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INSIDE

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CYBER INEQUITY: WORLD  
ECONOMIC FORUM REPORT

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## FAITH, CHARITY, BUSINESS, CONVERGE AT MAHAKUMBH 2025

**BISWAJEET BANERJEE**  
MAHAKUMBH NAGAR

### CRORES OF BELIEVERS BATHE IN THE ETERNAL GLORY OF SANGAM

The sacred banks of the Ganga, Yamuna, and the mystical Saraswati came alive with a sea of humanity as the Maha Kumbh commenced on the auspicious day of Paus Purnima with over 1.65 crore people took a dip at the holy river.

Pilgrims from every corner of the country, carrying faith in their hearts and offerings in their hands, gathered to take the first holy dip. The air was filled with reverberating chants of "Har Har Gange" and "Jai Shri Ram," creating an atmosphere of divine fervor. The devotion of the pilgrims was palpable as they began arriving at the Sangam from midnight, braving the biting cold. Wrapped in woollens, they carried their belongings on their heads, the weight of which seemed insignificant before their unwavering faith. "It feels like a burden lifted from my soul when I take a dip here," said Savitri Devi, a 65-year-old pilgrim from Rajasthan, as she emerged from the water with a serene smile.

The banks of the Sangam turned into a kaleidoscope of colors as people dressed in traditional attire thronged the ghats. Children played in the shallow waters, their laughter mingling with the chants of mantras, while elders sat in prayer, their lips murmuring sacred hymns. The youthful enthusiasm was especially striking, with many capturing the moments on their phones and sharing them instantly. "It's a proud moment for us to be here and celebrate our culture with the world," said 22-year-old Aniket Mishra from Allahabad, holding a selfie stick as he stood at the edge of the waters. The spiritual energy was matched by nature's grace, with a light drizzle the previous night followed



Devotees take a holy dip at Sangam during Maha Kumbh Mela 2025, in Prayagraj, Uttar Pradesh

sight of millions standing waist-deep in the water, hands folded in prayer, was both humbling and awe-inspiring. "This is the heart of India, where the soul of our nation resides," said Dr. Vinod Kumar, a historian observing the event.

The first day of Mahakumbh also saw a bustling market atmosphere, with devotees enthusiastically shopping for food, puja items, and other essentials from both established stores and small vendors.

Ramkumar, a food vendor from Hardoi who arrived two weeks ago, shared his experience: "Here, we are not only feeding devotees but also earning spiritual merit. We are not overcharging anyone, and everything is running smoothly." Similarly, Sunil from Bhadohi, who is serving tea at the event, expressed gratitude for the opportunity. "I've come here for 45 days to earn a livelihood. On this chilly first day, tea is being served to the devotees without any extra charge," he added.

Mahakumbh 2025 is turning into a unique confluence of commerce and charity, as the first day witnessed both thriving business and widespread acts of generosity. Various organisations set up Bhandaras across the fairgrounds, distributing food and tea in abundance to the countless devotees present.

From piping hot Khichdi to Puri Sabzi, devotees were treated to a variety of meals, while tea was served at numerous stalls throughout the day.

Renowned saints, including Satua Baba, have also extended hospitality by organizing Bhandaras and making arrangements for devotees to stay in their camps, ensuring that no one leaves without being cared for. This seamless blend of spiritual service and economic activity highlights the inclusive spirit of Mahakumbh.

by a cool breeze enhancing the sanctity of the occasion. Pilgrims were seen lighting diyas, offering flowers, and performing rituals on the ghats. "The cold water feels like the blessings of the goddess herself. This is not just a bath; it's a spiritual rebirth," said Ramesh Gupta, a trader from Delhi who had traveled

with his family for the occasion. The elaborate security arrangements ensured a smooth flow of devotees. Police personnel stood alert at every corner, guiding the crowds and maintaining order. Drones hovered overhead, providing real-time monitoring from the Integrated Command and

Control Center. "We feel safe and cared for. The arrangements this year are truly commendable," said Kavita Joshi, a teacher from Uttarakhand. For many, the Maha Kumbh was not just an act of faith but also a celebration of cultural heritage. The ghats became a stage for

impromptu performances of bhajans and folk songs, as groups of devotees formed circles and sang in unison. The atmosphere was electric yet peaceful, a blend of human devotion and divine energy. Social media was abuzz with posts, photos, and videos from the event. "I shared a live video of the aarti,

and my friends back in Mumbai were amazed. This is a part of our culture we should all be proud of," said Prerna Mehta, a first-time visitor to the Kumbh. As the sun rose over the horizon, casting a golden glow over the confluence, the Sangam appeared like a painting brought to life. The

## India summons Bangladesh Deputy High Commissioner

**PIONEER NEWS SERVICE**  
NEW DELHI

India on Monday summoned Bangladesh Deputy High Commissioner Nural Islam amid escalating border tensions between the two nations. The development comes a day after the Bangladesh Foreign

Ministry summoned Indian High Commissioner to Dhaka Pranay Verma. The border tensions between India and Bangladesh have escalated after Dhaka alleged that India was trying to construct fences at five locations along the India-Bangladesh border, violating a bilateral agreement.

In a statement, the Bangladeshi foreign ministry said, "Bangladesh Foreign Secretary Ambassador Md Jashim Uddin on Sunday expressed the deep concern of the Government of Bangladesh to the High Commissioner of India Pranay Verma at his office at the Ministry of Foreign

Affairs over the recent activities of the Border Security Force (BSF) of India along the Bangladesh-India Border." The conflicts have surfaced in five areas, including (northwestern) Chapainawabganj, Naogaon, Lalmonirhat, and the Tin Bigha Corridor.

## FII's exit, Sensex drops sharply

**PIONEER NEWS SERVICE**  
MUMBAI

The equity benchmark Sensex cracked over 1,000 points to dive below the 77,000 level on Monday, tracking heavy selling in global equities and a spike in international crude prices. A strong US jobs data, which dampened early rate cut expectations, the rupee logging its steepest single-day fall in nearly two years and unabated foreign fund outflows also dampened investors' sentiment.

### MARKETS



Falling for the fourth straight session, the 30-share BSE benchmark Sensex tanked 1,048.90 points or 1.36 per cent to finally settle at 76,330.01. During the day, it plunged 1,129.19 points or 1.45 per cent to 76,249.72. The NSE Nifty dropped 345.55 points or 1.47 per cent to close at 23,085.95. From the 30-share blue-chip pack, Zomato cracked nearly 7 per cent. Power Grid, Adani Ports, Tata Steel, NTPC, Tata Motors, Tech Mahindra, Mahindra & Mahindra, Asian Paints, Sun Pharma and UltraTech Cement were the other major laggards.

In contrast, Axis Bank, Hindustan Unilever, Tata Consultancy Services and IndusInd Bank were the gainers.

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Classifieds

LOST AND FOUND

I, Kuljeet Singh Rai s/o Kehar Singh Rai R/o Vill: Gahoon Teh-Balachaur (SBS Nagar) declare that in my 10th class certificate from ICSE Board, year 2012-2013 Index No. T/5478/006 session March-April 2013 has been lost in home. If anybody found then contact at my above address.

BEDKHALI NOTICE

I, Randhir Singh s/o Veer Singh R/o H.No 246, Krishna Enclave dhakoli zirakpur declare that My son Manjeet Singh and Mandeep Singh is out of my control. I disown them from my all movable/immovable properties. Anybody deal with them at his own risk.

I, Sudip Chakrabarti Son of Basu Dev Chakrabarti Resident of House no 1656, Main Bazar, Manimajra Chandigarh inform that my son Lucky Chakrabarti is out of my control. I disown him from my all movable and immovable Properties. Anybody deal with him at their own Risk. He himself responsible for his any activities in future.

We, Yash Paul Malik S/o Zile Singh Malik and Shakuntika W/o Yash Paul Malik R/o H. No. 30, Village Ugra Khari, Panipat, declare that our son Ajay Malik are out of our control. So we disown our son from our moveable and immovable property. In future, anybody who deals with them will be responsible for that deal himself.

I, Rashmi W/o Virendra Kumar R/o #1592/13, Krishna Colony, Hari Nagar, Jind declare that my son Kushagra alias Mitthu is out of my control. So, I disown him from my all movable/immovable properties. If anybody deals with him shall do their own risk in future.

I, Dulari Devi W/o Om Parkash R/o Village Tepia, Teh Rajpura District Patiala declare that I disowned my daughter Pooja Rani from my moveable immovable properties due to out of my control, anybody dealing with her at their own risk.

I, Bhagwanti W/o Ram Kumar R/o Makrani (75) PO Mauri Distt. Bhiwani declare that my daughter in law Meena W/o Late Sh. Gurupreet and his son Dhruv are out of my control. So I disown them from my all moveable/immovable properties. Any body dealing with them at their own risk. I or my family are not responsible for any type of their any acts.

PUBLIC NOTICE

I, Hitherto Known As Undersigned Ankit S/O Sh. Harmesh Masih Residing At Village Village Barota, Po Abdullahpur Tehsil Mukerian, Distt. Hoshiarpur, Punjab Have Changed My Name And Shall Hereafter Be Known As Ankit Kaushal. It Is Certified That I Have Complied With Other Legal Requirements In The Connection.

I, Gurpreet Kaur W/o No. 15344853H, Rank- Hav Name- Gurnant Singh Unit 53 Engr. Regt, Resident of Vill- Manana PO. Behloipur Tehsil & District- S.A.S Nagar (Mohali) State -Punjab, Pin-160014 have changed my date of birth 07Dec1983 to 07Dec1981, vide Affidavit Dated 13-01-2025 before Notary SAS Nagar (Mohali) (Pb)

I, Sukh Dev S/o Bindra R/o Deputyganj Nilmatha Distt. Lucknow declare that in my son Aditya Pal army record my name wrongly entered Sukh Dev Pal. But my correct name is Sukh Dev. So amended my name from Sukh Dev Pal to Sukh Dev in my son army record.

CHANGE OF NAME

I, Vikas S/o Satinder Kumar R/o 34A, Vidya Nagar, Gobindpuri Road, Yamuna Nagar have changed my name from Vikas to Vikas Sabharwal.

I, Hira Singh s/o Sukhdev Singh S/O Bawa Singh R/O Village Uchha Dhakala Tehsil/Distt- Gurdaspur (Punjab). Declare That In My Army Record My Wife Name Rajwinder Kaur Is Wrong. But My Wife Name Rajinder Kaur Is Correct. Vide Affidavit No. IN/PB95081044787070x Dated 08/01/2025 Before Executive Magistrate Dinanagar (Gsp).

I, Vikas Sehla S/o Ved Pal Singh R/O 134, Shivpuri B, Near ITI, Yamuna Nagar, Tehsil Jagadhri, Distt. Yamuna Nagar have changed my minor son name from Laavanya Sehla to Lovyam Sehla.

I, No.3405649Y Ex Hav(Click) Pawan Prakash Saini S/o Sh. Fateh Chand Saini R/O Moh. Saini Nagar Ravidas Mandir Road Bhiwani (Haryana) has changed my wife's name from Sushila Devi to Sushila & my son's name from Priyanshu Prakash Saini to Priyanshu Prakash for all future purposes.

I, Harmukh Singh S/o Bhupinder Singh R/O H.No.16, Dabra Chowk, Behind Medicity Hospital, Govind Nagar, Hisar (Haryana) have changed my name from Harmukh to Harmukh Singh for all purposes in future.

I, Mohd Julfan S/o Basim Ahmed R/O House No. 985, Vikas Nagar, Mauli Jagran, Chandigarh, have changed my name to Julfan Ahmed.

I, Mood. Salim S/o Nanu Khan R/O H, no. 550 Ward No. 13 Behind Power House Old Hamida Yamanuger Tehsil Jagadhri that I have changed my name from Mood. Salim to Mohammad Salim. Concerned note.

I, Sukhraj Singh Sidhu employed as Deputy Commandant Engineer at 17th Bn. ITBP reckong Peo, Distt Kinnaur (H.P.) have changed my name from Sukhraj Singh (Old Name) to Sukhraj Singh Sidhu (New Name)

I, Sarwan Kaur W/o Sh. Baldev Singh R/O H.No. 200, Milk Colony, (Sector 14-West), Chandigarh have changed my name from Sarwan Kaur to Gurdeep Kaur.

I, Nand Kishore S/o Shri Bhagwan R/o 509, Pana - Khadian VPO-Rohat, Rohat (215), Sonipat, Haryana-131403 have changed my name to Nand Kishor for all purposes.

I, Bal Kishan S/o Ram Lal Sharma R/o 120, Krishna Nagar, Near Chandpur, Yamuna Nagar have changed my name from Bal Kishan to Bal Kishan Sharma.

I, No. JC (NYA) 2703491L NB Sub Kuldeep Singh S/O Sh. Rattan Singh R/O Village Bidola PO Chhappar Rangran, Tehsil Tosham, Distt. Bhiwani declares that in my army record, my son's name is Yovraj Singh, which is wrong. Now I want to register my son's name as Yuvraj Singh in my army record, which is correct.

I, Jannat D/o Jatinder Pal Singh R/O House No. 70, Near Sampark Center, Sector 10-A, Chandigarh have changed my name from Jannat to Jannat Kaur.

I, Veena W/o Ram Gopal R/O House No. 582/1002, Sector 16, New Pritami Nagar, Karnal Haryana have changed my name from Veena to Veena Kumari.

I, Surekha W/o Ravinder Paul R/o H.No.242 Nav Jyoti School Wall Gali Near Cold Store Dashmsh Avenue Naushehra Khurd Majitha Road Amritsar have changed my name to Surekha Paul

I, Krishan Kumar father of Army no 17027300K, Rank cfn, name eshavar Singh resident of village- Ishrakabas, PO-baberi Teh- Bansur distt- Kotputli behror (Rajasthan) & serving with Static Wksp EME, Mhow C/O-56 APO. declare that in my son's service record my name and date of birth is wrongly written as Krashan Kumar and date of birth 1 August 1970. But my correct name is Krishan Kumar and correct date of birth is 1 January 1970.

I, Bhothi Devi mother of Army no 17027300K rank cfn, name Eshavar Singh resident of village- Ishrakabas, PO-baberi, Teh- Bansur, distt- Kotputli behror (Rajasthan) & serving with Static Wksp EME, Mhow C/O 56 APO. declare that in my son's service record my name and date of birth is wrongly written as bhothi Devi and date of birth 7 August 1974. But my correct name is Bhothi Devi and date of birth is 1 January 1977.

I, Rathod Cheharba Ratuji spouse of No.14940739P Sep Rathod Ratuji Bhihaji R/o 258 Rajhaputwas Uchadovas Memadpur PO Memadpur Distt Banaskantha Gujarat 385421 now at 15 mech Inf C/O 56 APO have changed my name from Rathod Cheharba Ratuji to Rathod Cheharben Ratuji vide Affidavit No IN-PB96746697891622X Dated 13-01-2025 before Notary Public Amritsar

I, Anil Kumar S/o Sh. Ramji Lal R/o H.No. F-152, New Model Town Extension, Hisar (Haryana) have changed my name from Anil to Anil Kumar for all future purposes.

I Sumathi Prabhakar spouse of No 15503600H Dfr Prabhakara SC R/o Shanthigramma Hobali Haasan Karnataka 573220 have changed my name from Sumathi Prabhakar to Sumathi vide Affidavit No PB96735544154670X Dated 13-01-2025 before Notary Public Amritsar

I Barsha spouse of JC287630X SUB Suresh Meena R/o Karadyia Bhil Baktal Sehore Madhya Pradesh 466001 have changed my name from Barsha to Varsha Meena vide Affidavit No IN-PB96740093835301X Dated 13-01-2025 before Notary Public Amritsar

Continuity Pg. No. 08

SYMBOLIC POSSESSION NOTICE

ICICI Bank Branch Office: ICICI Bank Ltd Office Number 201-B, 2nd Floor, Road No 1 Plot No-83, WFI IT Park, Wagie Industrial Estate, Thane (West)- 400604

The Authorised ICICI Bank Officer under the Securitisation, Reconstruction of Financial Assets and Enforcement of Security Interest Act, 2002 and in exercise of the powers conferred under section 13(12) read with Rule 3 of the Security Interest (Enforcement) Rules 2002, issued Demand Notices to the borrower(s) mentioned below, to repay the amount mentioned in the Notice within 60 days from the date of receipt of the said Notice.

Table with 5 columns: Sr. No., Name of the Borrower(s)/Loan Account Number, Description of Property/ Date of Symbolic Possession, Date of Demand Notice in Demand Notice (Rs), Name of Branch

The above-mentioned borrowers(s)/guarantors(s) is/are hereby issued a 30 day Notice to repay the amount, else the mortgaged properties will be sold after 30 days from the date of publishing this Notice, as per the provisions under Rules 8 and 9 of Security Interest (Enforcement) Rules 2002.

Date: January 14, 2025 Place: Srinagar Sincerely Authorised Signatory For ICICI Bank Ltd.

Canara Bank (A Govt. of India Undertaking) E-AUCTION SALE NOTICE CANARA BANK Recovery & Legal Section Regional Office Panipat-132103, Ph. 0180-4088335, Mob: 7015926780, EMAIL: ropptrec@canarabank.com

E-AUCTION SALE NOTICE SALE NOTICE OF MOVABLE / IMMOVABLE ASSETS UNDER THE SECURITISATION AND RECONSTRUCTION OF FINANCIAL ASSETS AND ENFORCEMENT OF SECURITY INTEREST ACT, 2002 UNDER RULES 6(2), 8(6) & 9 OF THE SECURITY INTEREST (ENFORCEMENT) RULES, 2002

LAST DATE OF RECEIPT OF EMD IS 29.01.2025 UPTO 5:00 P.M.

DATE OF E-AUCTION IS 31.01.2025 (12:30 PM TO 1:30 P.M) (with unlimited extension of 5 minutes duration each till the conclusion of the sale)

Main table with 7 columns: Sr No., Branch Name/Name & Address of the Borrower(s)/ Guarantor(s), Brief Description of Movable / Immovable Property/ies, Total Liabilities as on specified Date, Reserve Price (in Rs.), Earnest Money Deposit (EMD) (in Rs.), Details of A/C No. IFSC CODE Auction notice

Other terms and conditions:

- a) The property is being sold with all the existing and future encumbrances whether known or unknown to the bank. The authorized officer/Secured Creditor shall not be responsible in any way for any third party claims/rights/dues. The purchaser should conduct due diligence on all aspects related to the property to his satisfaction. The bidder are advised to in their own interest to satisfy themselves with the title and correctness of others details pertaining to the secured assets including the size/area of the immovable secured asset in question and also ascertain any other dues/liabilities/encumbrances from the concerned authorities to their satisfaction before submitting the bid. The purchaser shall not be entitled to make any claim against the authorized officer/Secured Creditors in this regard at a later date.

SYMBOLIC POSSESSION NOTICE

ICICI Bank Branch Office: ICICI Bank Ltd., Plot No. 23, Shal Tower, 3rd Floor, New Rohtak Road, Karol Bagh, New Delhi- 110005

The Authorised ICICI Bank Officer under the Securitisation, Reconstruction of Financial Assets and Enforcement of Security Interest Act, 2002 and in exercise of the powers conferred under section 13(12) read with Rule 3 of the Security Interest (Enforcement) Rules 2002, issued Demand Notices to the borrower(s) mentioned below, to repay the amount mentioned in the Notice within 60 days from the date of receipt of the said Notice.

Table with 5 columns: Sr. No., Name of the Borrower(s)/Loan Account Number, Description of Property/ Date of Symbolic Possession, Date of Demand Notice Amount in Demand Notice (Rs), Name of Branch

The above-mentioned borrowers(s)/guarantors(s) is/are hereby issued a 30 day Notice to repay the amount, else the mortgaged properties will be sold after 30 days from the date of publishing this Notice, as per the provisions under Rules 8 and 9 of Security Interest (Enforcement) Rules 2002. Date: January 14, 2025 Place: Ludhiana Sincerely Authorised Signatory For ICICI Bank Ltd.



नगर निगम रोहतक
राजकीय चयन
सर्व कार्यों के निष्पत्ति निम्न प्रकार है कि नगर निगम, रोहतक...

NAME CHANGE
I, REKHA Mother of No 4591987H
Rank SEP Name SAHIL SINGH
presently residing at Vill - GADDI
KHERI, PO - GADDI KHERI, Teh -
ROHTAK, Distt - ROHTAK, State -
HARYANA. I have changed my name
from REKHA DEVI (Old Name) to
REKHA (New Name) vide Affidavit
No 31460 dated 13.1.2025

PUBLIC NOTICE
We, Varun Singla son of Kishan Lal son of Kishori Lal & Smt.
Neha Singla wife of Varun Singla son of Kishan Singla...

Public Notice
की राहेंदार सुमंजस की बचतबंदी सहायता
सहायता राहेंदार विच बी सी डी टेंटे दे विच
संभालेन रेंडटा चारुंटी दे सिमरी जेठार...

LOST & FOUND
I Ramesh Kumar S/o Mukand Lal R/o House
no 565/ M/Gh, Baldev Nagar, Housing Board
Colony, (Area 90 sq yards) Ambala City...

PUBLIC NOTICE
It is hereby informed to general public at large that Nisha
Singh son of Gurnaj Singh, resident of village Odhan...

LOST AND FOUND
It is informed to the general public that
Narinder Pal Singh S/o Late Kuldeep
Singh resident & owner of Flat No. 113B...

PUBLIC NOTICE
Plot No. 116, Sector-53, Phase-V, HSIDC, Indl
Estate, Kundli measuring 153 Sq. Mtr. under R &
P Policy dated 07.12.2007 was allotted by HSIDC...

RECRUITMENT NOTICE FOR EMPLOYMENT OF CANTEEN
STAFF FOR EX-SERVICEMEN CANTEENS & DOT URC
Application is invited for the post of Director, Manager, Asst Manager and Account Clerk as per vacancy at various
Ex-Servicemen Canteens located at Hisar, Jind, Rohtak, Bhiwani, Badhra, Charkhi Dabri, Bahadurgarh, Beri, Malanahil and Jhohju
Kalan, & Manager for DOT URC, Haryana. Qualifications and ORs for each post are as under:

Public Notice
It hereby informs to general public at large that Sh.
Salinder Singh son of Mheender Singh Rio Village
Narar, Tehsil & Distt. Kaithal as desired by you...

Public Notice
The South Indian Bank Ltd
Regional Office - Delhi, 3rd Floor, Plot No.21, 2/11,
Pusa Road, Karol Bagh, New Delhi-110005
Phone - 011 4233 1664 / 011 4512 8661
Email - ro1008@siib.co.in.

Public Notice
Sub: Transfer of Flat No.511, 5th Floor, Type-A,
GHS-2, Sector-31, Panchkula (Haryana) in the
name of Sh. Dharam Singh S/o Sh. Tek Ram...

Public Notice
It is notified for the information of the
general public and all concerned with the
property No. Flat No.511, 5th Floor, Type-A,
GHS-2, Sector-31, Panchkula (Haryana)...

पंजाब नैशनल बैंक Punjab National Bank
Branch: Bawa Tarana Road (E-UBI Branch-146620) Now PNB Branch Sonapat
SALE NOTICE
NOTICE U/S 13(2) OF THE SECURITIZATION AND RECONSTRUCTION OF
FINANCIAL ASSETS AND ENFORCEMENT OF SECURITY INTEREST ACT 2002

पंजाब नैशनल बैंक Punjab National Bank
CIRCLE SASTRA CENTRE, Add: SCO 170, SECTOR-13-17, PANIPAT, Haryana-132103
E-MAIL: CS8293@pnb.co.in
DEMAND NOTICE UNDER SECTION 13(2) OF THE ACT
Registered Post with A/D
Date: 20.12.2024

E-AUCTION SALE NOTICE
E-Auction Sale Notice for Sale of Immovable Assets under the Securitisation and
Reconstruction of Financial Assets and Enforcement of Security Interest Act, 2002 read
with proviso to Rule 8(b) and 9(1) of the Security Interest (Enforcement) Rules, 2002.

पंजाब नैशनल बैंक Punjab National Bank
CIRCLE SASTRA CENTRE, Add: SCO 170, SECTOR-13-17, PANIPAT, Haryana-132103
E-MAIL: CS8293@pnb.co.in
DEMAND NOTICE UNDER SECTION 13(2) OF THE ACT
Registered Post with A/D
Date: 01-01-2025

SCHEDULE 'A' Table with columns: Sr. No., Nature of Facility, Outstanding inclusive of interest as on date of NPA i.e. as on 03.10.2024, Un-applied interest w.e.f. 30.09.2024 To, Panel Interest Simple, Cost/Charges Incurred by Bank

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SCHEDULE 'B' Table with columns: Sr. No., Nature of the Document, Nature of Security, Date of Execution, Amount Secured (Rs.)





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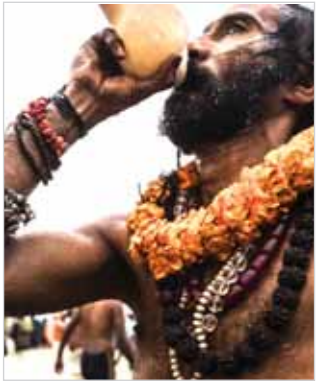
PAPER WITH PASSION

## Confluence of faith

Truly a once-in-a-lifetime experience, the Maha Kumbh celebrates India's unity, diversity and enduring spiritual heritage

There are fairs and festivals but none like Maha Kumbh, a once-in-a-lifetime event that is as spiritual as it is eventful, showcasing tenacity, modernity, culture and human will to endure—all at the same time. The Maha Kumbh Mela 2025, the world's largest religious congregation, began on January 13 in Prayagraj, Uttar Pradesh, drawing millions of devotees to the sacred confluence of the Ganga, Yamuna, and the mythical Saraswati rivers. This event is expected to host over 45 crore pilgrims, including 15 lakh from foreign nations, over its 45-day span. The Maha Kumbh is a deeply spiritual event, rooted in ancient Hindu traditions. The ritual of taking a holy dip at the Triveni Sangam is believed to cleanse one of sins and pave the way for salvation (moksha). This grand gathering is a testament to India's enduring spiritual heritage and celebrates the unity and diversity of its cultural fabric. As Prime Minister Narendra Modi noted, the Maha Kumbh is a "sacred confluence of faith, devotion, and culture." The Uttar Pradesh government, in collaboration with central agencies, has made extensive preparations to accommodate the unprecedented number of pilgrims. The state has allocated a budget of Rs 7,000 crore for the event, focusing on sanitation, security, and technological integration.

Like any mega event Maha Kumbh is also not free from fear of mishaps especially stampedes which have happened in the past. To avoid that, there have to be elaborate security arrangements especially on the designated bathing days. The State government has deployed AI-enabled cameras, underwater drones for 24/7 monitoring, and teams from PAC, NDRF, and SDRF for crowd and water safety are on the watch. A first-of-its-kind initiative featuring digital monitoring systems to streamline crowd management and enhance safety has also been put in place. Besides, this time expansion of ghats, installation of remote life-saving buoys, and a fleet of 700 flagged boats have been made to ensure smooth movement and safety of devotees. Maha Kumbh's appeal lies in its fusion of ancient spirituality with modern infrastructure. This year's 'mela' exemplifies this synergy, blending cutting-edge technology with age-old rituals. The congregation serves as a melting pot for devotees, saints, and tourists, creating a vibrant tapestry of faith and culture. On *Paush Purnima*, the first 'Shahi Snan' witnessed more than 40 lakh devotees taking a holy dip at the Sangam. The ceremonial bath marks the beginning of the 'mela,' symbolising the purification of body and soul. Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath welcomed devotees, emphasizing the event as a celebration of 'unity in diversity' and the blending of faith with modernity. With meticulous planning and unwavering commitment, Maha Kumbh 2025 stands as a shining example of India's ability to honour its spiritual roots while embracing technological advancements. As the Maha Kumbh unfolds, it offers a transformative experience to millions who seek spiritual solace and cultural enrichment.



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### PICTALK



Devotees take a holy dip at Sangam on the first day of Maha Kumbh Mela 2025, in Prayagraj

## How to give a golden touch to the silver years

Old age often conjures images of frailty, dependence and withdrawal. But it can be a second bloom—a chance to embrace life with renewed vigour

John and Hazel are a couple in their eighties. They were our neighbours at a mountain resort in Germany and were on a two-week holiday. They had come from the UK, driving nonstop for hours. They went hiking in the woods, drove to nearby places of interest even on snowy and rainy days without cursing the weather, made their own breakfast in their room instead of indulging in the buffet, and seemed to be having the best of their times. When I spoke to them, I saw how enthused they were about their retired lives, looking forward to travelling more, seeing more places on earth, and not once did they mention any discomfort that might be commonplace at their age: creaking knees, waning memory, shivering hands, feeble limbs. This is the kind of old age I wish for myself and my spouse. Though, truth be told, 'wish' feels more honest than 'envisage' because I am unsure if I will see the world that far ahead. Pushing my mid-fifties, I am already troubled by the thought of a frail old age where my body might fail me, denying me the



chance to drink life to the lees. Health issues have started giving me early warnings. And every time I travel to the West and see people older than me by a few decades living with independence, engagement, and joy, I am overcome not with envy but with wonder—and a quiet determination. Why do we, in India, not resign ourselves so early to physical decline, social withdrawal, and the weight of ailments? Somewhere along the way, we have been conditioned to expect aging as a slow retreat from life rather than an opportunity for a second bloom. Part of it lies in our cultural mindset, perhaps—where old age is often equated with quietude,

dependence, and spiritual pursuits. In contrast, many Western cultures emphasise personal fulfillment and activity well into the later years of life. Retirees continue to travel, explore hobbies, and stay physically active, seeing old age as a continuation of life rather than its decline. We Indians often embrace a more sedentary old age, citing health issues, familial obligations, or even spirituality as reasons to wind down. But does spirituality have to mean withdrawal? The narrative around aging needs to shift—from enduring to embracing, from retiring to thriving. Perhaps, if we break free from the cultural mould of passive aging and take cues from people like John and Hazel, we can look forward to a life where the sunset years are not just endured but truly, deeply lived. To achieve this, we must adopt a proactive approach. Regular physical activity tailored to our abilities can significantly enhance mobility and reduce age-related health issues. Prioritising balanced nutrition with a focus on protein intake and essential

vitamins is key to maintaining strength and mental clarity. Beyond physical wellness, fostering emotional well-being by staying connected with friends, family, and community can counter isolation and loneliness, which often accompany aging. Moreover, financial planning cannot be overlooked. A secure financial base can empower older adults to pursue passions, travel, and stay engaged in life. Ultimately, aging is a privilege—a phase of life that can be as vibrant and fulfilling as any other if approached with the right mindset. Let us not merely aspire for longer lives but richer ones, where we continue to explore, learn, and inspire generations that follow. The golden years can truly be golden if we choose to make them so. To John, Hazel and dozens others that I come across on my jaunts to the other side of the globe, thank you. For making me see life in a whole new perspective. *(The author is a Dubai-based columnist and children's writing coach. She has published six books. View are personal)*



ASHA IYER KUMAR

# The calculus behind global invitations

The guest list of Republic day, over the years has reflected India's growing global aspirations, balancing diplomacy with pragmatism



BHOPINDER SINGH

Beyond the obvious suggestions of bilateral bonhomie and relationship, there is an invisible calculus of cold strategy in inviting foreign Heads of State to events like the Republic Day, in the Indian context. This year, the President of Indonesia, Prabowo Subianto, graces the occasion. Last year it was the French President, Emmanuel Macron, who heads what the Hudson Institute has described as "India's new best friend". This is unsurprising, given that France was one of the rare countries to avoid condemning India's nuclear test (later emerged as amongst the foremost nuclear fuel and reactor suppliers), supports Delhi's bid to become a permanent member of the United Nations, besides offering strategic defence platforms like Rafale fighters, Scorpene submarines etc. Before Macron it was the Egyptian President Abdel Fattah el-Sisi (reviving memories of Nehru-Nasser era) whose visit signified India's increased leverage within Ummah (Islamic world), negating Pakistan's age-old rhetoric. Still earlier were stalwarts from BRICS comity i.e., Brazil and South Africa, which was reflective of India's expanded outreach and ambition to assert its strategic independence, beyond superpower-led 'Bloc'. But one region that has increasingly concerned India in terms of the duality of opportunities and threats, is from the East feeding its 'Act East' (evolved from prior 'Look East') policy. Part of the opportunities is to stitch alliances and further the latent opportunities of the prosperous ASEAN region, and part of its security concern is the shared fear of China's expansionism which makes these Eastern countries, natural allies with India. Therefore the 2018 guest list for the Republic Day parade was a virtual who's who of Heads of State under the commemorative theme 'Shared Values, Common Destiny' from Brunei, Cambodia, Indonesia, Laos, Malaysia, Myanmar, Philippines, Singapore, Thailand and Vietnam. This year's guest is yet again the President of Indonesia, Prabowo



Subianto, who will be the third Indonesian Head of State to come as the Chief Guest after Joko Widodo in 2018, Susilo Bambang Yudhoyono in 2011, and Sukarno in 1950 (who incidentally was the first foreign Head of State in a Republic Day parade). Beyond the deep civilisation and cultural connection between the two Asian countries, Indonesia as the world's largest Muslim population country with institutionalised tenets of religious tolerance and diversities, has much in common with India. But perhaps the most significant commonality is the wounded history with China as the purge unleashed by Indonesian dictator and strongman, Suharto (killing between 0.5 to 1 million communists, also banning Chinese literature, culture and diplomatic relations) took decades for the Sino-Indonesian diplomatic relations to reopen in 1990. But it is the brazen Chinese claims of territorial usurpation in the South China Seas that affect Indonesia the most, especially with its sovereignty over the Natuna Islands getting repeatedly punctured by Chinese transgressions. China's infamous nine-dash line formulation has consumed the waters of the Natuna Islands from a cartographical sense, even though the Permanent Court of Arbitration Ruling validated Indonesian claims. But it is an issue that remains testy with Indonesian President Prabowo Subianto



THEREFORE THE 2018 GUEST LIST FOR THE REPUBLIC DAY PARADE WAS A VIRTUAL WHO'S WHO OF HEADS OF STATE UNDER THE COMMEMORATIVE THEME 'SHARED VALUES, COMMON DESTINY'

recently signing a memorandum of understanding with the Chinese for "joint maritime development" whilst acknowledging an "overlapping claim" – it was a move of acknowledgement that was slammed by many international commentators who believe it gave credence and support to Chinese claims. That said, the usually unconcerned Indonesians who had warmed up to the Chinese with its Belt & Road Initiative (BRI) largesse and other investments are gradually becoming more Sino-wary and concerned. The visit of the Indonesian President to India will be carefully watched in Beijing for what is said or suggested during the visit. Besides the Chinese angularity, there are enough commercial and diplomatic stakes to be tapped bilaterally, which chooses the Indonesian Head of State, very apt and strategic. However, across the oceans, it is the guest list of invitees for the swearing-in of the 47th President of the United States (20th Jan) that is raising eyebrows, about the unpredictability of the Trump 1.0.2 tenure, that it signifies. Reportedly the Trump-Vance Inaugural Committee has raised an unbelievable \$170 million (compared to \$107 in 2016) from the deep-pocketed donors and corporations who presumably seek to curry favour with him at the jamboree. But it is the personal invite list of Trump (doing away with the traditional

avoidance of Head of State to US Presidential swearing-in) that is extremely disconcerting, for it includes ideological hard right-wingers like Italian Prime Minister Giorgia Meloni, Argentinian President Javier Milei, El Salvador President Nayib Bukele, Hungarian President Viktor Orban, ousted Brazilian President Jair Bolsonaro and French far-right leader Eric Zemmour! But the strangest invite was to the Chinese President Xi Jinping, onto whom his Presidential campaign diatribe and threats were ostensibly directed. Xi tellingly declined and may instead send some other official. The much-believed invite to the Indian Prime Minister never came, and it will be left to the External Affairs Minister, S Jaishankar, to represent the Indian government, as per the invite received. Another notable omission has been the Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky who went public in expressing interest to attend the same but hasn't received the invite. Trump's unsaid 'freemey' Vladimir Putin would be smiling at emerging signals from Washington DC. US Ambassador to India's reassurance given the "crowded swearing-in ceremony" doesn't seem too convincing or reassuring. *(The writer, a military veteran, is a former Lt Governor of Andaman & Nicobar Islands and Puducherry. The views expressed are personal)*

### LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

#### DECODING ANCIENT LANGUAGES

Madam — The Chief Minister of Tamil Nadu MK Stalin has announced a prize of \$1 million for deciphering the script of the Indus Valley Civilisation (IVC), or Harappan Civilisation, aka Dravidian Civilisation, the Bronze Age culture that originated in the Indus River valley around 6000 BCE. For over a century, "the pictographic and logo-syllabic script, probably standing for one or two languages, has been the most vexing problem for epigraphists and archaeologists. However, "Indus script scholars John Marshall, Yuri Kozorov, Nikita Gurov, Kamil Zvebil, Asko Parpola, Iravatham Mahadevan and Bryan Wells agree that the language underlying the Indus script is Dravidian." A science paper pointed out that the Indus Valley people spoke a Dravidian language, while the Vedic people spoke an Indo-European language, Sanskrit. The paper argues, "A possible scenario combining genetic data with archaeology and linguistics is that proto-Dravidian was spread by people of the Indus Valley Civilisation." At an event in Chennai to mark the centenary of the IVC, Stalin said that the discovery of Sir John Marshall, the then Director General of the Archaeological Survey of India, completely changed the understanding of India's past. Stalin added that the discovery debunked the claim that Aryans and Sanskrit originated in India. Marshall's argument that the IVC predated Aryan (Vedic) civilisation and that the language in the Indus Valley could be Dravidian was a turning point in history. Ironically, his statue is being installed in Tamil Nadu, though he is credited with discovering IVC through excavations in Harappa and Mohenjodaro, now in Pakistan. **Haridasan Rajan | Kozhikode**

#### END POST-RETIREMENT POSTINGS

Madam — The suggestions of the Vice President to go on merit while deciding postings are welcome. His suggestion to

#### India a developed nation by 2047



The ambition of transforming India into a 'Viksit Bharat' by 2047 demands bold and innovative economic strategies. The recent proposal to create an 'Amrit Kaal Fund', inspired by Singapore's GIC model, appears to be a highly promising approach to achieve the financial goals necessary for sustainable growth. India's public sector enterprises have demonstrated significant improvement in earnings and the market value of public sector stocks has nearly tripled

in recent years. By transferring PSU holdings in excess of 51 per cent into this fund, the government can effectively leverage these assets to raise resources, reduce fiscal deficits, retire public debt and improve India's sovereign credit ratings. The strategic shift away from traditional privatisation toward shared public ownership addresses valid concerns about the concentration of wealth and political sensitivities. Furthermore, listing the fund as an exchange-traded vehicle would allow domestic and international investors to participate in India's growth story, thereby unlocking additional capital. It is imperative that the 2025 budget prioritises this visionary initiative to propel India towards 8+ GDP growth to achieve the goal of a developed nation by 2047. **Vishal Mayur | Tumakuru**

do away with post-retirement rehabilitations is also a valid one to avoid decisions being incentivised and inductive to grab posts. But these are happening as policy of the ruling party. The top executives of public service commissions do not decide such political policies. Therefore, he should use his good office and prevail upon the ruling dispensation to do away with the system of taking their favourable judgements to decide their post-retirement rehabilitations. A blanket ban avoiding posting after retirement for five years may be thought of. Postings lack logic. The governor is selected based on political lenience, and he is expected to appoint apolitical academicians as vice chancellors of universities. It cannot happen so. As such, postings are made on merit, but the merit here means normally the speed and commitment with which the line of the ruling party is toed up. In a system where caste, cash and commitment to policies are predominant, expecting activities meant for Puritans is like

searching for fuel sticks in a desert land. **A G Rajmohan | Anantapur**  
**EMPOWERING WOMEN INVESTORS**  
Madam — The participation of women in India's equity markets is steadily growing, marking a significant shift in financial dynamics. Factors like increased financial independence, digital accessibility through investment platforms, and rising financial literacy have empowered women to actively invest in stocks. Women are adopting a research-driven, long-term approach, contributing to a more balanced and stable market environment. Despite challenges like cultural biases and limited confidence in some cases, the trend is gaining momentum. This rise not only promotes gender inclusivity but also strengthens retail participation in India's equity landscape, heralding a more diverse financial future. **Anushka Bohra | Ujjain**  
Send your feedback to: [letterstopioneer@gmail.com](mailto:letterstopioneer@gmail.com)



### FIRST COLUMN

## AN ODE TO MY MOTHER

A woman of immense strength and boundless compassion, she dedicated her life to healing



RAVI VALLURI

Always be associated with people who are good at heart, said Swami Vivekananda. My mother shared her birthday with Swami Vivekananda (12th January). She nurtured strong bonding with spiritually inclined stalwarts. I recall her association with Sathya Sai Baba, Ganapathi Sachchidanda Swamiji, Raghavendra Swami Mutt, Swami Chinmayananda, Jiddu Krishnamurti, Mahesh Yogi and Gurudev Sri Sri Ravi Shankar. She wanted to pursue medicine but life did not take that trajectory. So, she upended the pyramid and became a qualified medical social worker and worked diligently at the Rajan Babu TB (RBTB) Hospital, in Delhi.

Gurudev says, "Open your hands and sky is in your hands." To combat and challenge the disease of tuberculosis she initiated several rehabilitation projects. This included a creche for the children of those afflicted with this malady, a Stitching Centre, candle and match-making units. She used to tell patients and their children that "Fear is only as deep as the mind allows." Thus, patients afflicted with TB, but not bedridden participated in the projects. This was what she called "Diversionary Therapy". Climate changes, civilisations collapse, governments change, political affiliations alter and even the best possible model collapses.

This is inevitable. It was extremely traumatic for my mother and she became a patient of Paroxysmal Atrial Tachycardia (PAT). This is a type of arrhythmia (irregular heartbeat). Paroxysmal means that the episode of arrhythmia originates and terminates abruptly. Atrial implies the arrhythmia starts with atria or in the upper chambers of the heart. The tachycardia results in a significant increase in the heartbeat per minute. It is accompanied by severe sweating, dizziness, palpitations, angina, and



acute breathlessness. Normally a patient suffers from such a condition owing to emotional upheavals, physical exhaustion, deep anxiety, and consumption of caffeine or alcohol. She was administered medication but it worked only to an extent. The real help came in the form of a pentagon-shaped talisman. That is through Siddha Healing, Pranik Healing, the 10-day Vipassana Course and the Part 1 and Part 2 Art of Living courses.

Indisputably it is the infinitesimal and scientific power of breath. Breathing techniques, meditation, medication and proper diet changed the trajectory of the life of the patient and brought back the mojo in her life. The year 2020 A virulent virus that is assumed to have originated in the dragon land of China assumed monstrous proportions and spread like a pandemic across the swathes of the globe. The robust lady, a woman of substance contracted the disease on the 23rd of December that year, a day after I was detected positive with the pestilence.

Six days before when she would have celebrated her eighty-fourth birthday, and despite testing negative for COVID, life was snuffed out and she entered the empyrean. She was on the ventilator, something my mother would have abhorred as the lethal virus had entered her lungs. Strangely at 7:30 a.m. that morning, though enfeebled by the pernicious disease, I was performing Sudarshan Kriya and had a premonition that my mother had entered Vaikuntha. A few minutes later my wife knocked on the door and with misty eyes and a choked voice conveyed the news. We are yet to recover from the body blow. My mother used to get up at twelve in the night and followed a strict regimen that included Vipassana meditation, Pranik Healing, Siddha Healing, Mudra Pranayama and then Sudarshan Kriya. This lasted for almost six hours. She was also religious in taking her short walks... how did she contract the disease and leave for her heavenly abode? Destiny or Karma?

(The writer is the CEO of Chhattisgarh East Railway Ltd. and Chhattisgarh East West Railway Ltd. He is a faculty of the Art of Living; views are personal)

# Deciphering the concerns in State of Forests Report 2023



V K BAHUGUNA

While the total forest and tree cover rose by 1,445.81 sq km since 2021, the findings reveal deeper concerns about the health and sustainability of India's natural forests



The Forest Survey of India (FSI) has a few weeks ago released its 2023 state of Forest report which shows an increasing trend in forest and tree cover in the country. The current assessment has shown a very meagre increase in forest cover by 156.41 sq km compared to the past assessment of 2021. However, the total forest and tree cover of the country has increased by 1445.81 sq km compared to the last assessment of 2021.

The results are good to show to the nation that its forest machinery is doing a good job in maintaining and also increasing the resources it is managing and controlling. This also is a good political tool in the hands of the Central government to show its success in conserving the forest resources and the overall environment. However, as the saying goes 'the proof of the pudding is in the eating'. The benchmark of any such professionally well-prepared report can be judged only if it shows the correct picture.

This year the team of the FSI brought out several key features like decadal changes in the various forest parameters and tree cover/ agro-forestry by preparing a change matrix, growing stock calculations both inside and outside the forest cover, information on canopy density of different classes of forests, carbon stock calculation, changes in western ghat eco-sensitive zone, fires and grazing status and status of natural regeneration, division wise forest cover for 16 states etc. The FSI officers have put up the data collected and analysed in the public domain and it is necessary that as professional administrators people like me bring some of the urgent issues that need the attention of the Prime Minister who is keen to see the success of conservation in the country, because the health of the forest of the country is not good rather the natural forests are in bad shape and



THE CONDITION OF FORESTS SHOULD NOT BE ASSESSED BY CARBON GROWTH OR TREE NUMBERS BUT BY THE CONDITION OF RESERVE AND PROTECTED FORESTS WHICH ARE THE SOURCE OF MORE THAN 450 RIVERS AND RIVULETS OF OUR COUNTRY AND SOURCE OF RECHARGING THE AQUIFERS, BINDING THE SOIL AND CONTROLLING THE HYDROLOGY

overall scenario demand a serious rethink on the way we manage our forest bio-diversity, even though India is ranked 3rd in top ten countries for an average net gain in the forest area. Let us discuss some of the points for action by the professionals/ administrators as well as the political leaders. Before I flag the issues let us accept the fact that Trees outside the recorded forests are to the tune of 30.7 million ha which is 37.11 per cent of the total forest and tree cover of the country. All kinds of plantations like rubber, coconut, palm, areca nut etc are also included in it have saved the foresters from criticism with around 1289.40 sq km increase in tree cover between 2021 and 2023 and 20,286.57 sq km almost a 20 per cent increase since 2013.

On Paris's commitment to carbon stock India had compared to 2005 had already reached 2.29 billion tonnes of carbon capture. One of the issues of serious concern is the fact that the canopy density of over 40,709.28 sq km has shifted from high-density (70 per cent) and medium (40 per cent and above) density forests to open-category forests (10 per cent or less canopy density).

A major portion of this must be in recorded forests and catchments of major rivers and the habitat of Tigers. Apart from this 5573 sq km of good or open forest forests have become scrub and refractive wastelands. Thus almost 46707 sq km of forests have become non-forest inside the recorded forests as per page 73 of the report. Apart from this glaring forest /tree cover losses are in major forested states like Madhya Pradesh, Karnataka, Andhra

Pradesh, Assam, Gujarat, Tripura, Telangana, Ladakh and Nagaland, North-eastern states and Himalayas.

However, some states reported an increase also and among them are Chhattisgarh, Rajasthan and Uttar Pradesh but the question today is how healthy is our forests. Now let us take the condition of regeneration. Only 48 per cent of the recorded forests have adequate natural regeneration 24 per cent have inadequate regeneration and another 9 per cent have no regeneration at all and for the last 10 years, there has been a severe loss of regeneration.

The condition of forests should not be assessed by carbon growth or tree numbers but by the condition of reserve and protected forests which are the source of more than 450 rivers and rivulets of our country and source of recharging the aquifers, binding the soil and controlling the hydrology so vital for sustaining the food, nutritional, climate, livelihoods and water security of millions of people of the country. So in a nutshell, we may feel happy to have a figure of 82 million ha of forest and tree cover (25.17 per cent of geographic area) which covers 71 million ha of forest cover (21.76 per cent) and 3.4 per cent Tree cover.

But the fact is we have only 9 million ha of very dense forests with 70 per cent canopy density and 24.35 million ha of forest with 40 per cent and above density. Another 18.5 million ha is with 10 per cent density or above and this includes the Green Wash area outside the recorded forests on private lands adjacent to recorded forests. Thus only 33 million ha of forest

cover is worth good density in the recorded forests compared to 30 million ha of trees outside the forests. Thus the real good forest is only around 10 to 11 per cent of the geographic area and it must give a wakeup call to foresters and political leaders. One of the reasons is the poor implementation of the Forest Right Act 2006 which has become an apolitical tool in the hands of competitive politics.

The Director General of Forests who is the Chief Technical Advisor of the government of India must tell the Prime Minister and Forest minister of the real situation in natural forest management as a professional like the then Army Chief Gen Vij told Prime Minister Manmohan Singh when he asked him to make adjustments in Siachin area and do not be hawkish. He told him firmly that being a professional he would never agree and after his presentation the Prime Minister supported him.

The IFS lobby should propose immediate remedial measures and one of the measures should be to change the format of the future State of Forest Report of FSI. The first part should only deal with the assessment of forests in recorded forests, the second part should deal with Trees outside forests and the third part should deal with fire management, carbon and change matrix etc. Hope the powers that be will notice the suggestion given here and stop the hotchpotch reporting.

(The writer is former Director-General of ICFRE in the Ministry of Environment, Forest and Climate Change; views are personal)

# India and Afghanistan: Navigating a complex diplomatic landscape

## The Taliban's return to power and Pakistan's enduring influence have created a multifaceted challenge for India

The evolving relationship between India and Afghanistan presents a multifaceted diplomatic challenge. India's engagement with Afghanistan, particularly after the Taliban's return to power, is closely linked to its broader strategic interests in the region, especially its rivalry with Pakistan.



K S TOMAR

The Taliban's close ties with Pakistan and its association with terrorism pose a serious security threat, making India's diplomatic engagement a complex but necessary endeavor. While seeking to safeguard its regional influence and counter Pakistan's dominance in Afghanistan, India must carefully navigate the Taliban's authoritarian rule, human rights concerns, and the risk of further destabilizing the region.

India's Diplomatic and Developmental Footprint India's involvement with Afghanistan extends beyond diplomatic posturing and is driven by long-term strategic and developmental goals. Through substantial investments in infrastructure, education, and humanitarian aid, India has positioned itself as an important partner to Afghanistan. Projects such as the construction of the Afghan Parliament, the Salma Dam, and educational scholarships for Afghan students have significantly enhanced Afghanistan's infrastructure while fostering goodwill between the two nations. India's developmental efforts have had a direct positive impact on Afghanistan's stability and growth, providing a counterbalance to Pakistan's attempts to exert control over Afghan affairs. Strengthening ties with Afghanistan offers India significant strategic benefits, including access to Central Asia. By bypassing Pakistan, India secures a direct route to Central Asia's markets and resources, reducing Pakistan's monopoly over Afghanistan's

trade routes. This economic advantage is coupled with enhanced counterterrorism cooperation, as both nations share concerns about the proliferation of extremist groups. This collaboration not only bolsters India's position as a responsible regional power but also contributes to regional stability. Pakistan's Strategic Setback: India's strengthened relationship with Afghanistan poses a significant challenge to Pakistan's strategic objectives. Historically, Pakistan has viewed Afghanistan as a strategic depth, crucial for its security and regional influence. Any shift in Afghanistan's alliances toward India directly undermines this narrative. The development of an India-Afghanistan trade corridor,



particularly through Iran's Chabahar Port, bypasses Pakistan entirely, diminishing its leverage over Afghanistan's trade routes. This economic shift erodes Pakistan's ability to influence Afghan policy, further isolating it in the region. Security concerns compound Pakistan's challenges. The increasing Indian presence in Afghanistan is perceived as a potential avenue for intelligence-gathering and support

for nationalist movements within Pakistan, particularly in its Pashtun and Baloch regions. The Taliban's Role: Despite Pakistan's close ties with the Taliban, India's diplomatic engagement with Afghanistan has the potential to empower elements within the country that resist Pakistan's control. This could shift power dynamics within the Taliban or exacerbate internal divisions. The Taliban's governance and its approach to extremism remain critical factors in shaping the future of India-Afghanistan relations. India's diplomatic strategy hinges on the Taliban's willingness to adopt inclusive governance and curb extremism, which could open avenues for constructive engagement.

Regional Stability Regional stability remains precarious as tensions between India and Pakistan persist, coupled with the Taliban's uncertain governance. Proxy conflicts could spill over into Afghanistan, exacerbating instability. The Road Ahead: India's long-standing commitment to Afghanistan's reconstruction, particularly through investments in infrastructure and humanitarian aid, has been central to its regional strategy. India has invested over \$3 billion in Afghanistan, supporting projects such as the Zaranj-Delaram Highway, the Afghan Parliament building, and the Salma Dam. These initiatives have directly contributed to Afghanistan's economic and social develop-

ment. Other contributions include power transmission lines, healthcare programs, educational scholarships, and food aid, reflecting India's commitment to Afghanistan's well-being and stability. The Taliban's return to power in 2021 cast uncertainty over the future of these projects. Despite the political upheaval, India has maintained a humanitarian approach, continuing to provide support where possible. However, the Taliban's restrictive policies and authoritarian rule complicate these initiatives. India's cautious engagement seeks to balance its strategic interests with the need to uphold humanitarian values. (Writer is a senior political analyst and strategic affairs columnist; views are personal)





40 farmers killed by Boko Haram militants

Dakar (Senegal) (PTI): At least 40 farmers were killed in an attack by Islamic militants in northeast Nigeria's Borno state...

Verdict in Al-Qadir case against Imran delayed again

PTI ■ ISLAMABAD Pakistani court on Monday postponed for the third time the announcement of the verdict in the 190 million pounds Al-Qadir Trust corruption case...

been held and another is expected this week. It was not clear if the judgment would impact the talks. The National Accountability Bureau (NAB) in December 2023 filed the case against Khan (72), Bibi (50) and six others...

Verdict in Al-Qadir case against Imran delayed again

Some 35,000 civilians have been killed and more than 2 million have been displaced in the northeastern region, according to the UN.

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Some 35,000 civilians have been killed and more than 2 million have been displaced in the northeastern region, according to the UN.

The 2014 kidnapping of 276 schoolgirls by Boko Haram in the village of Chibok in Borno state — the epicentre of the conflict — captured the attention of the world.

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दि बाज़पुर को-ऑपरेटिव शुगर फेक्ट्री लि., बाज़पुर, जिला-उधमसिंह नगर (उत्तराखण्ड) ई-निविदा सूचना

Public Notice Lost & Found. This is to inform the general public that Sh. Lokesh Kumar S/o Sh. Sheo Singh and Smt. Manju Kumari W/o Sh. Lokesh Kumar...

IN THE COURT OF MRS. RUCHIKA SINGLA, LD DJ-3, N/W ROOM NO. 311, 3rd FLOOR, ROHINI COURTS, DELHI-85

GOVERNMENT OF ODISHA OFFICE OF THE CHIEF CONSTRUCTION ENGINEER, CENTRAL RURAL WORKS CIRCLE, BHUBANESWAR

Public Notice. Notice is hereby given that my client Arun Mittal is in process to purchase the Plot bearing No. 51, area measuring 8.23 marla out of Khata No. 32/202/2-2 situated in the area of village Unha Ga, Tehsil Ballabgarh, District Faridabad Haryana...

Public Notice. My clients Varinder Singh (having Aadhar no. 348231981438) S/o Late Sh. Pyara Singh & Kulwant Kaur W/o Varinder Singh both R/o/50/5A, 1st Floor, Front Side Khalsa no. 23/6 Vikas Vihar North Extension, New Delhi-110041 have severed/terminated all relations from his son SATPAL SINGH SABHARWAL & his wife Baljinder Kaur including their children and disinherit/dismown them from their all moveable and immovable properties including current residence due to their misbehaviour, cruelty etc. In future any person deal with the aforesaid debarred persons that shall be his/her own risks and cost and my clients will not be responsible for the same in any manner.

PUBLIC NOTICE. My client, Mrs. Sunita Sharma, w/o Lt. Mr. Vinod Kumar, r/o HA-95, Sector 144, Noida, 201304, has disowned her son, Mr. Mayank Sharma, and his wife, Mrs. Nancy Sharma, due to misconduct & conflicts.

NORTHERN RAILWAY Pre-Bid Meeting for Procurement of Snow Blower/Cutter. Tender No. 15245170 for procurement of 02 Nos. of Snow Blower/Cutter has been published by this office.

Public Notice. This is to inform the general public that Mrs. Deepa Jain and Mrs. Rakhi Jain are the GPA Holders of Flat bearing Pvt. No. 202, area measuring 900 sq. ft., in back portion on Second floor 'Saiji Flat'...

Public Notice. This is to inform the general public that Mrs. Deepa Jain and Mrs. Rakhi Jain are the GPA Holders of Flat bearing Pvt. No. 202, area measuring 900 sq. ft., in back portion on Second floor 'Saiji Flat'...

PUBLIC NOTICE. Plot No.145, Sec-38, IOC, Phase-I, Rai, E.I. Sonapat, measuring 312.50 sq. mtr was allotted by the corporation to Late Mr. Dhanraj Lal (now deceased) S/o L.L. Shri Manu Lal...

Public Notice. I, Bidyut Kumar Dey alias Bipul Chandra Dey S/o- Manindra Chandra Dey, R/o-Plot No. 37, 2nd Floor, Pocket-3, Bindapur DDA Flats, Uttam Nagar, Delhi-110059, declare that Bidyut Kumar Dey & Bipul Chandra Dey are one & same person i.e. myself.

Public Notice. I, Brahma Shankar S/o Asharfi Lal R/o A-274, Gali No.-2G, Ambika Vihar, Shiv Vihar, Karawal Nagar, Delhi-110094 and my wife Manju Devi have severed relations and debarred our daughter Jyoti from her moveable-immovable properties due to her misconduct. I and my wife will not be responsible for her any acts.

Public Notice. Mother's name of Vidushi Pandey in her School records is Shivani Mishra. So we want to change Mother's name of Vidushi Pandey in her school records to Shivani Mishra.

Public Notice. I, Saha Devi Nougai W/o Basna Nand Nougai R/o W-84, Sector-12, Noida Gautam Budh Nagar, UP-201301 declare that Saha Devi & Saha Devi Nougai both name same & one Person. In future know as Me Saha Devi Nougai for all Purpose.

Public Notice. The General Public is hereby informed that my client Mr. Vinod Kumar S/o Roshan Lal and his wife Smta. Saral Roshila, Maitika Gani, North Delhi, Delhi-110037, declares that their son and daughter his wife Chitra Jindal are not co-operating with him showing selfish attitude towards his client. They are living separately and they both keep on fighting with my client and creating hurdles, mental tortures and agonies for my client and do not let him live peacefully. So my client hereby severing all relations, ties and knots with their above named son and his wife. They are therefore debarred and disinherited to claim any right or concern in any of moveable or immovable properties of my client. Any person dealing with them will do so at his/her own risk and cost & my client will not be responsible for the same.

Public Notice. The undersigned being the Authorised officer of "The Kangra Co-operative Bank Ltd.", Head Office at, C-29, Community Centre, Pankha Road, Janak Puri, New Delhi - 110058, having its registered office at 1916, Chuna Mandi, Pahar Ganj, New Delhi-110055, under the Securitisation and Reconstruction of the Financial Assets & Enforcement of Security Interest Act, 2002...

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BSES Rajdhani Power Limited, New Delhi TENDER NOTICE Date: 14.01.2025 Sealed tenders under two Bid System (Un-priced & Priced) is invited for following jobs from all bidders.

राष्ट्रीय प्रौद्योगिकी संस्थान, कुरुक्षेत्र NATIONAL INSTITUTE OF TECHNOLOGY (Under the Ministry of Education, Govt. of India) KURUKSHETRA-136119 (HARYANA) Advt. No.04/2025

THE KANGRA CO-OPERATIVE BANK LTD. C-29, Community Centre Pankha Road, Janakpuri, New Delhi-110058. APPENDIX IV [See rule 8(1)] POSSESSION NOTICE (For immovable property)

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# Growing complexity widening cyber inequity: World Economic Forum report

**PTI ■ NEW DELHI**  
Growing complexity in the cyber landscape is further exacerbating cyber inequity, deepening the divide between developed and emerging economies, and widening the gap between large and small organisations, the World Economic Forum said on Monday.  
In its Global Cybersecurity Outlook 2025, the WEF said nearly 54 per cent of large organisations have identified supply chain interdependencies as the greatest barrier to achieving cyber resilience.  
About 45 per cent of cyber leaders were also found to be concerned about disruption of operations and business processes. It further found



that geopolitical turmoil has affected the perception of risks, with one in three CEOs citing cyber espionage and loss of sensitive information or intellectual property theft as their top concern. The WEF report said that the rising complexity in cyber space arises from the rapid growth of emerging technologies, prevailing geopolitical uncertainty, the evolution of threats, regulatory challenges,

vulnerabilities in supply chain interdependencies and the growing cyber skills gap. "Cyberspace is more complex and challenging than ever due to rapid technological advancements, growing cybercriminal sophistication and deeply interconnected supply chains," WEF Managing Director Jeremy Jurgens said, calling for collaborations between public and private sector stakeholders to secure the benefits of digitalisation for all.  
The study found that 66 per cent of organisations expect AI to have a major impact on cybersecurity in 2025, but only 37 per cent reported having processes in place to before the security of AI tools before deployment.

# Retail inflation eases to four month low of 5.22 per cent in December



**PTI ■ NEW DELHI**  
Retail inflation slowed to a four-month low of 5.22 per cent in December compared to 5.48 pc in November, mainly due to easing of prices in food basket, according to government data released on Monday.

The inflation based on Consumer Price Index (CPI) was 5.48 per cent in November and 5.69 per cent in December 2023. According to CPI data released by the National Statistics Office (NSO), the inflation in the food basket reduced to 8.39 per cent in December. It was 9.04 per cent in November and 9.53 per cent in December 2023. "The CPI (General) and food inflation in December 2024 is the lowest in the last four months," the NSO said. Last month, the Reserve Bank of India raised the inflation projection for the current fiscal year to 4.8 per cent from 4.5 per cent.

# Infra development imperative to achieve Viksit Bharat goal: Gadkari



**PTI ■ SONAMARG**  
Union Minister Nitin Gadkari on Monday said infrastructure development is imperative to achieve the goal of Viksit Bharat, as the economy depends on good transport and communication facilities. "The Prime Minister has given us a mission of developed and prosperous India. If we have to achieve a Viksit Bharat, we will have to improve the country's infrastructure. "Until water, power, and transport,

communication do not develop, industry, business, and tourism will not get a boost," Gadkari said, addressing a rally after Prime Minister Narendra Modi inaugurated the Sonamarg tunnel here. The Union Minister said Modi has taken a pledge to develop J-K along with the country. "He has given us the task of developing this infrastructure. Good roads make a country developed and prosperous. We are working on a mission to make J-K developed and prosperous so that industries are established here, tourism increases, employment opportunities are created for the youth and poverty is eradicated. With that view, we are developing the infrastructure in J-K," he added. Gadkari said the inauguration of the Sonamarg tunnel, which was

previously known as the Z-Morh tunnel, was historic and would provide all-weather connectivity to the tourist resort town. "Today is a historic day that the Sonamarg tunnel is being inaugurated by the Prime Minister. Due to the closure of this road (due to heavy snowfall), some areas remained closed for five to six months per year. "It was started in 2012, but there were several difficulties. Today, I am happy that the work has been completed. By the opening of this tunnel -- Srinagar to Ladakh, Leh highway will especially be connected, which used to remain shut for 5-6 months," he noted. He said the work on the nearby Zojila tunnel was going on and once open, it will reduce the travel time from Srinagar to Leh by 3.5 hours and keep the road open throughout the year.

# Gold maintains rising streak for fifth straight session, silver remains flat



**PTI ■ NEW DELHI**  
Gold prices rallied for a fifth straight session, rising Rs 110 to Rs 80,660 per 10 grams in the national capital on Monday, according to the All India Sarafa Association. The precious metal had settled at Rs 80,550 per 10 grams in the previous session on Friday. In the past five trading sessions, gold prices

appreciated Rs 1,660, or 2.1 per cent, to Rs 80,660 per 10 grams. The price of gold of 99.5 per cent purity rose Rs 110 to Rs 80,260 per 10 grams against the previous close of Rs 80,150 per 10 grams on Friday. "Gold prices advanced as the rupee weakened by touching 86.61, driven by elevated crude oil prices. The rise in crude prices came on the back of fresh sanctions imposed on

Russia by US President Joe Biden, escalating geopolitical tensions," Jateen Trivedi, VP Research Analyst of Commodity and Currency at LKP Securities, said. The rupee logged its steepest single-day fall in nearly two years and ended the session 58 paise down at its historic low of 86.62 (provisional) against the US dollar on Monday, weighed down by a stronger American currency and surging crude oil prices. "This rupee depreciation supported gold prices in the domestic market, amplifying the impact of global cues," Trivedi added. However, silver traded flat in the second straight session at Rs 93,000 per kg on Monday. Meanwhile, gold contracts for February delivery on the MCX increased Rs 227, or 0.29 per cent, to Rs 78,650 per 10 grams in futures trade on Monday.

# Rupee sinks to record low, settles 58 paise down at 86.62 against US Dollar



**PTI ■ MUMBAI**  
The rupee logged its steepest single-day fall in nearly two years and ended the session 58 paise down at its historic low of 86.62 (provisional) against the US dollar on Monday, weighed down by a stronger American currency and surging crude oil prices. At the interbank foreign exchange, the rupee opened at 86.12, and moved 1 paise during intraday to 86.11 before closing the session with a loss of a staggering 58 paise at its lowest-ever level of 86.62 (provisional) against the greenback. The fall of 58 paise, or 0.67 per cent, in one session was the steepest since February 6, 2023 when the unit had lost 68 paise. The Indian currency has witnessed the deepest plunge of more than Re 1 in the past two weeks from the closing level of 85.52 on December 30. Rupee had breached the 85-paise-dollar mark for the first time on December 19, 2024. On Friday, the local currency had declined 18 paise to settle at 86.04 against the US dollar, a day after registering a marginal gain of 5 paise. In the

preceding back-to-back sessions on Tuesday and Wednesday, it had plunged 6 paise and 17 paise, respectively. The unprecedented fall was attributed to the relentless chase of the US dollar by investors, which also led to a massive withdrawal of foreign capital from Indian equities. Foreign Institutional Investors (FIIs) offloaded equities worth Rs 2,254.68 crore on Friday. So far this month foreign investors have withdrawn Rs 22,194 crore from Indian equities, according to exchange data. According to analysts, the Reserve Bank of India has allowed the fall in rupee's exchange rate versus US dollar amid dwindling forex reserves and declining emerging market currencies. "RBI will allow the weakness as demand keeps moving up and supplies dwindle," said Anil Kumar Bhansali, Head of Treasury and Executive Director, Finrex Treasury Advisors LLP. The Reserve Bank of India on Friday said the country's forex reserves dropped by USD 5.693 billion to USD 634.585 billion in the week ended January 3.

# Mutual funds collect ₹1.18 Lakh Crore via NFO in 2024; thematic funds dominates space

**PTI ■ NEW DELHI**  
Asset management companies launched 239 new fund offerings (NFOs) mobilising Rs 1.18 lakh crore in 2024, with sectoral or thematic equity funds emerging as the top choice of investors, according to a report by Germinate Investor Services Research. This was higher than 212 NFOs collecting Rs 63,854 crore in 2023 and 228 NFOs garnering Rs 62,187 crore in 2022. The NFO landscape expanded from 81 offerings in 2020 to 239 in 2024, besides, the funds raised through the space more



than doubled from Rs 53,703 crore in 2020. The trend suggests a strong growth trajectory and heightened investor

confidence. Usually, NFOs come during a surging market when investor sentiments are high and optimistic. The NFOs

were floated to capitalise on the mood of investors and attract their investment as they were willing to invest at that time. Industry experts said the stock market performance along with the positive investor sentiments led to higher fund mobilisation through NFOs in 2024. In the entire 2024, Sensex jumped 5,898.75 points or 8.16 per cent, and the Nifty surged 1,913.4 points or 8.80 per cent. Overall, thematic/sectoral funds, index funds and exchange traded funds (ETFs) captured significant investor interest. "With 53 NFOs raising Rs 79,109 crore, these funds

emerged as the top choice for investors," the report said. Tailored to specific sectors or themes, sectoral or thematic equity funds resonated with investors for their focused approach and alignment with market trends. Notable examples include funds targeting sectors like manufacturing, technology, and ESG (Environmental, Social, and Governance) themes. Individually, HDFC Manufacturing Fund NFO led the pack, with a record inflow of Rs 12,500 crore in April 2024. In terms of month, the highest number of NFO launches was recorded in December,

marking a strong year-end momentum. Going ahead, the report said the mutual fund industry is likely to face a recalibration in 2025 after the strong gains of recent years. "While extraordinary returns may not sustain, the focus will shift to ensuring stability, maintaining liquidity, and achieving reasonable returns in line with market trends. Investors must adapt to a more balanced approach, safeguarding capital while managing expectations. This calls for strategies that align with changing market dynamics and ensure a steady performance even in uncertain times," it added.

# India ranks third globally in fintech funding despite 33 per cent lower infusion in 2024

**PTI ■ NEW DELHI**  
India ranked third globally in terms of funding received in the fintech segment despite a decline of 33 per cent on a year-over-year basis to USD 1.9 billion in 2024, market intelligence firm Tracxn said in a report on Monday. The sector witnessed a decline in funding, driven by a broader slowdown in demand and geopolitical headwinds, Tracxn's Annual India fintech report 2024 said. "The fintech sector experienced a notable decline in funding in 2024, with a total of USD 1.9 billion raised. This represents a 33 per cent decrease from the USD 2.8 billion secured in 2023. The Indian fintech ecosystem has solidified its position as one of the top three globally funded fintech ecosystems in 2024, trailing only the US and the UK," the report said. The sector had raised USD 5.6 billion in 2022. The highest funding of USD 805 during 2024



was received by the sector in the third quarter which was 61 per cent higher on a year-over-year (Y-o-Y) basis. Additionally, 59 per cent of the total funding in 2024 was secured during the second half of the year, indicating a late-year recovery while August emerged as the most robust month for funding, contributing USD 434 million to the annual total. "Despite the global

funding slowdown, India's fintech ecosystem continues to demonstrate remarkable resilience and adaptability. The emergence of two new unicorns and a record eight IPOs in 2024 underscore the sector's ability to thrive amidst challenges," Tracxn, Co-Founder, Neha Singh said. "As we look to the future, the sector is poised to build on these successes, driving

financial inclusion and innovation while solidifying its position as a global leader in the fintech space," Singh said. The year 2024 witnessed the emergence of two unicorns, Money View and Perfios, compared to a single unicorn in 2023 though there were only three USD 100 million-plus funding rounds recorded, marking a 50 per cent decline from the six

such rounds in 2023. The digital lending solutions dominated the funding received by accounting for 64 per cent of the total funding raised during the year. The notable deals in 2024 included DMI Finance raising USD 334 million funding led by MUFG and Credit Saison raising USD 144 million during the year. The late-stage rounds are the most affected. Late-stage funding amounted to USD 1.1

billion, marking a 42 per cent reduction compared to the USD 1.9 billion raised in 2023, the report said. The late-stage funding was USD 3.1 billion in 2022. Early-stage funding rounds recorded a 16 per cent Y-o-Y drop to USD 562 million in 2024 from USD 667 million raised in 2023 and a 70 per cent decline compared to USD 1.9 billion in 2022. Seed-stage funding declined 19 per cent Y-o-Y to USD 178 million in 2024 from USD 219 million in 2023 and 66 per cent from USD 529 million in 2022. "Mergers and acquisition activity saw a slight dip, with 26 acquisitions recorded in 2024, down 16 per cent from 31 in 2023. Notable transactions included the USD 94.5 million acquisition of PureSoftware by Happiest Minds, and the USD 44 million acquisition of ET Money by 360 One," the report said. The sector recorded eight IPOs in 2024 which was a 300 per cent increase compared

# INBRIEF

**SURJIT PATAR MEMORIAL FUNCTION-2025 ON 14TH JANUARY**

**AMRITSAR:** "Surjit Patar Memorial Function-2025" will be organised by Guru Nanak Dev University in collaboration with Punjab Kala Parishad, Chandigarh, and the Department of Languages, Punjab, Patiala on January 14th, Tuesday, at the Golden Jubilee Convention Centre of the University, at 10 am.

**PVUNL HOSTS FIRST ASH USER MEET 2025 AT RANCHI**

Patratu Vidyut Utpadan Nigam Limited (PVUNL) successfully organized its inaugural Ash User Meet 2025 at Chanakya BNR Hotel, Ranchi, emphasizing innovative and sustainable applications of fly and bottom ash.

**PONGAL FESTIVAL OBSERVED AT NARUVI HOSPITALS**

The annual Pongal celebrations at Naruvi Hospitals, Vellore, were celebrated with fervour, with enthusiastic participation from people cutting across age, gender, religion, and community.

**REC LIMITED COMMITS ₹8.44 CRORE UNDER CSR TO SUPPORT 1MW SOLAR PHOTOVOLTAIC POWER PLANT**

REC Limited, a Maharatna CPSE under the Ministry of Power and a leading NBFC, has signed a Memorandum of Agreement (MOA) with the Gandhigram Rural Institute under its Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) initiative.

# Jannik Sinner starts his Australian Open title defence with a straight set win

PTI ■ MELBOURNE

After wasting a set point in the second tiebreaker with an ill-conceived drop shot, Jannik Sinner quickly reverted to what's been working for him and finished off a straight-set win over Nicolas Jarry to begin his Australian Open title defence. The 7-6 (2), 7-6 (5), 6-1 victory on Rod Laver Arena extended Sinner's winning streaks to 15 on both the tour and on hard courts in Grand Slams. After all the pre-tournament attention on the 2024 doping cases of Sinner and long-time women's No. 1 Iga Swiatek, both started the year's first Grand Slam tournament about the same time on nearby courts on Day 2. "Yeah, I was curious to see how it was," Sinner said of the reception at Rod Laver, where he became a fan favorite last year. "You never know what's happening. I was happy about the crowd. It was a nice atmosphere." Top-ranked Sinner had to grind

for two long, tiebreak sets against No. 35-ranked Jarry, a 29-year-old from Chile, before finding his touch. "It was a very close one because the first sets, they can go both ways," Sinner said. "In the third set when I broke it the first time, that gave me a little bit of room to breathe. "I'm happy how I handled the very tough situation." Sinner has got a good record at Melbourne Park in that department. He rallied from two sets down in last year's final to beat Daniil Medvedev for his first Grand Slam title, coming off a semifinal upset of 10-time champion Novak Djokovic. While Sinner was deep into his match against Jarry, Swiatek, a five-time major winner from Poland, fended off top-ranked doubles player Katerina Siniakova 6-3, 6-4 on John Cain Arena. Coco Gauff had a little difficulty adjusting to the sun at one end of Rod Laver Arena in Monday's



first marquee match and dropped a 6-3, 6-3 win over 2020 champion Sofia Kenin. Third-seeded Gauff beat Swiatek to win the title at the WTA Finals last November and started this season by helping the U.S. To

victory at the United Cup last week, against beating No. 2 Swiatek in the final. Gauff, the 2023 U.S. Open champion is wearing a Marvel-inspired bodysuit and skirt at Melbourne Park and she's radiating confidence and calm. "I knew going in it was going to be difficult, but you know I'm happy with how I played," she said of the 1-hour, 20-minute win over Kenin, who at No. 81 is a much tougher opponent than her ranking suggests. "I mean (I) could serve better, but like on that side I was struggling to see the ball," Gauff said, pointing to one baseline on the main show court that was bathed in sun. "So I'm just happy that I was able to manage through that." Another 20-year-old American, Alex Michelsen, produced the biggest win of his young career with a 7-5, 6-3, 2-6, 6-4 first-round upset of 2023 Australian runner-up Stefanos Tsitsipas. Michelsen's three booming service returns in the ninth game

of the fourth set helped him earn a vital break against the 11th-seeded Tsitsipas and, after shaking off jitters on his own serve, he closed out for his first victory over a player ranked in the top 20 at a Grand Slam. No. 17 Frances Tiafoe advanced in five sets over Arthur Rinderknech of France. Gauff went into her opening round on a streak of winning 33 matches against players ranked outside the Top 50, dating to a loss to Kenin at Wimbledon 2023. The draw presented another tough trip to Australia for Kenin. It was the third straight year Kenin faced a Grand Slam champion in the first round in Australia, and her fourth consecutive first-round exit here. Gauff will next play Jodie Burrage of Britain. No. 7 Jessica Pegula also advanced along with No. 12 Diana Shnaider, No. 28 Elina Svitolina, and Belinda Bencic, who ousted No. 16 Jelena Ostapenko.



## Nick Taylor wins another playoff with clutch play

PTI ■ HONOLULU

Nick Taylor in a playoff is tough to beat. Getting there was hardest part for the Canadian, who delivered another highlight reel of clutch moments in the Sony Open. Down to his last shot, Taylor chipped in from 60 feet for eagle on the par-5 closing hole at Waialae for a 5-under 65 to get into a playoff with Nico Echavarria. He holed a 10-foot birdie putt on the first extra hole. And then he hit a wedge from 46 yards that was close to perfect to set up a 3-foot birdie putt for the win. The last shot might have been the easiest shot he had in the final hour. "I'm a bit stunned this worked out this way," Taylor said. That was true for so many others, starting with Echavarria, the 30-year-old Chilean who delivered some big moments of his own with a 15-foot par save, a 12-foot birdie, and twice getting up-and-down from the bunker at the end for a 65 to join Taylor at 16-under 264. Behind them were Stephan Jaeger and J.J. Spaun, and the Sony Open looked to come down to them along the back nine until Jaeger piped a drive out-of-bounds on the 16th and Spaun bogeyed from a bunker on the 17th. Both failed to birdie the par-5 18th to join the playoff. Echavarria was surprised it was only a two-man playoff. "If Nick doesn't chip in, I win

the tournament," he said. Echavarria didn't miss a beat in his bid for a third straight year with a PGA Tour title. The bunker shot on the 18th was creative and bold for a tap-in birdie. On the 18th in the first playoff hole, his second shot looked to be about 20 feet away on the fringe for an eagle putt when the wind nudged it down the hill into the rough, forcing him to get up-and-down. He had 40 feet on the collar for eagle on the second playoff hole at No. 18, and the first putt came out soft and was 7 feet short. He missed the birdie putt to extend the playoff. "I misjudged the lag putt on the last hole. I didn't think it was going to be that slow. Didn't consider the wind," Echavarria said. "The wind kind of held it and my lag putting today was a little off, which is a strength of mine. But, I mean, just one bad putt can't define a great week." Taylor never looked like a winner — especially after missing a pair of 4-foot birdie putts on the 15th and 16th holes — until he had a lei around his neck and the trophy in his hand. It was his fifth PGA Tour title, the last three in a playoff. He beat Charley Hoffman in Phoenix last year with clutch putting in a playoff. And it was the Canadian Open in 2023 when Taylor famously holed that 70-foot eagle putt to win his national open before a delirious, rain-

soaked crowd. The victory sends Taylor to the Masters again, a big perk after a dismal end to last season. He moved back to No. 29 in the world and will be in all the signature events this year. None of this seemed possible when he was two behind with two to play coming off two short misses. "It was just one of those where you try to get until they don't let you play anymore," Taylor said. "I was 1 over through seven, get on a birdie streak here. It's always so bunched here, but I did a really good job every day really of just hanging in there. "Fortunate for me, really good things happened at the end." Jaeger and Spaun both left Waialae with plenty of regrets. From the time they made the turn, it looked like a duel between them to decide the winner, and they put on a great show until the final three holes. Jaeger holed a 30-foot birdie putt on the 14th to catch Spaun, who then followed by making a par putt from just inside 30 feet to stay tied for the lead. Jaeger didn't hit a fairway on the back nine except for an iron off the 15th tee, and it finally caught up with him at the end. He hit driver to cut off the dogleg on the 16th but it went so far left that it was never found, presumed to be out-of-bounds. "The one on 16 I would like to have back. Wrong hole to hit that shot," Jaeger said.

## Paris Saint-Germain remains unbeaten in French league

PTI ■ PARIS

Paris Saint-Germain remained unbeaten and seven points clear at the top of the French league — halfway through the season — after Ousmane Dembélé scored twice in a 2-1 win over Saint-Etienne. Marseille is in second place after 17 rounds, with third-place Monaco 12 points adrift of defending champion PSG, which has beaten both sides. Dembélé scored in the 13th minute and the France winger netted from the penalty spot 10 minutes later after a video review spotted a handball from Léo Pétrot on Achraf Hakimi's cross. The decision seemed harsh as the ball grazed Pétrot's hand without him knowing. Dembélé moved to 10 league goals, level with teammate Bradley Barcola and one behind co-top scorers Jonathan David (Lille) and Mason Greenwood (Marseille). Barcola thought he had his 11th goal of the season close to halftime but, on a day of video reviews, the goal was ruled out for a foul by the player himself. PSG has been linked with a move for Georgia winger Khvicha Kvaratskhelia from Napoli, but it was another Georgian who scored for 16th-place Saint-Etienne as Zuriko Davitashvili neatly curled in a free kick midway through the second half. Despite its unbeaten league record, PSG again looked nervous and came



close to conceding an equalizer. Earlier, Deiver Machado scored late as seventh-place Lens won 2-1 at struggling Le Havre to move one point behind Lyon in sixth. The Colombia defender headed powerfully home from Poland winger Przemyslaw Frankowski's cross in the 77th minute. Central defender Abdukodir Khusanov was left out of the Lens squad amid reports of an imminent big-money transfer to Premier League defending champion Manchester City reportedly worth 50 million euros (\$51 million). The 20-year-old joined Lens on a four-year contract last season, becoming the

first Uzbek to play in Ligue 1. Lens paid just 100,000 euros (\$110,000) to sign him from Belarus club Energetik-BGU Minsk. Veteran winger Andre Ayew put Le Havre ahead in the eighth minute, scoring for the second straight game following his goal against Marseille last weekend. Striker Goduine Koyalipou equalized in the 28th with a header on debut after joining on Thursday. Le Havre has lost five straight league games and is in 17th spot. Elsewhere, improving Strasbourg climbed into ninth place with a 2-1 win at Toulouse in a match where video reviews affected both sides, and rock-

bottom Montpellier had two players sent off near the end of a 3-1 home loss to Angers. Dutch striker Emanuel Emegha scored two first-half goals for Strasbourg and then had a third ruled out for offside in the 38th minute. Toulouse scored from Ismaël Doukouré's own-goal in the 35th and, in the 75th, striker Zakaria Aboukhhal prepared to take a penalty to make it 2-2 after being fouled. However, the referee changed his mind following a video review and instead awarded Toulouse a free kick right on the edge of the area. More frustration followed for the home side moments later. Toulouse thought it had equalized when Frank Magri side-footed in Aboukhhal's pinpoint cross from the left. But VAR intervened again to rule the goal out because United States defender Mark McKenzie was narrowly offside. Forward Esteban Lepaul netted twice as Angers moved up to 13th place. He scored in each half, either side of a penalty from Montpellier midfielder Téli Savanier. Montpellier lost its composure in the closing stages when defender Boubakar Kouyaté and captain Jordan Ferri were sent off within one minute of each other. Midfielder Zinedine Ferhat added the third goal for Angers in the ninth minute of stoppage time.

## Alex Michelsen upsets Tsitsipas at the Australian Open

PTI ■ MELBOURNE

Alex Michelsen produced the biggest win so far of his fledgling career to upset 2023 runner-up Stefanos Tsitsipas in the first round of the Australian Open, and he knew instinctively where credit was due. The 20-year-old American overcame nerves on his serve in the fourth set before clinching a 7-5, 6-3, 2-6, 6-4 win Monday over Tsitsipas, a 26-year-old from Greece who has a career-high No. 3 ranking and has contested two Grand Slam finals. Michelsen started playing tennis around age 3 and hit most days as a kid with his mother, Sondra, a school teacher who played college tennis. "Yeah, I'm sure she's watching right now," Michelsen told the crowd on John Cain Arena, one of the three main show courts at Melbourne Park. "Yeah, we hit a million



balls from the baseline every day. We'd go like 30 minutes up the middle, then we go across each way for like an hour and a half. "I mean we would just go out there and she would never miss a ball — she's incredible. But no chance I'd be here without without her, so thanks Mom. Love you." The No. 42-ranked Michelsen reached the third round last year on his Australia debut before losing in the first

rounds at Roland Garros and Wimbledon and in the second round at the U.S. Open. His win over Tsitsipas was Michelsen's first against a player ranked in the top 20 at a Grand Slam. He played with freedom against Tsitsipas, taking big swipes with his service returns — including three in the ninth game of the fourth set that helped earn him a vital break.

He got a bit tense on serve, surrendering two hard-earned breaks in the fourth set, but stayed composed in the last game. "Yeah, I didn't take the most direct path, that's for sure. Shouldn't have got broken twice in the fourth. My serve let me down. Served double faulting way too much," he said. "But I was also returning really, really well. I felt like I was winning most of the baseline rallies when I was inside the baseline and controlling the point. "So I was thinking at 4-all, after I got broken twice, saying, 'You're still in this, just play every point for what it is.' I played a great 4-all game and got it done at 5-4." He finished the match with eight aces and eight double-faults, but hit 46 winners to only 40 unforced errors. "First of all, I was just trying to stay super composed out there. I knew it was going to be a battle in the end," he said.

## Denmark captain Simon Kjaer retires from football

PTI ■ COPENHAGEN

Former Denmark captain Simon Kjaer formally retired from soccer Monday despite offers to continue playing since he left AC Milan as a free agent last year. Kjaer will perhaps be best remembered as the captain who rushed to Christian Eriksen's aid and then led teammates in shielding him from view on the field after the star playmaker collapsed because of cardiac arrest during a European Championship game in June 2021. Kjaer also consoled Eriksen's partner on the field. Kjaer, along with the Denmark team and medical staff, later won the FIFA Fair Play Award for their actions in Copenhagen.

## Regularly peeping into past glory keeps Sindhu hungry for more success

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

When the going gets tough for P V Sindhu, the star badminton player dives into her highly successful past to seek inspiration to keep going in her quest for more glory. The 29-year-old has in her cabinet every trophy and medal that is there to be won. She is one of the only three Indians to win two Olympic medals, and is also a world champion besides claiming medals at Asian Games and Commonwealth Games. But Sindhu struggled to repeat her international success last season, the medal-less show at the Paris Olympics raising doubts about her future in the sport she dominated for so long. For Sindhu however, speculations don't matter. She still steps on the court with the same passion that has catapulted her to the zenith of world badminton.

"Of course yes," Sindhu told PTI in an interview when asked if she still has the hunger to keep going. "I am saying this because when you see those wins, how happy it makes you and how much confidence it gives you, that itself will take you to another level. Seeing wins again and again keeps that hunger going, so definitely yes. "There are some clips when you are really young when you look at it, it feels like wow, you know, you have done so much and you know why can't I do it more? You question yourself, and that's when it all starts, so yes," Sindhu said during an interaction facilitated by sports brand PUMA, which has signed her as an ambassador. Sindhu understands that she will have to endure plenty of struggles but she can't afford to lose hope. "I have seen a lot through sport, it was important for me to believe in myself when there

were days where I was injured and I didn't know if I can come back and I can be my 100 per cent, which happened in 2015, when I had an injury, but then I bounced back, and I got a silver at Rio. "My life has changed a lot since the time I started and till now I have had a lot of awards, rewards which has given me a lot of confidence. I am very grateful for whatever I have achieved and when I look back, I can tell that yes I have done whatever I could." Wins and losses are part of the learning curves. So what has been the biggest learning for Sindhu? "Being patient. That has taught me a lot in life, being patient and wait for the right time because sometimes game teaches you to be patient no matter what. "You have to keep waiting till you get whether it is success or whether it is the right time or whether it is the right shot...



You have to wait for the right time to do the right thing." Sindhu said self-belief is something an athlete can't do without, indicating that she is trying to overcome the ongoing tough phase with the same virtue. "It hits you when you are actually not able to win or not able to get that success or when you are actually at your lows.

That is when it is important for an athlete to stay there and keep believing in yourself. There were days when I lost matches which were very very close. "There were days where I was like why am I losing, what is happening, can I bounce back, can I come back stronger and especially lowest is when it hits you really hard. I was doubting

myself but people around me were very very supportive in terms of they were like it's okay, believe in yourself, you can do it. "I am very lucky to say that I have parents who are sports persons and they know what it is and what it takes because they have experienced so much that they tell me that this is what happens and you need to be stronger and you need to come back stronger." Sindhu was candid in admitting that digesting defeats is still difficult for her despite so much success in her career. "It does hurt, it does hurt at any point of time even though let's say if you don't have to prove anything, or if you have achieved everything and what is left you might ask me what else is left? "For me I feel that there is a lot of time left and I can win a lot of tournaments and I can play for so many more years

because if you are fit and if you are injury free I think passion towards the sport itself will take you much more longer." She also emphasized that the relationship between a coach and an athlete needs to be very clear in terms of what is going in your head and on off court. "A coach needs to understand even if I am not able to say what is happening in the court. As a coach you know he understands what you feel. So it is very important to also have that trust between a coach and an athlete." Sindhu has a clear plan for the 2025 season when she will compete in select tournaments to avoid injuries. "There are a lot of tournaments every month. We are out for like 15 days, 20 days. Definitely I will pick and choose a tournament because as you said I need to stay injury free. That is very important. If you stay injury free that's when you go and give your 100 per cent.

"There are some tournaments where BWF says that you have to play, but apart from that, the players are also smart enough to pick and choose tournaments." Sindhu said she is still evolving as a player, working on her skills because "the game has been changing so much." "People have become really strong in their defense so to break that, you have to work on that. You have to also work on defense. Not everyone gives you chance to attack. Because I'm a tall player and I have a good reach, so not everyone will give you a chance to attack, so accordingly you have to make changes." Sindhu also hoped that the gulf between her and the next generation will be bridged sooner than later. "I am hoping that the gap closes soon. There are a lot of youngsters I have seen in the Syed Modi (recent tournament she won) doing really well.

