 January 2025

Venue
Convention Centre, Lokseva Bhawan

Key Highlights

Inauguration on 6 January 2025

Guided Bird Watching Tours

Expert Talk & Workshops

Conservation Initiatives

Events

Bird Watching
Chilika & Mangalajodi
7 - 8 January 2025

Odisha Birder's Conclave
Barkul
11 January 2025

Bird Walk
Nandankanan
12 January 2025

Wildlife Documentary Screening
Regional Museum of Natural History
7 - 12 January 2025



State Wildlife Organization
Forest, Environment & Climate Change Department, Govt. of Odisha

Australia beat India to reach WTC final; reclaim BGT after 10 years

PTI ■ SYDNEY
A listless India was knocked out of the World Test Championship (WTC) final as Australia cruised to a six-wicket victory in the fifth Test here on Sunday to reclaim the Border-Gavaskar Trophy after 10 years, leaving the visitors with much to deliberate in a difficult transition phase made worse by over-the-hill batting stars.
Australia won the five-match series 3-1 and qualified for the WTC final against South Africa slated at the Lord's from June 11 to 15.
While Australia would be eyeing a second successive WTC mace, it would be the first time since the event's inception that India won't be in the finals. The team had finished runner-up in the previous two summit clashes.
On Sunday, the target of 162 could have been trickier for Australia had India's new Test captain Jasprit Bumrah been in a position to bowl despite painful back spasms. But once Virat Kohli led

the team out, it was as clear as the Sydney skyline that defending the total would be next to impossible. Bumrah deservedly walked away with the player of the series honour for his astonishing haul of 32 wickets in five matches. But it was hardly a consolation for the shambolic team performance that India managed, showing resilience only in brief phases.
"Little frustrating but sometimes you have to respect your body, you can't fight your body. Disappointing, probably missed out on the spiciest wicket of the series," Bumrah said of his inability to bowl in the second innings during the presentation ceremony.
Prasidh Krishna (3/65 in 12 overs) and Mohammed Siraj (1/69 in 12 overs) were not a patch on Bumrah and despite multiple breakthroughs, they bowled too many poor deliveries to make it easy for the hosts to canter home in just 27 overs.
Usman Khawaja (41), Travis Head (34 not out) and debutant Beau Webster (39 not out) completed



the formalities, putting an end to India's misery in a tour that has exposed all of the team's batting frailties and an unhealthy reliance on Bumrah.
Once Bumrah was ruled out after he tried some shadow bowling during the morning warm-up session and didn't feel comfortable, the writing was on the wall.
The magnificent Scott Boland (6/45) and the ever-reliable Pat Cummins (3/44) polished off the Indian tail for just 157 in 39.5 overs. If one takes out Rishabh Pant's fiery 61 and Yashasvi Jaiswal's 22, the other nine players collectively contributed a mere 74 runs.
The series would leave the men who matter in Indian cricket establishment with a lot on their minds when they deliberate on ways to get the house back in order.
With six of the completed innings yielding less than 200 runs, one doesn't need a soothsayer to tell what went wrong on the tour.
Regular skipper Rohit Sharma and

batting talisman Virat Kohli flopped with technical issues troubling them throughout the season.
Jaiswal (391 runs) was the top-scorer despite three ducks followed by rookie Nitish Kumar Reddy (298 runs), KL Rahul (276 runs) and Pant (255 runs).
As much as one wants to take a nuanced view of Rohit and Kohli's poor form but it is undeniable that both veterans are finding it increasingly difficult to stem the rot that has set in their batting.
There are a few good youngsters in the fringes and the new World Test Championship cycle would demand that they be given a chance to develop over time.
While a tough call on Kohli and Rohit is awaited, the BCCI brass also needs to seriously look at whether coach Gautam Gambhir is the right man to be in-charge across formats.
Under Gambhir, India have lost six Tests out of 10 during the season going by apart from being defeated in an ODI series in Sri Lanka.



It's frustrating but you have to respect your body: Bumrah

PTI ■ SYDNEY
Laid low by a back spasm, Jasprit Bumrah was frustrated at missing out on bowling on the "spiciest wicket of the series," but the premier India pacer emphasized that sometimes it becomes imperative for a player to respect his body.
Bumrah could not bowl on day three when India needed to defend a small 162-run target on a tricky wicket.
Australia needed just 27 overs to overhaul the target and claim the Border-Gavaskar Trophy after 10 years as they took advantage of Bumrah's absence.
"It was really frustrating but sometimes you have to respect your body, can't fight it. Disappointing, probably missed out on the spiciest wicket of the series," Bumrah said, who was named Player of the Series for his 32 wickets in the series, during the post-match presentation.
"Felt a bit of discomfort during my second spell in the first innings and had to check it out."
Resuming day three at 141 for six, India lost their remaining four wickets for 16 runs to be all out for 157 in their second innings.
Asked about the discussion in the morning, Bumrah said: "The chat this morning was about the same thing, about

having belief and showing character. Lots of ifs and buts, the whole series was fought hard, we were in the game today as well, not like we were out of it, this is how Test cricket goes."
"Being in the game for longer, creating pressure, absorbing pressure and playing to the situation are all important. You have to adapt to the situations and these learnings will help us in the future."
Bumrah added that the experience of playing in Australia will help young players like Nitish Reddy and Harshit Rana in future.
"They've (youngsters) gained a lot of experience, they'll go from strength to strength. We've shown that we have a lot of talent in our group."
"Lot of the youngsters are keen, they're disappointed that we haven't won but they'll take learnings from this experience. It was a great series, congratulations to Australia, they fought really well."
Travis Head, who emerged as the highest run-scorer in the series with 446 runs, heaped praise on Bumrah.
"He's a great performer, he had an exceptional tour. It is the best individual performance I have seen in Test cricket," Head said.
Winning captain Pat Cummins described his team's 3-1 victory in the five-match series as

Started setting new goals for 2025 after World Championship and Khel Ratna: Gukesh

PTI ■ BENGALURU
D Gukesh climbed dizzy heights in the past one month, a World Championship triumph getting garnished by the Major Dhyani Chand Khel Ratna award recently, but the chess prodigy now wants to reset his focus and goals to tackle a "challenging" 2025.
Gukesh will be seen in action in the Tata Steel tournament in Wijk aan Zee in Netherlands, beginning on January 17.
The event will see participation from frontline players such as Anish Giri, Arjun Erigaisi, Fabio Caruana and R Praggnanandhaa among others.
"Yeah, 2025 will offer a very tough challenge. A lot of new and interesting tournaments are coming up. The world championship was in the past.



I'm very happy about it and all the awards and receptions," Gukesh told a select media gathering during the felicitation ceremony organised by WestBridge Capital here on Sunday.
"But now, I have started thinking about new goals, new tournaments and new ways to prepare. The goal, the approach will be the same, to give my best, to keep improving myself, and win as many tournaments as possible."
"So, I am looking forward to a fun year with a lot of learning, a lot of improvements and hopefully a lot of good results," he added.
However, Gukesh will have to carry with him the tag of world champion and along

with it loads of expectations and increased scrutiny. But the 19-year-old is prepared to stand in the limelight.
"Yeah, I have been used to being under the attention for a while. Obviously, after the world championship, it will be more. But the basic things I remember are to keep improving myself and accepting failures when they come."
"I think in general, I have high expectations of myself. So, I think my aim is to meet my own expectations rather than that of others," he said.
But has he been able to handle all the adulation that has deservedly come his way?
"I had thought that it (winning the World Championship) would be somewhat similar to the Candidates, but obviously it's much more. I'm grateful for all the attention and recognition."



Varun Tomar shines in men's 10m air pistol

PTI ■ NEW DELHI
Reigning Asian champion Varun Tomar grabbed the spotlight by clinching both the senior and the junior men's 10m air pistol titles at the 67th National Shooting Championship Competitions (NSCC) here on Sunday.
The 21-year-old Army marksman, who narrowly missed out on last year's Paris Olympics, overcame a sluggish start in the senior final to snatch his maiden national crown at the expense of teammate Pradhyumn Singh, who fell short by 0.8 points.
Rajasthan's Aakash Bhardwaj won the bronze.
Tomar then had a similar slow start in the junior final, but quickly made up ground, staying in touch with eventual silver winner Nikhil Saroha of Uttar Pradesh who was on a start-to-finish mission.
Tomar's patience finally paid off after the 21st shot as Nikhil blinked with an 8.5, handing the senior pro an easy double gold in the end at the Dr Karni Singh Shooting range.
Tomar's score in the senior final was 238, while he was clearly more confident in the junior final, resulting in greater accuracy with a tally of 246.2.
Pradhyumn also rounded off a fruitful day with a second medal, a bronze in the junior men's air pistol.
The youth final saw a UP 1-2 when Chirag Sharma overcame the 14-year-old Dev Pratap by margin of 1.3 after 24 shots.

Gavaskar upset after not being invited to present BGT with Border

PTI ■ SYDNEY
The legendary Sunil Gavaskar on Sunday expressed his displeasure after not being invited to present the trophy, named after him and Allan Border, to Australia following their win over India in the high-voltage five-match rubber.
Australia reclaimed the Border-Gavaskar trophy after 10 years with a six-wicket win over India in the fifth and final Test.
Border presented the trophy to the home team but Gavaskar, despite being at the venue at the same time, was inexplicably ignored.
"I certainly would have loved to have been there for the presentation. After all it is the Border-Gavaskar Trophy and it is about Australia and

India," Gavaskar was quoted as saying by Code Sports.
"I mean, I am here on the ground. To me it should not matter that Australia won when it comes to the presentation. They played better cricket so they won. That's fine."
"Just because I am an Indian.



I would have been happy to present the trophy with my good friend Allan Border," he added.
Had the Indian team won the trophy, Gavaskar would have been invited to present it to the victorious side.
Cricket Australia (CA) later confirmed that Gavaskar was

aware he would have presented the award to Indian captain Jasprit Bumrah if the tourists had won the Sydney Test and retained the trophy.
"We acknowledge it would have been preferable if both Allan Border and Sunil Gavaskar had been asked to go on stage," a CA spokesperson said in a statement.
Both India and Australia have been competing for the Border-Gavaskar Trophy since 1996-1997 and the rivalry has grown to become one of the biggest in Test cricket.
The five-match series that Australia won drew record crowds at multiple venues and broke an 87-year-old attendance record at the Melbourne Cricket Ground last week.

If you have commitment towards red ball, play domestic cricket, says Gambhir

PTI ■ SYDNEY
India head coach Gautam Gambhir said on Sunday that struggling stars Rohit Sharma and Virat Kohli "still have the hunger to excel" but urged all senior players, including the duo, to play domestic games and show their "commitment" towards red-ball cricket.
Known for his plain speak, the two-time World Cup hero also didn't give any assurances on whether Rohit or Kohli will be a part of the Test set-up moving forward.
Both the stars were woefully out of form during the just-concluded Test series against Australia that the visitors lost 1-3 to surrender the Border-Gavaskar Trophy as well as a spot in the World Test Championship final.
"It's not the right moment right now for me to talk about where we are going to be after five months. A lot of things change in sport. Forms change, people change, attitude changes, everything changes in sport. And we all know that five months is a long time," Gambhir said at the post-series press conference.

"So let's see before the England series (in July) what's going to happen. But whatever will happen, will happen for the best interest of Indian cricket," asserted the former opener.
Rohit scored 31 runs in five innings before dropping himself from the playing eleven and Kohli managed 190 in nine knocks, including a second innings century after India had taken a lead of more than 300. A glaring failure for Kohli was his inability to avoid being dismissed on deliveries that were bowled outside the off stump. Asked if he would like the seniors to play at least one round, if not two, of Ranji Trophy starting January 23, Gambhir sent across a clear message.
"I would always like everyone to play domestic cricket. That is how much importance domestic cricket needs to be given. Not only one game, if they are available and they have the commitment to play red-ball cricket, everyone should play domestic cricket," Gambhir said.
"As simple as it can get. If you don't give importance to domestic cricket you will never get the desired players that you want in Test cricket," he explained.



Kohli last played a Ranji Trophy match in 2012 while Rohit's most recent domestic red-ball game was in the 2015-16 season.
The 'Ro-Ko' Dilemma
The tough-talking former player refused to be drawn into a

discussion on the much-speculated future of Kohli and Rohit, insisting that they are the best judge when it comes to analysing their role in Indian cricket.
"See, I can't talk about the future of any player, it's up to them as well.

But yes, what I can say is that they still have the hunger, they still have the passion, they're tough people and hopefully they can continue to take Indian cricket forward," he said.
"...Ultimately whatever they plan,

they will plan for the best interest of Indian cricket."
He wants the star duo to do some soul searching as to where they stand. "First of all, every individual knows where their game and hunger is. That is the most important thing for any sport and any profession."
"It is not just about the sport, how hungry you are, how passionate you are and whether the team is moving forward with your contributions or not," he pointed out.
I need to be fair to everyone Gambhir, in his pre-match press conference, spoke about honesty in the dressing room. He reiterated the position on Sunday, saying that his responsibility is to be fair to everyone irrespective of their experience and stature.
"If I am fair with only two or three individuals and not with others, then I am being dishonest to my job," he said.
"So, whether it is a player who has not made a debut yet or a player who has played 100 Test matches, the simple aim of my job is that I have to be absolutely fair and equal to everyone," he added.
During his days in Kolkata Knight

Riders and Lucknow Super Giants, Gambhir often stressed about the need for a happy dressing room. He said that philosophy holds good for the India set-up too.
"If you're committed to what we are doing with honesty, I think that should be fine. And more importantly, to keep the dressing room happy, I have to be absolutely honest and equal and fair to everyone in that dressing room."
Rohit has shown accountability Gambhir lauded Rohit for opting out of the fifth Test due to poor form.
"If a leader has taken this decision, I don't think there is any problem. We talked about accountability and that starts from the top and Rohit Sharma started that in the last match," the 43-year-old said.
"I am the first one to accept mistakes"
When asked if there is an acceptance of everything that has gone wrong on the tour, Gambhir was quick to declare that he never runs from accountability.
"The first thing is that the person sitting here will accept the mistakes first. So, don't worry about the fact that the mistakes will not be accepted here," he replied.